

So, whether in the government or outside, the influence of individual initiative on the development of aviation technology has been significant, and will continue to be so, as long as we have a system that recognizes good ideas when they come along. But history shows that you can't count on the government to do it all, and the private initiative system of philanthropy and venture capitalist has and can provide a back-up. In view of the new national program for manned space flight to the moon and Mars, and the drastic redirection of funding of aeronautical programs, these private initiatives may become more important than ever for the US to maintain its lead in aeronautical technology, Philanthropists and venture capitalists – pay attention!



JGG – A 35 Year History

By Sharon D. Dillon

The Williamsburg-Jamestown Airport's story is one of struggle and triumph. It all began in 1967 when Larry Waltrip first asked his parents, Dudley and Mary Waltrip, who owned a construction company, to take their bulldozers and carve a little airstrip on their 200 acres of clay off of Lake Powell Road so he could learn to fly. Larry, his father Dudley C., and his brother Dudley S. (Timmy), began to do just that – carve the runway with their bulldozers. In the middle of all this, friends told them “You have to get permits from the State and the FAA to build and operate an airport”. This they did, and on July 10, 1969 the senior Waltrips did receive permission to establish and operate the Jamestown Airport by both the State and the FAA. Ironically, Larry did get his private certificate in 1970, but he did his flying at Fort Eustis since he was a member of the Virginia Air National Guard.

As construction began and word got around, a few neighbors were up in arms. They thought the airport would not meet safety standards, especially considering the airport approach flew over their neighborhood and near the Rawls Byrd Elementary School. Some were also fearful that the Waltrips would run a substandard operation, using the airport as a business loss to decrease their tax burden.

The neighbors formed a committee and filed legal suits to prevent the construction, even going so far as the Virginia Supreme Court. When that august body found in the Waltrips' favor, construction continued and on September 20, 1970 the airport, with a new name, officially opened with a grand dedication ceremony.

Eugene Marlin, of the Peninsula Airport Commission and manager of the Patrick Henry Airport (now Newport News-Williamsburg International Airport), dedicated the airport and said the Williamsburg-Jamestown Airport had “nowhere to go but up.”

Richard Coakley, chair of the James City County Board of Supervisors and a former opponent of the project, said the airport was “one good example of the type of progress James City County has made in the past 15 years.” Then he and Miss Williamsburg, Mary Lou Bloxom, cut the ribbon to officially open the airport designated W-70, now JGG.

Master of Ceremonies was Williamsburg City Council member Charles H. Forbes III and the Rev. Sam Hart of Jamestown Presbyterian Church gave the invocation. The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) even contributed a temporary control tower to facilitate the guests attending the event.

Even though it was not yet open to business, Governor Linwood Holton landed at the airport in June 1970. He was the first of many celebrities to pass through JGG.

As time passed many of the neighbors who opposed the airport became some of its most ardent supporters. However, some remained opposed and from time to time contacted the FAA or wrote letters to the editor of *The Virginia Gazette* complaining of noise and safety concerns.

For example, after the April 1971 airshow, Dr. George W. Grayson, candidate for the Virginia House of Delegates, called the airshow “a reckless affair that threw all safety precautions to the winds.” He also said the airport was “ill conceived” and “subsidized by tax monies.”

His comments were rebutted by a *Virginia Gazette* editorial opinion that said Grayson had picked this issue to make a favorable impression on the airport’s neighbors. “As candidates for public office sometimes do in the heat of a campaign, he also appears to have got himself slightly out on a limb. We couldn’t resist picking up a saw.” Later a citizen wrote to support Grayson’s contentions.

In 1978 a neighbor wrote, “I have, however, suffered the agonies of living in the vicinity of it, along with other lowly groundlings. . . . I have a frightening image of several pilots flying in formation over my neighborhood, a half mile or so from sacred airport property, with flour bombs hanging out their doors, when suddenly a bomb goes poof, blinding one of the pilots.” He included a copy of a letter he sent to the FAA and finished by stating his dissatisfaction with the FAA’s response.

