

The Fairchild FC-2 NC 3984

by Lynne Belluscio

Early in 1928, Russell Holderman was flying for Harry Rogers out of Miami. Russ's wife Dorothy was working for Harry, selling tickets for rides in his new Fairchild monoplane.

The Fairchild was equipped with the Wright Whirlwind motor that was being used in transatlantic flights. Rogers' Fairfield had flown nonstop from Long Island to Jacksonville where it refueled and headed to Miami. Dorothy was supposed to sell tickets for rides, but she asked Rogers "How about my selling the Fairchild?" Rogers laughed. "OK, the price is \$12,500 and if you sell it, I'll give you five percent." According to Russ Holderman's account, published in the recent book *"From Kittyhawk to the Moon"*.

Dorothy greeted me a little breathlessly with a laugh in her voice and said, "I sold the Fairchild!" When she showed me a down payment check for \$1,000, signed with an unfamiliar name, I was suspicious immediately and finally we both agreed the check writer must be a jestor." The jestor was Donald Woodward, heir to the Jell-O fortune, and youngest son of



Photo is from the Airventure Museum in Oshgosh, Wisconsin and is of a Fairchild FC-2 NC 3569.

middle of the conversation and told Rogers that the night before, when he and Don had walked into the display room, they had misread the "Flight Tickets" sign for "Fight Tickets." He wanted to know where the fight was and when they could get tickets. But the joke was on Rogers, because Don sat down and wrote a check for the full price of the airplane, \$12,500. But he wanted to hire Russ Holderman to be his pilot, "but I still hankered for my own field and school and told him I would only take the job until he

set on operating my own field and flying school whereupon he brushed aside all my arguments with this: "Come north with me and I'll let you build an airport and have your own school, and what's more, I'll back the whole thing." If someone had told me that I had just designed and built the first foolproof airplane in the world, I couldn't have been happier. We closed the deal then and there." So the Fairchild became Don Woodward's first airplane and the story of the Woodward Airport began.

The Fairchild got its name from Sherman Fairchild a well-known designer of cameras used for aerial photographs. He needed an airplane with a wide field of view. Unable to find a plane that met his specifications, he bought a facility at Farmingdale, Long Island and began production of the specialized airplanes. The prototype FC-1 flew in June 1926 with a Curtiss OX-5 engine which proved inadequate. The FC-2 – (the plane purchased by Don Woodward) was equipped with a Whirlwind engine and was manufactured with wheels, skis, or floats.

Early Fairchilds were fitted with only three longerons in the rear of the fuselage and this configuration became known as the "razorback." (I bought a balsawood Fairchild FC-2 razorback model. I hope to have most of it assembled for the new Woodward Airport exhibit. It re-

ally gives me an appreciation for how these early wooden planes were constructed. It's amazing that they ever flew at all!)

The FC-2 could carry four passengers or 820 pounds plus the pilot. It had a 44 foot wingspan, but most unusual was that the wings could be folded. The folding operation required two men who could fold the wings into a 13-foot compact unit in two minutes. A large Yale padlock hung down in clear view of the pilot to show that the wings were indeed locked in place. The plane was 31 feet long and weighed 2160 pounds. It averaged 100 miles per hour, but could reach a maximum speed of 122 mph.

The first FC-2 was bought by the Department of Commerce and was used to accompany Charles Lindbergh on his goodwill tour of the United States. The most famous Fairchild was the FC-2W Stars and Stripes, which was the first airplane to fly on the continent of Antarctica. It was left on the ice at the end of the first expedition but was recovered, refurbished and flown for four years later by the second expedition. Much of the aircraft was later used to supply parts for other FC-2s, but parts of it are now in the collection of the National Air and Space Museum in Washington. Don Woodward's Fairchild was registered with the number NC 3984.



Don Woodward's Fairchild FC-2 NC 3984.

Orator Woodward.

Russ and Dorothy along with Rogers headed over to the hotel to meet with Woodward to see if he was joking. When they handed Don the check, much to their dismay, he tore it up. Don's friend, Leonard Heimlich got into the

got a regular pilot." Holderman suggested that Don hire Harry Smith and everything looked like Smith would become Woodward's pilot until he crashed. "Woodward again insisted that I come on as his full-time pilot. I told him I still had my heart

