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GRUMMAN (COLUMBIA) XJL



Greg Board's Columbia XJL-1 N54205 (ex Bu31400) after restoration at Pima Air and Space Museum in Arizona

Grumman's planned successor to the Duck floatplane was the Grumman G-42, designated XJL-1, preliminary design work commencing at their Bethpage NY factory in 1939. It was an modernised design, retaining the same layout for two crew in tandem and a four seat cabin in the fuselage, but with a new tricycle undercarriage and increased power of a 1350hp Wright R-1820. Grumman were fully occupied with wartime combat aircraft production and the project did not advance until 1942 when the US Navy ordered two prototype XJL-1 and construction commenced at Bethpage.

Because construction of the last 330 J2F-6 Ducks had been transferred to **Columbia Aircraft Corporation**, the Navy Department agreed for the responsibility for the construction of the two XJL-1 prototypes to be transferred to Columbia Aircraft's plant, nearby on Long Island at Valley Stream NY. Progress was slow and when work was suspended on V-J Day, the first airframe was 75% built and the second halfway assembled. In August 1946 Columbia were authorised to complete both prototypes, and the first Bu31399 was first flown on 25 October 1946, followed by the other in December. In September 1947 both were flown to the Naval Air Test Centre (NATC) at NAS Patuxent River MD for flight evaluation and hydrodynamic tests, which were terminated on 21 September 1948. Although the NATC report stated that most handling characteristic were rated as good, "*due to the repeated failure of the nose gear and water rudder well and exhaustion of spare parts, the test were terminated before the full evaluation was completed.*" The report detailed failures of the nose gear actuators, nose gear door linkage and lower water rudder bracket.

This NATC report and Post-war military budget cut-backs resulted in no production orders for the XJL-1, which was never given a name. The two prototypes were parked at NAS Patuxent River stripped of engines, propellers and radios, Bu31400 having only logged 120 hours flying time. On 28 February 1949 they were stricken from US Navy strength and placed up for disposal by auction. The successful bidder was Herbert D. Scudder and on 21 June 1949 he paid \$420 for both airframes and a package of spare parts.

Scudder was a senior flight test engineer for Martin Aircraft Co at Baltimore, Maryland, who had a long association with the Martin range of flying boats, from *China Clipper* to *Mariners* and *Mars*. His house at Chase MD was on the Gunpowder River, close to the Martin plant, and next door he had a water dock and hangar where he kept his Piper Cub floatplane.

The Navy wanted the engineless XJL-1s promptly removed from Patuxent River NAS, so Scudder decided they would be towed on water up the coast to Baltimore. Both were dismantled and the hulls (with a wing on one side to provide stability from the outer wing float) were towed behind an small boat 80 miles to his

home. The vertical tails and cockpit canopies had to be removed to fit under a low railway bridge. All parts removed were sent to his home by road. For the next six years the XJL-1s sat in his hangar at Chase MD being slowly restored and reassembled. N54205 was ready for water test runs during 1955, during which it dragged its anchor and damaged the the nose wheel.

Herb Scudder was killed on 7 December 1955 while crewing the prototype Martin P6M *Seamaster* jet flying boat, which crashed into Cheapeake Bay MD during a test flight. His widow placed the two XJL-1s up for sale. They were left in Herb's hangar for two years before a sale was made to Lee Redman of Redman Brothers Used Cars at Cicero IL. Redman brought in Bob Siegfried to be test pilot, and Siegfried later recalled: *"The planes were hangared when we arrived at the Scudder home and so they were in pretty good shape. The surplus sale had included all the engineering data, Navy test documentation, aircraft manuals, so there was plenty of information about the type and its characteristics. Their size together with provisions for aerial photography, a tail hook and JATO bottles was almost overwhelming."*

Bu34100

Redman and Seigfried concentrated on the completed XJL-1 Bu31400/N54205, which made its first takeoff from the Gunpowder River in October 1957. Siegfried was the pilot, with Redmond in the rear seat, both wearing test flying gear - swimsuits and sweaters! Soon after, Seigfried departed on its delivery flight, first leg to Cleveland where he landed on Lake Erie alongside Cleveland's Lakefront Airport. Bob Seigfried was not available for the next leg to Chicago, so fire tanker pilot George Stell volunteered. On arrival at Chicago he tied up at at Navy Pier after landing on Lake Michigan. Siegfried then flew it the short distance to Meigs Field, on the Chicago lakefront, where it was lifted out of the water by a crane and the landing gear extended. As a landplane, Siegfried flew it to Joliet IL where he trained owner Lee Redman to transition from his Beech Bonanza to the 6 ton, 1400hp XJL-1.

