

Guest Profile – Ruth Holden

Photo's and article by David Chivens. Historical photos from Ruth Holden.



Ruth Holden

When I first heard that Ruth Holden had purchased a 1937 Lockheed 12A, I could hardly believe my ears. When I asked her about it, I could hardly keep up with the incredible story that seemed to gush forth with all kinds of interesting twists and turns. Stories about her father, Paul Richter who co-founded TWA, and stories of a barn full of documentation and memorabilia that linked both Paul and Ruth to this very airplane back in the 1940's. In fact, so much interesting information was thrown at me at Ruth's lightening speed delivery that it was difficult to decide what would be the best story to actually write.



**Ruth's 1937 Lockheed 12A Electra
On the Ramp at San Luis Airport**

A whole book could, and probably should be written about her father Paul Richter. Born in 1896 and as a young man firmly believed in the future of aviation. He earned pilot's license #309 and his first airplane was a Curtiss Jn-4 "Jenny". He started Aero Corp of California in 1926 with partners Jack Frye and Walt Hamilton as a flight

school and charter service and later branched out into scheduled airline service as Standard Airlines which later became TWA. During WWII he took leave from TWA to become Chief of Staff for Operations, US Naval Air Transport. He flew all kinds of aircraft through the golden age of aviation including Northrop Alpha, Lockheed Vega, Northrop Gamma, and on into the first modern aircraft to serve the airlines including DC-2, DC-3, Boeing 307, and Lockheed Constellation.

RICHTER IS NOTED COAST SPEED AND ALTITUDE CHAMP



Lieut. Paul E. Richter, Jr., vice president of the Aero Corporation of California, with Jack Frye, president, manages the liveliest flying organization and the largest air school on the West Coast.

Lieutenant Richter took five prizes for speed and efficiency in an Eaglerock in the National Air Races in 1927, and holds the World's altitude record for OX-5 motor, which naturally enough, was also made in an Eaglerock. He has flown over 2,000 air hours.



Paul Richter '40's Era TWA Advertisement

And, the Lockheed 12A would make a great story all on it's own. One of the early aircraft to use truly

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modern design and construction methods with a fully monocoque aluminum structure, retractable landing gear, electric flaps, and fully cowled engines. This is the same model as used by Amelia Airhart in her attempted around the world flight. This particular aircraft, N18137, was built in 1937 by Lockheed in Burbank and purchased by TWA in 1940. It was used by TWA for various purposes including high altitude research, development of de-icing equipment, anti static devices and executive transport. Flown frequently by Paul Richter. Richter's logbook entries show flights to transport movie stars, congressmen, aircraft company executives, and his daughter Ruth.

Ruth Holden is quit a story as well. Daughter of Paul Richter, raised in the crucible of aviation, flight attendant for TWA, local pilot and owner of a very nice Piper Warrior, active member of 99's.

Or perhaps it's the melding of all three. A story of how Ruth and the airplane found each other to bring history full circle. A story of how the airplane brings to life the boxes of memorabilia left by her father, and the story of how this indomitable woman has found the courage to buy and operate a 68 year old 10,000 lb gross weight twin-engined aircraft of this magnitude.

