

THE CORSAIR

AND PART THREE

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**THE AUTHOR
CONTINUES ON DOWN
THE WARBIRD ROAD,
CHECKING OUT IN THE
MUSTANG WITH THE
ULTIMATE GOAL OF
OBTAINING A CORSAIR**

For the rest of the summer of 1971, I continued to fly with Wally — taking several hours of aerobatics from him until I felt comfortable in the Texan. Wally issued me with a “Statement of Aerobatic Competency” — the so-called low-level aerobatic waiver. Then, towards the end of that summer when he knew he had taught me all that was necessary, Wally told me to land at an outlying airfield after an aerobatic session and to stop the aircraft, but keep the engine running so we could swap seats. I did as instructed. He wanted me to experience at

least one takeoff and landing from the back seat.

With vision extremely limited from the rear cockpit of the T-6, I did manage to get the plane off the ground. The regular routine was followed for pattern work but right before touchdown the forward vision was so poor that I lost the runway and let Wally take over the landing.

I had control for rollout and headed off to one side where we again switched seats for the flight back to Midway. While switching seats, Wally said something to the effect that since I could now land a Texan

from the backseat, I was now qualified to fly the Mustang. This led me to comment, “But you made the landing!”

Wally replied, “No, I didn’t. You had it all the way.”

I just got into the front cockpit and said no more, but I will tell readers right now that I did NOT feel comfortable with that landing.

With the summer of 1972, I felt comfortable enough with the Texan to begin attending airshows where I made acquaintance of other Warbird pilots. Two from Chicago would become flying partners and life-long friends. Austin Gibbons was one guy — a physician a few years older than I who had come to fly his T-6 much the same way as I. The other was USAF trained and had flown in Vietnam and was now an airline pilot. He was Dick Hendrickson and he was the consummate pilot who knew and had mastered just about everything aviation — from flight, to aviation history, to aircraft maintenance. His outstanding abilities and reputation eventually earned him the FAA designation of ACE — Airman Competency Examiner.

Dick took Austin and I under his wing and further improved our flying abilities with care and patience, including how to fly precise, tight, wing-overlapping formation. With



Will Martin’s *El Gato Rapido* with the author in the front seat.