A month later Redman flew N54205 to an aircraft auction at Rockford IL and sold it to Australian pilot Gregory R. Board then based at Michigan City, Indiana. Board repaired the landing gear to return the aircraft to amphibian status and it was tied up at the lakefront at Michigan City for some months before moving to the city's airport. Board flew for specialist aviation company Television Associates of Indiana, which developed reflection of television and radio signals over long distances, using a B-25 Mitchell and Beech AT-11 Kansans: *see below The Australian Connection.*

In 1959 Board moved to Tucson AZ to join Aero Associates Inc, and ferried N54205 from Indiana to Tucson Over two years due to forced landings along the way. He had Aero Associates carry out modifications for a planned non-stop around the world flight, including replacing the 1200hp Wright R-1820-56 radial with a 1700hp Wright R-2600, as he had first proposed back in 1958. However the aircraft never flew again. Aero Associates Inc were awarded ownership in 1965 as part of a court order against Board for unpaid maintenance bills. The XJL-1 was parked outside at Ryan Field, near Tucson for nine years while attempts were made to sell the aircraft. Even a trade with the US Naval Aviation Museum at Pensacola FL in exchange for a C-47 was unsuccessful. In April 1974 it was acquired by another Tucson military disposals aircraft trader, Aircraft Surplus Co which also operated Bob's Air Park, a storage yard on the boundary of Davis-Monthan AFB.

N54205, complete but in weathered metal finish, was towed on its undercarriage along the road from Ryan Field to Tucson Airport, where it was parked in the weather until acquired in 1987 by Pima County Air & Space Museum at Tucson. It was towed on its landing gear to the museum, where it can be seen today, restored in silver US Navy markings.

Bu31399

The partially rebuilt Bu31399 remained at Herb Scudder's hangar until the property was sold and it had to be moved. It was towed behind a boat to nearby Essex Skypark, where it was parked to languish in the weather for many years. It seems that Lee Redmond did little work on his second XJL, which became derelict. Finally in 1976 it was acquired by John Seidel of Chicago, a warbird enthusiast who owned Grumman J2F-6 Duck N1214N and was keen to fly its successor. The derelict XJL was dismantled and moved on two 40 foot trailer trucks to Illinois and stored in a barn. The planned rebuild was shelved and in 1981 it was sold to California. Ten years later it was acquired by experienced warbird rebuilder Dick Martin, who completed the rebuild on behalf of the warbird operator Cinema Air Inc, then based at Carlsbad-Palomar CA.

By March 1997 Bu31399, now re-registered N48RW and finished in all blue US Navy markings, was ready for its first test flight at Carlsbad CA. Disaster struck during that first flight on 12 March 1997 when engine failure caused a forced landing on soft ground at US Marines Corps Camp Pendleton at nearby Oceanside. The big amphibian overturned and was badly damaged. Work began on repairs at Carlsbad, but Dick Martin moved the damaged aircraft to his large new hangar at Murietta-French Valley CA which specialized in DHC-6 Twin Otter maintenance. Here it is stored, partially rebuilt, although it has been quoted as displayed at the Wings & Rotors Air Museum at French Valley Airport.