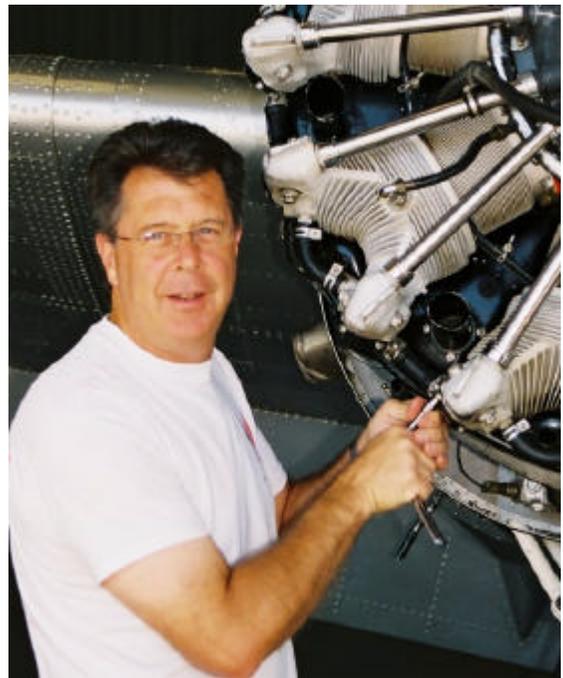
This story starts when Ruth was a child. Most young children don't realize how their parents fit into the world. To Ruth, Paul Richter was a great and loving father who died prematurely when she was 14 years old. It is only as an adult that she can appreciate the giant that this man was in the aviation world. He lived in a time when aircraft grew from cantankerous bits of cloth and wood barely able to traverse a few hundred feet to the advent of scheduled and comfortable intercontinental flights. He was instrumental in building an industry and setting the high standards that have since become regulated procedures. He flew the planes, checked the pilots, and visualized the future of aviation. When he died at the age of 53, he had lived life more fully than most who would live to be twice his age.

It has been difficult for Ruth to know what to make of this legacy. The boxes of old correspondence, TWA advertisements, logbooks, awards and other memorabilia are overwhelming. What does one do to preserve these things and the memory of the man?

A series of coincidences started with the creation of a web page to honor her father: paulrichtertwalegend.com. Ruth was subsequently contacted on the website by the owner of an old Lockheed 12A that had been previously owned by TWA. The owner wanted to document some of the aircraft history in order to promote the sale of the

aircraft. Ruth and her daughter, Sue, started going through the old documents to see what they could find, and what they found astounded them. Not only was the aircraft owned by TWA from 1940 to 1945, but was flown frequently by her father. Ruth had even ridden in the plane as a child. So when she found herself digging through the history of this airplane, she asked herself, "Why am I helping sell this airplane to someone else?" The airplane is part of her heritage and she decided to buy it herself and bring it home.

While the Piper Warrior is a great airplane to fly, it had not really prepared her for handling this heavy taildragger sporting two big Pratt and Whitney R-985 radial engines. So she enlisted the help of friend Curt "Rocky" Walters to go down to Georgia to take delivery of her new acquisition. Rocky has been flying for American Eagle for 17 years, but even that experience does not totally prepare one for the Lockheed. A check pilot was enlisted to fly part way with them to be sure Rocky learned the nuances of this old bird.



Curt "Rocky" Walters

And how does the Lockheed fly? Rocky says that it is an absolute delight to fly----very stable and predictable with nice control feel. Landing is a bit different than the commuter craft of his day job, as the big taildragger likes to come in at about 85 kts on final, slowing to 75 kts at touchdown on the mains, holding a little forward pressure until the tail drops. The Lockheed has large electrically operated flaps of a "split" design

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and the ailerons droop when the flaps are deployed. The tail wheel is locked for take off and landing to assist with directional stability before the rudder becomes authoritative.



Large Electric Flaps



Retractable Landing Light

Rocky and Ruth, with some help from Pat Yancey of Vintage Aero, have been going over the Lockheed, getting to know some of its inner secrets. It had not been flown very much in the last ten years, so while in overall good condition there are a number of issues to deal with to bring it up to reliable flying condition. But what 68 year old doesn't have a few issues to address.



Getting a Good Look Inside

So, what's next for Paul Richter's old Lockheed? Ruth says that the main thing is to keep the plane flying.

Her goal is to get checked out in it which will of course require a twin engine rating, taildragger endorsement, and quite a few hours getting comfortable with Dad's old mount.



Cockpit of N18137

So look for Ruth and Rocky in the big Lockheed and give them a big thumbs up for having the sheer courage to take on the care and feeding of this historic aircraft.



N18137 doing what she does best