1929 COMMAND-AIRE 5C3, NC997E

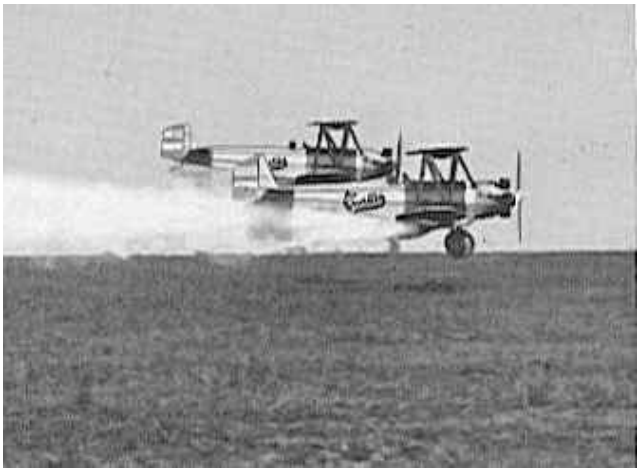
History

By

Robert G. Lock

Command-Aire 5C3, construction number W-136 was manufactured by the Little Rock, Arkansas factory and received its license number October 15, 1929. The ship was constructed in accordance with ATC 184 as granted by the Aeronautics Branch of the Department of Commerce in July 1929. The aircraft left the factory with two 22-gallon gas tanks installed in the upper wings and a removable forward fuselage cross-brace that would allow later conversion to a crop dusting aircraft. This aircraft was probably the first aircraft design that could be converted from a passenger carrying ship and a crop dusting ship and back to a passenger carrying ship. Power was a Wright Challenger 6-cylinder air-cooled radial engine producing 185 horsepower.

Sold to the Curtiss Flying Service of Delaware, Incorporated, 27 W. 57th Street, New York, New York, it flew as NC997E until early 1931. Transferred to the Southwest, it was modified for crop dusting by the Curtiss Flying Service of Houston, Texas. The ship was licensed as NR997E by the Aeronautics Branch.



Right, two Command-Aire 5C3 ships dusting in Houston, Texas. Original factory colors and trim scheme are apparent, while company logo, "Curtiss" is painted on fuselage sides. Although license numbers are not determined, they could be NR996E and NR997E, both owned by the Curtiss Flying Service of Houston, Texas.

Left, a Command-Aire 5C3, NR920E as outfitted by the factory for crop dusting. Original 185 horsepower Wright Challenger engine with Standard steel propeller is installed. Note full-span slotted ailerons for exceptional low speed control, ideal for crop dusting. In June 1931, NR997E was returned to NC status by removal of the dusting

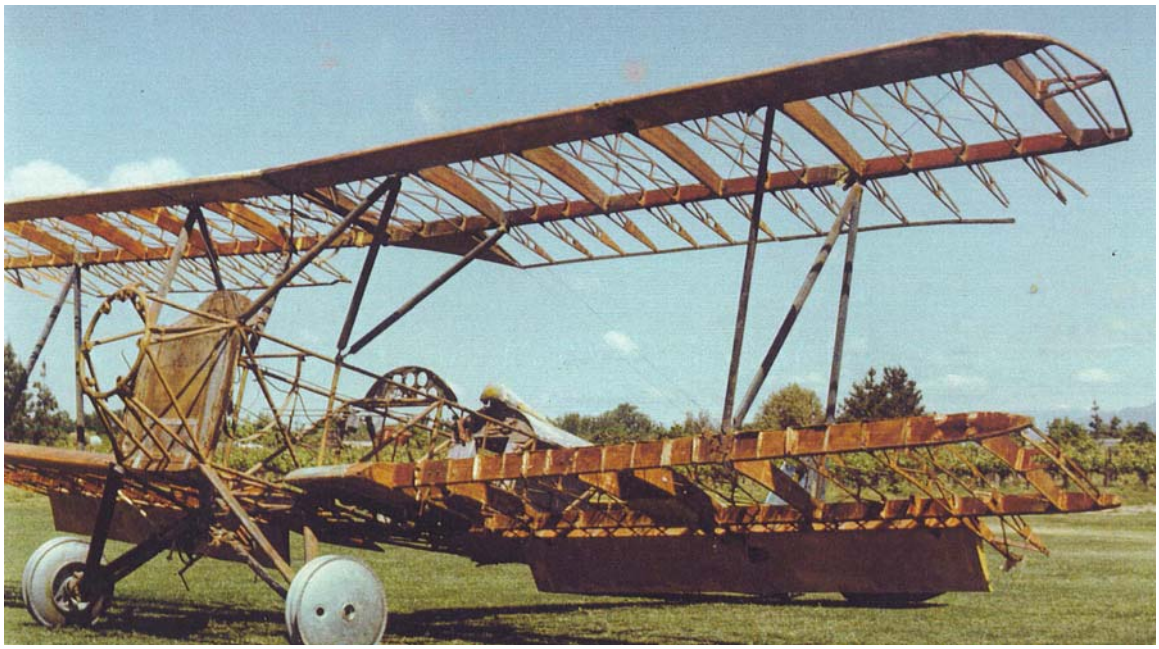
hopper and installation of front seat and controls. Work was accomplished by the Curtiss Flying Service, a Command-Aire distributor.