- •	XJL-1	Bu31399	prototype: ff Valley Stream NY	25.10.46
			NATC Patuxent River MD: USN evaluation	19.9.47/48
			NAS Patuxent River MD: stored stripped	48/49
			US Navy: struck-off charge	28.1.49
		N54207	Herbert D. Scudder, Chase MD	.49/55
			(rest. project in hangar at Chase MD)	
			Lee Redman/ Redman Bros Used Cars, Cicero IL	.57
			(moved to nearby Essex Skypark MD, derelict 59/63)	
			Eastern Flying Service Inc, Essex Skypark	22.10.63/70
			(due unpaid parking fees, unmoved derelict 63/70)	
			Bernard H. Ulbrich, Baltimore MD	30.11.70/76
			(rest. project Essex Skypark MD 72/73, stripped hulk, Essex Skypark by 76)	
			John C. Seidel, Chicago IL	7.76/81
			(moved by road to Kaneville IL 9.76, stored dism. in a barn pending planned rest. to fly)	
			Sandy Falconer. Lakeport CA	12.81/01
			(moved by road to Lakeport CA, stored dism.)	
		N48RW	Richard W. Martin Inc, Carlsbad-Palomar CA, later Murietta-French Valley CA	4.93/07
			(purchased dism., trucked to Palomar for rest. at Carlsbad-Palomar 92/97, ff 12.3.97 in all blue US Navy markings)	
			rebuilt for Cinema Air Inc, Palomar CA	95/97
			forced landing on first flight due engine failure, overturned Camp Pendleton, Oceanside CA	12.3.97
			(under rebuild again at Palomar CA 98, moved to Murrieta CA by 2001: partially rebuilt)	
			Copperhead LLC, Murrieta-French Valley CA	5.5.07/14

- •	XJL-1	Bu31400	second prototype: ff Valley Stream NY	12.46
			NATC Patuxent River: USN evaluation	29.9.47/48
			NAS Patuxent River MD: stored stripped	48/49
			US Navy: struck-off charge	28.1.49
		N54205	Herbert D. Scudder, Chase MD	.49/55
			(rest. in hangar at Chase MD, water taxi tests .55 but owner killed prior to test flights)	
			Lee Redman/ Redman Bros Used Cars, Cicero IL	.57
			(ff Chase MD on Gunpowder River 10.57) ferried to Joliet IL)	
			Gregory R. Board, Michigan City IN	.58/60
			Greg Board/ Aero American Corp, Tucson AZ	2.12.60/65
			(del. Michigan City-Tucson, arr. 2.62, mods. at Tucson for extra fuel and air-to-air refueling, re-engined with B-25 QEC Wright R-2600: not flown)	
			Aero American Corp, Tucson AZ	.65/74
			(court judgement against Board due unpaid fees, open storage Ryan Field AZ 65/74)	
			Aircraft Surplus Co/ Bob's Airpark, Tucson AZ	4.74
			(towed on road to Tucson Airport ex Ryan Field .74)	
			Robert O. Hoover, Tucson AZ	14.1.75
			(open storage, Tucson Airport 75/85)	
			Pima Air and Space Museum, Tucson AZ	.87/17

*noted at Ryan Field AZ 3.74, all metal;
noted Tucson AZ 10.10.77 on Hamilton Aircraft ramp, complete, metallic, flat tyres;
noted Tucson AZ 10.11.81 metallic no markings, complete; same 5.82;
noted outside at Pima Museum 8.00, 1.02, 2.04 restored and moved inside by 10.09;
manufacturers plates of both XJ-1s have been inspected: only the USN serial is quoted, no c/n.*

The Australian connection

The XJL-1 N54205 was purchased by Australian Gregory R. Board during 1958. He was an experienced airline pilot then working in USA, based at Michigan City, Indiana flying B-25 Mitchells and Beech AT-11 Kansans for a company named Television Associates of Indiana Inc. This company specialised in worldwide aerial survey to establish locations for the installation of TV towers and repeaters to extend the range of coverage. As well as

domestic use by the USA TV networks, extensive flying was carried out in Iran and neighbouring Middle East countries on contract to the US State Department.

Gregory Richmond Board had enlisted in Royal Australian Air Force in 1940 and flew Brewster Buffalos in Malaya, surviving two crashes and being shot down by a Zero, baling out of the burning aircraft. Later he was attached to Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation at Fishermans Bend, Melbourne as a test pilot for the CAC Boomerang fighter production. Postwar, he founded New Holland Airways, Sydney to fly migrant charters to Australia from Rome and Athens using ex RAAF Lodestars and Hudsons, DC-3 and even a DC-5. The booming and lucrative itinerant migrant charter trade was shut down by the Australian Department of Civil Aviation in 1949 to protect Qantas and BOAC. Board played a key role in the clandestine delivery of the migrant charter aircraft to the newly-formed Israel Air Force. He then left Australia to pursue an adventurous flying career overseas for the next two decades, before returning home to start more aviation enterprises.

Further details of Gregory Board's colourful flying exploits can be found on this website at *The Migrant Caper*.

