

GOONIES INVADE FLABOB!

VINTAGE FLABOB AIRPORT HOLDS ITS FIRST DC-3/C-47 FLY-IN

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There is nothing like the sound of a Pratt & Whitney R-1830 (or R-2000, but more on that a bit later) cranking over and coming to smoke-belching, oil-spitting life. The experience gets even better when there is a whole bunch of similar radials coming to life at the same time. Fortunately, I was able to enjoy those sounds and sights since, on the weekend of 19-21 May, Flabob was home to the DC-3/C-47 fly-in.

Flabob is thought to be the seventh oldest airfield in California and its survival is a bit of a miracle but more on that later. For those unfamiliar with this grass-roots gem, let's get into the field's history. Although somewhat blighted today, Riverside in the first couple of decades of the 20th Century was a bit of paradise. People traveled from all over to enjoy the benign climate, thousands of acres of citrus groves, and the proximity of other vacation spots. Also, there was a grand hotel by the name of the Glenwood Mission Inn that was (and still is) a true jewel, and many wealthy people built magnificent Craftsman and Mission Revival homes.

Southeast of town was a small dirt airstrip called Allesandro Field. When the USA entered the Great War in 1917, early aircraft from the Signal Corps began landing at the field and a base was established that rapidly began to grow and the dirt strip became a training base for early military aviators.

On 20 March 1918, the base was renamed March Field in honor of Lt. Peyton March, son of the Army Chief of Staff, who had been killed in a training accident. Full operations began in April of that year and continued until April 1923 when the economic downturn would close the field. However, it reopened in 1927 and just kept growing. Today it is March Air Reserve Base.

Back then, everyone was "air-minded," especially after Lindbergh had flown the Atlantic, so Riverside city officials wanted an airfield established that would put the city on the "air map" and start drawing business.

The did get their "airport," but it was in a rather unusual way. The city leased a chunk of flat land on the Evans Ranch, which was next to the main two-lane road to Los Angeles and just west of the Santa Ana River. They brought in a grader and flattened the area to an acceptable level for early aircraft operations.

Now, came a problem — who would run this new enterprise? In an almost

Hollywood manner, they found him and his name was Roman "The Cowboy Aviator" Warren. Leading a roughneck life across the west, Warren tried to enter the Air Service but his lack of education kept him out. As the war came to an end, some instructors took interest in the young man and took him aloft for a few lessons in Curtiss Jennies. After getting a couple of hours, he soloed and found that this was the life for him. Doing odd jobs, he saved some money and purchased a new crated Jenny. Thus, he set out as one of the new gypsies — the aerial barnstormers. One thing led to another and he found himself over Riverside and



This tired old "freight dog" was last flown by Four Star Airlines in Puerto Rico. It will be made into a monument in front of the airport.

With the R-2000s up to full power, Barry Fait cleans off the Flabob runway as N62CC heads for liftoff.

popped his Jenny down on what was known as Jurupa Field. This was basically a clear, well — sort of clear — piece of dirt off Jurupa Avenue.

The dirt was leased by a character by the name of Pliny Evans who was not an aviation visionary but rather raised cattle and he put the Cowboy Aviator to work building fencing so the cows would not eat the fabric off aircraft. For whatever reason, cows had an affinity to snack on aircraft fabric — their strong tongues licking away until the fabric came loose in tatters, which they then gobbled down (EDITOR'S NOTE: I spent one memorable New Year's Day hiking with Bruce Lockwood to a remote piece of land above Thousands Oaks, California, where Bruce had dead-sticked the Mk. IX Spitfire he was flying after the Merlin had failed. We were

carrying tie-downs and covers but when we finally arrived at the fighter, we found it surrounded by cows happily licking away on the fabric-covered control surfaces. Fortunately, we managed to chase them away before any damage was done).

The City of Riverside got involved and some more clearing took place and by 1925 an airport had been established. To say that business was not good would probably be an understatement and the Cowboy Aviator was occupied with maintaining a few planes, giving rides, and doing occasional instruction.

Warren then got the idea that flying under a local bridge would create publicity — and he was correct.