Curtiss Flying Service sold NC997E to the Eagle Airplane Company Incorporated, Rocky Mount, North Carolina in 1932. Records show the ship had an operation time of only 200 hours. The ship was operated by Eagle Airplane Company until December 22, 1942. With a total operating time of 541 hours, NC997E was sold to J.R. McDaniel of Fort Pierce, Florida.

McDaniel converted the ship back to the restricted category by installing a dusting hopper in the front cockpit. On July 22, 1945, a Continental R-670 radial engine producing 220 horsepower was installed to increase reliability for crop dusting. Modification to the ship was field approved by the Civil Aeronautics Administration (CAA). The last license was May 6, 1952 with a total operating time of 1625 hours, from October 15, 1929 to May 6, 1952. The logbooks showed the aircraft operated a total of 202 hours from May 1951 to May 1952. The last mechanic to work on the ship was Charles Stone, Jr., A&E 334919.

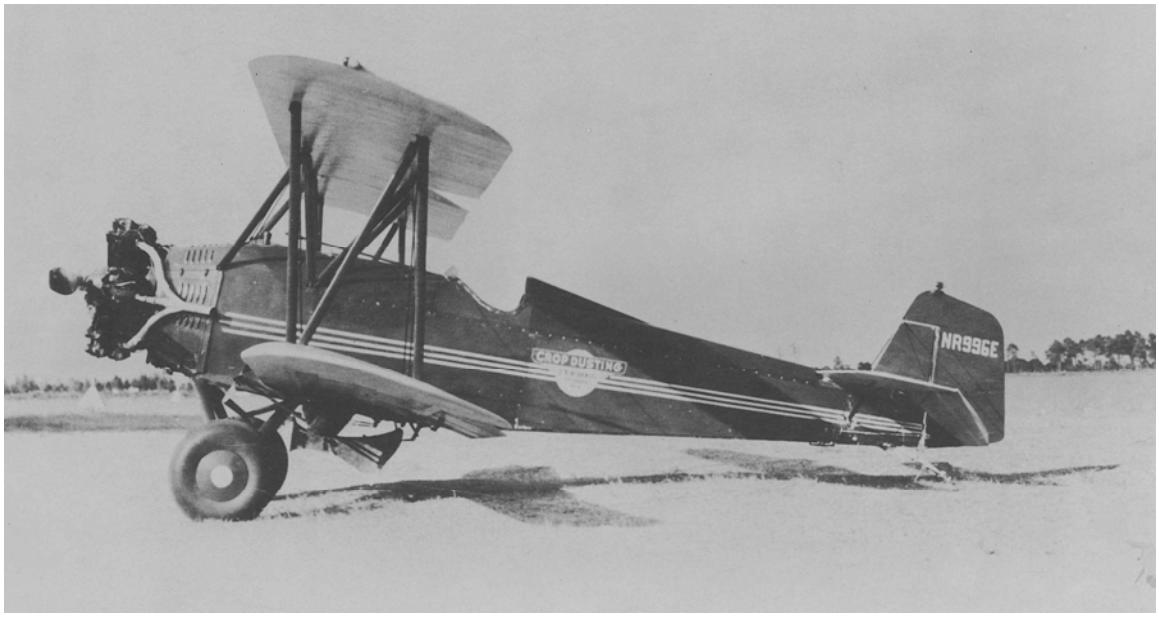
NR997E was acquired in 1965 from Don Williams of Newhall, California. Two other ships were eventually acquired, NR996E and NR998E. NR998E was the original ship entered in the 1931 Guggenheim Safe Aircraft Contest. Williams had the aircraft shipped from Ft. Pierce, Florida to California in the early 1960's.

Above, NR996E and NR997E loaded on trailer for transporting to Reedley, California.



Above, first assembly of all the good pieces from 3-airplanes in 1978 at Reedley, California. Restoration would eventually take 11-years.