By 1956 Greg Board had joined Television Associates of Indiana after previously flying freighter DC-4s for Trans Mediterranean Airways at Beirut, Lebanon. It is likely that he came across TAI aircraft in the Middle East while operating in Iran, Egypt, Pakistan, Syria and Turkey with their B-25 and Beech AT-11s fitted with long range underwing fuel tanks. It has been reported that reflecting dishes were extended from their bomb bays.

Back at TAI home base Michigan City in 1958, Greg Board was flying a contract for aerial terrain mapping of Cuba. Between missions over Cuba, he carried out maintenance on his XJL, at first on the water while tied up at the lakefront. He repaired the faulty nose gear undercarriage and flew it to Michigan City Airport. During 1958 he worked on N54205 and submitted modification proposals to FAA, including replacing the 1200hp Wright R-1820-56 radial with a 1700hp Wright R-2600. He intended to use a B-25 Mitchell QEC unit and the B-25 cowlings. The re-engining was not done at this time but Board was reported in mid 1958 as saying he was planning to fly the XJL back to his home in Australia.

Because of his modification proposals, the FAA issued the Civil Conversion Certificate Approval for the XJL-1 type to G. R. Board, Michigan City, Indiana.

In 1960 Greg Board moved to the warmer climate of Tucson AZ, to join Aero American Corporation, which marketed and carried out maintenance on military disposals aircraft from the nearby storage yards of Davis Monthan AFB (USAF) and Litchfield Park NAS (US Navy). Aero American was based at Ryan Field, a wartime military strip in the desert near Tucson.

In May 1960 he test flew N54205 prior to ferrying it from Indiana to Tucson. The 1500 mile trip was to take two years. On the test flight the undercarriage did not fully retract so Board made a cautious water landing at the Michigan City Lakefront. The extended gear caused a severe water loop which damaged the aircraft, which was half submerged. With great difficulty it was lifted from the water for the damage to be repaired and the troublesome electrically operated undercarriage extension mechanism replaced by hydraulic actuation.

In early December 1960 Board returned to start the delivery flight. After 50 miles the Wright R-1820 failed and he made a forced landing with undercarriage extended in a farmers field near Kankakee Illinois. Two Aero Associates mechanics were sent from Tucson to make repairs to the airframe and engine. Three months later it was ready to continue the flight, and Board covered 600 miles before the engine failed again, but he landed safely at the small town of Woodward, Oklahoma. There it sat for almost a year before a replacement R-1820-97 and two mechanics from Aero Associates arrived from Tucson and took two weeks to get the aircraft ready. The engine had been purchased and built up by Aero Associates at Board's request. Finally, in February 1962, he reached Tucson.

At this time Aero Associates Inc supplied three B-17s and a B-25 for movie work in England. Greg Board and aviation author Martin Caiden were among pilots selected to deliver the bombers across the Atlantic and fly them during the making of the movies *The War Lover*, *633 Squadron*, and *The Longest Day*. The two became friends and 1963 they each purchased a French Nord 1002 (licence built Me 108) to fly back to USA.

Another joint venture proposed by Cairden and Board was a proposed non-stop flight around the world flight in the XJL-1. It is unconfirmed but probable that their plan was to use one of Aero Associates Inc's military surplus Boeing B-17s as the fuel tanker. Board commissioned Aero Associates Inc to carry out extensive modifications on N54205 for extra fuel tankage, provision for air-to-air refueling, and replacing the 1200hp Wright R-1820-56 radial with a 1700hp Wright R-2600 with new engine mounts, propeller and custom cowlings. Most of this work was completed but the aircraft never flew again.

Greg Board had moved on from the XJL. He was now involved in a three year "off the books" contract via Aero Associates Inc to acquire, prepare and ferry twenty surplus USAF Douglas A-26s in full military configuration from Tucson to the Portugese Air Force. This was in contravention of a US Government embargo on sales of combat aircraft to Portugal because of their expected use for ground attack in Portugese colonies in Africa, particularly Angola. Seven A-26s were delivered before the operation was stopped by US Customs and his associates were arrested in Miami. Charges against Greg Board were finally dropped in June 1973.

During 1965 Aero American Inc won a court judgement against Board for unpaid maintenance work on the XJL, and the aircraft's ownership was transferred to Aero American Inc. It was to remain parked in the weather at Tucson airports for the next 22 years, until towed the few miles to the Pima Air and Space Museum.

References:

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