A high-angle, top-down photograph of a Cessna 170B aircraft in flight. The aircraft is white with a polished, metallic finish, reflecting the light. It is flying over a dense, green forest. The registration number 'N8143A' is clearly visible on the upper surface of the right wing. The aircraft's engine, propeller, and tail section are also visible. The lighting is bright, suggesting early morning.

HAVING NEVER
BEEN PAINTED,
FERRIS' CESSNA 170
GLEAMS IN THE
EARLY MORNING
LIGHT EAST OF
LAKELAND, FLORIDA.

THE LUCKY CESSNA

Russ Farris' 170B

BUDD DAVISSON

As Russ Farris sat under the wing of his shiny 170B enjoying the crowd at Sun 'n Fun 2003, he knew that few of the passersby could know that the most interesting chapter in the life of his airplane, N8143A, actually started on the morning of September 9, 1956. On that day, the lives of a Continental Airlines pilot, Ben Richards, and one of the first owners of the Cessna, James Folks of Carthage, Texas, were about to cross in a most unexpected sort of way.

Continental Flight 190 was a routine DC-3 short hop flight—El Paso, Tulsa, Bartlesville, then Kansas City. Captain Richards had made the flight many times in the past. In fact, he had more than 5,800 hours of DC-3 time—nearly half of his total time in the air had been at the controls of a Gooney Bird. This particular DC-3 had seen its share of traveling, too. By 1956 it had accumulated nearly 36,000 hours since joining the Army as a C-47 in 1942.

It was a clear Sunday morning, and James Folks was enjoying some time off and looking forward to giving some of his young friends a tour of the Bartlesville, Oklahoma, area in his recently acquired 170B. Folks had been flying for years and had a total of 3,200 hours in his logbook, a considerable amount of time for a civilian pilot.

Captain Richards and his copilot, John Deshurley, made their first stop in Tulsa, refueled, and then rolled down the runway with 14 passengers for the 16-minute flight to Phillips Airport in Bartlesville. It was about 2:15 in the afternoon.

As Richards and Deshurley rolled down the runway at Tulsa, James Folks was 43 miles away trying to get his four excited passengers strapped in. They ranged from 8 to 16 years of age, and all were totally psyched at the prospect of seeing their houses from the air. The Dewey Hi-Way airport where he based his Cessna was 3 miles northeast of Bartlesville.

His passel of passengers finally settled down, and with their noses glued to the windows, Folks and the Cessna trundled down the runway and lifted into the air. The time was almost exactly 2:30 pm.

As the gear of the Cessna left the ground, Continental pilots Richards and Deshurley were getting ready for their arrival at Bartlesville. They had already called and gotten the wind and altimeter settings and were in the process of cleaning up the flight deck in preparation for their landing. Their route made it easy for them to make a straight entry into downwind for Runway 17 at Phillips. About that time, James Folks and his passengers were scanning the ground trying to pick out various homes on the outskirts of Bartlesville.

The DC-3 was established on a long downwind, and First Officer Deshurley was running through the short “in range” checklist, which normally took about 30 seconds. One of the items on the list was checking the level in the hydraulic reservoir behind the copilot’s seat. As Deshurley was twisting around to check the sight gauge on the reservoir, one of Folks’ young passengers started yelling that he saw his house, so James Folks cranked the Cessna into a 45-degree bank turn to the right.

It was at that moment that the lives of James Folks, Captain Richards, First Officer Deshurley, 14 airline passengers, and four young Cessna passengers became instantly entwined.

While copilot Deshurley was checking the hydraulic fluid and



MARK GODFREY

Russell Farris and his friend, Shayla Reese.

James Folks was rolling into a turn to look at a house, fate brought their two airplanes together. The Cessna’s prop sliced into the right aileron of the DC-3 from below, then the transport surged ahead, and the 170B chopped several feet off the airliner’s right elevator and stab.

With all the sheet metal flailing around, the top cowling of the Cessna disappeared, the leading edge of the left wing was bashed and scored, and the windshield broken. A prop tip was bent forward, and the leading edge of the prop was cut and nicked from thrashing through so much aluminum.

The DC-3 lurched slightly. Predictably, the Cessna had a harder time of it and bucked and fought for a few seconds. Then both airplanes limped ahead on downwind to make landings. The airline passengers barely knew anything had happened, but Folks’ landing was undoubtedly accompanied by the screams of frightened passengers.

While all of this excitement was taking place over Bartlesville, Okla-



With the exception of modern avionics, the 170's panel remains much as it did during its encounter with the DC-3. A pair of LightSPEED active noise canceling headsets keeps the pilot and copilot's hearing intact.

right seat for U.S. Airways via Piedmont, but he never lost his love for little airplanes.

"As a young CFI, I was instructing in Cubs and Champs, Cessna 170s and 140s, and my taste has always run that way. In the early '90s, I got a straight 108 Stinson. It was totally original and unrestored and had only 290 hours on it total time. It still had the original paint and fabric, which at that point was about 30 years old. I actually flew it for three years with the original cover. Eventually, however, I had to take it down for restoration.