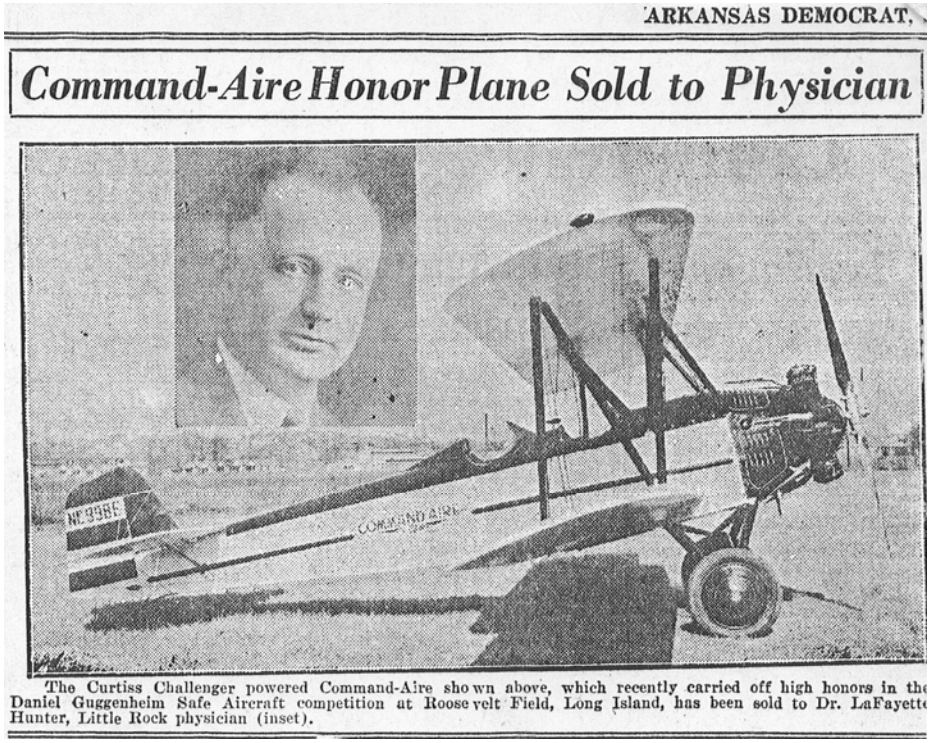
Above, flying again in all her glory, NC997E during American Barnstormers Tour of 2006. Owner Bob Lock in rear seat, brother Steve Lock in front seat soaring over the Wisconsin Dells area. Photograph was taken by Gilles Auliard.



Above, NR996E when operated by J.R. McDaniel, Ft. Pierce, Florida. Still powered by the originally installed factory engine, a Wright Challenger producing 185 hp, the dusting venturi can be seen below front cockpit where hopper is installed. These small hoppers normally carried 500 to 800 pounds of dust. Note that there are no wing tanks installed, therefore hopper was very small because nose fuel tank was installed in same area.

Right, the remains of NR996E in Reedley, California in 1970. Nose fuel tank can be seen just aft of firewall with hopper behind. Some original J.R. McDaniel blue and yellow fabric still on aft fuselage side. This aircraft now owned by Joe and Suzanne Araldi.

Above, Command-Aire 5C3, NC998E, construction number W-137 is shown at Roosevelt Field, Long Island, New York. This aircraft placed the highest of any stock unmodified ship in the Guggenheim Safe Aircraft Competition of 1931.



ARKANSAS DEMOCRAT,

Command-Aire Honor Plane Sold to Physician

The Curtiss Challenger powered Command-Aire shown above, which recently carried off high honors in the Daniel Guggenheim Safe Aircraft competition at Roosevelt Field, Long Island, has been sold to Dr. LaFayette Hunter, Little Rock physician (inset).

Left, a newspaper clipping from the Arkansas Democrat with brief story about NC998E, the Guggenheim ship being sold to a local person, Dr. LaFayette Hunter.

Command-Aire started life as Arkansas Aircraft Corporation in 1927 and applied for an "Experimental Certificate" for a "biplane for two passengers and pilot equipped with OX-5 motor." The certificate was issued on December 23, 1927. The name was changed to Command-Aire Incorporated and the small Little Rock company existed briefly between 1927 and 1932. The company produced approximately 235 aircraft of various models and powerplants. The last ship manufactured by the factory was the Little Rocket Racer model MR-1, serial number R-1 on July 8, 1930. A short time later the company ceased to exist and closed its doors in 1931 as a result of the stock market crash of 1929 and resulting Great Depression. Only a total of 11 model 3C3 and 5C3 aircraft have survived the passing of time. An excellent designed and constructed aircraft, the company's future was cut short by events in the world that only a very few manufacturers could overcome. Command-Aire rightfully deserves its place in the history of United States civil aircraft.

Robert G. Lock
August 25, 2008