"I like airplanes that are as original as you can get them. They don't have to be showpieces, but I don't want them modified in any way. That's what I was trying to do with the Stinson, but it was just taking too long.

homa, Russell Farris, now 48, was still in diapers in Lakeland, Florida, and although "airplane" would be one of his first words, it would be years before he began looking for an airplane of his own.

Farris was the son of a newspaper editor and writer, but he was fated to be a pilot. By the time he was 17 years old, he had migrated to Punta Gorda, Florida, and started taking flying lessons as soon as he could.

"I was 17 when I started flying the C-150, but almost immediately changed over to a T-craft, which is

what I flew for the rest of my license."

Following the normal path in an aviation career, his next step was to get a certificated flight instructor (CFI) certificate. He was 19 years old at the time.

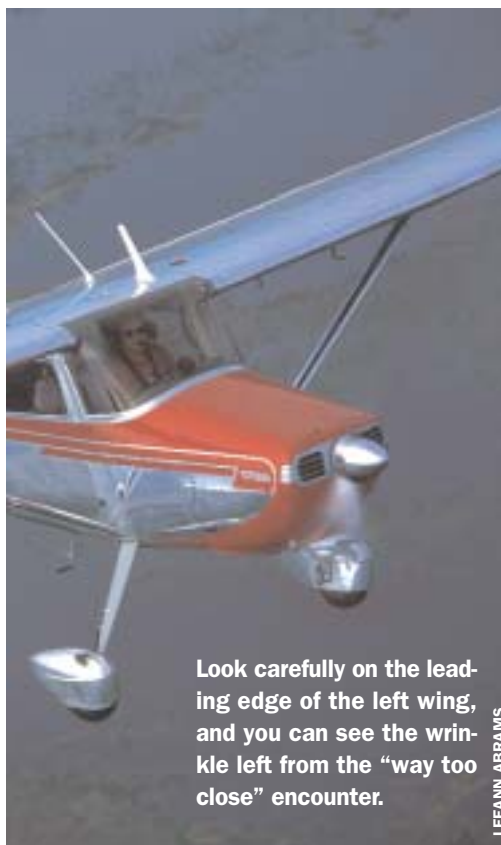
"I was like most kids—trying hard to get flight time. I instructed, I flew air taxi for a time, then started flying commuters, including, ironically enough, a lot of DC-3 and some de Havilland Heron time. Finally, I got a real job and started flying DC-8s for a freight company."

Eventually, Russ wound up in the

MARK GODFREY



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Look carefully on the leading edge of the left wing, and you can see the wrinkle left from the “way too close” encounter.

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“Then, about three years ago I came across this 170B. The airplane was really unusual because besides having clean, straight sheet metal, it had never been modified, and it had never been painted. At the time it had only 1,900 hours total time, and it has about 2,250 now.

“It had sat around for quite some time, about 10 years, but it was all there and was ready to go. Because it had never been allowed to [get] run down, but hadn’t been flown much, about all the restoration amounted to was a good wash job. I did change out the LORAN for a GPS and put in a decent radio with

glideslope, but that was it.

“I live in Rock Hill, South Carolina, and I fly the airplane all the time on instruments, so it was important I have a good panel, but I tried to keep it looking as original as possible while getting maximum utility out of it.

“Almost from the moment I bought the airplane, I have been vaguely bothered by a series of scuffs and creases on the leading edge of the left wing. It’s an area about the size of your hand, but it always bugged me because the rest of the airplane is so straight. In fact, I was very seriously considering changing that piece of skin.

“Then one evening I was on the Internet and decided to search my N number and see what I could find. That’s when I ran across the accident report.

“If you crawl all over the airplane with a magnifying glass, you can find several areas that you wouldn’t even think were collision damage. Just a few nicks, etc. But the thing on the leading edge looks exactly as if something hit the leading edge

and flowed over it.

“Having flown DC-3s quite a bit, I can’t imagine how they managed to do that amount of damage to a DC-3 and not crash themselves. For the prop to chew up the elevator and stab, that means the wing was clear under the DC-3’s fuselage. It just looks as if it would hook the tail wheel or something. The way the dings are shaped in my wing, they look exactly as you’d expect a wing to look that skipped off the bottom of a fuselage.

“I managed to come up with a newspaper clipping

from Bartlesville about the accident, and it had photos of both airplanes. The top cowling is completely missing, and the crash investigation says that two spark plugs were knocked out. That means something with some weight came down and took the cowl and the plugs at the same time. How do you hit something hard enough to break spark plugs and not crash? Absolutely amazing!

“I have spoken with John Deshurley, who has very vivid memories of that day. Also, the DC-3 involved still exists in a museum in Holland. It is painted in D-day colors with no mention of its close call on the museum’s website. They probably don’t even know about it.”

The creases in the top of Russ Farris’ 170B are one of the few things that keep the airplane from being nearly perfect. At the same time, however, he isn’t about to remove them.

It has been said that if you could read the wrinkles in a person’s face, you’d know their history. This is one of those few cases where a few wrinkles in a pretty face can tell a very interesting story.