Put into the context of the current dispute over the desirability of Oceana Naval Air Station these complaints were minor. However, they did result in the Waltrips applying for and receiving permission for a right hand traffic pattern on Runway 13. The most amazing aspect of JGG is that the Waltrip family wholly owns the airport and opens the facility to all who wish to use it.

The airport has received some grants and loans to maintain the runways and aprons, but the hangars have been constructed at the Waltrip’s expense. Over the past 35 years the Waltrips have received no income from the airport operations. All revenue is cycled back into airport development.

Despite these inconveniences the Waltrips have built the airport into a going concern that provides valuable services to this area of the Peninsula.

In 1971 they added a 60’ by 80’ hangar and a Cessna dealership, opened an aircraft maintenance shop, and a flight school; and for the next four years taught flying as a Cessna Pilot Center. On May 17, 1974 they leased the airport to Colonial Airlines for six months. At the end of that time the Waltrips resumed management because Colonial did not meet its financial obligations, so they leased the flight school to Tom Johnson, their chief flight instructor, and their maintenance shop to Carl (Mac) MacConnel, and to others through the years.

By 1977 they added a VOR instrument approach. 1984 saw the addition of their first set of T-hangars. One of the airport’s most popular attractions is Charly’s Airport Restaurant, which opened in 1990, with

home-made breads and desserts, whose aromas demand instant gratification to those who enter. A Global Positioning System (GPS) overlay of the VOR was added in 1995, a GCO in 2001, and an AWOS in 2002. In September 1990 they dedicated a new terminal building. The following year the Waltrips added the large three-bay hangar. Nearly coincident with this, on September 19, 1990 Patrick Henry Airport changed its name to Newport News-Williamsburg International Airport and JGG started getting requests for information on flights to Atlanta, Memphis, New York . . . , desperate calls for lost baggage These calls continue to this day.

Their 20-year airport master plan was approved in 1997. This allows them to make planned improvements over a period of time, taking each step in order. Part of that plan included installing a straight-in GPS approach (GPS SIAP) for Runway 13 with a height minimum of 671 feet. Some neighbors opposed the plan, thinking that the Waltrips would extend the current runway or add another, thus encouraging larger, noisier planes to land at JGG. However, they were able to convince their neighbors that they had no plans to enlarge, just to improve what is already there. Because of the dispute the James City County Board of Supervisors tabled the GPS SIAP.

Two other big events occurred at JGG in 1998. The first event was a newly formed airport advisory group. Even though it is unusual for a privately owned airport to have an advisory board, the Waltrips thought it would be another step in fostering good-neighbor relationships with the surrounding neighborhoods. The Waltrips want the facility to stay as it is, a hometown airport for general aviation pilots and aircraft.

On April 1, 1998 Tucker Edmonds opened the Jamestown Flight Center offering a flight school, maintenance facilities, and took over Mitch Bowman's already established Historic Air Tours using a Cessna 152, a Cessna 172 and a 177 Cardinal.

And, in October 1999 the Waltrip's new fuel farm went into operation, serving Jet A and 100LL. Within the last year, they doubled the ramp space with an extension to the north.

Currently the airport offers 15 T-hangars and three small, four large and 3 extra large corporate hangars. They will be adding 36 more T-hangars this year. Other services include runway lights, rotating beacon, fuel, maintenance, communications, navigation aids and approach lighting.

Additionally, they host two or three WINGS safety programs and numerous youth events each year. Students come from local schools and as far away as Isle of Wight County to participate in these events. They have sponsored Air Explorer groups and facilitated others such as Civil Air Patrol, Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts.

Many aviation-based groups have chosen to meet at JGG because in addition to its fine services it offers a close proximity to Colonial Williamsburg, Busch Gardens and Jamestown and Yorktown historic sites. The Flying Farmers met at JGG in 1973 and 1978. Herbert O'Berry of Windsor explained that he used his Cherokee 140 to keep track of his 600 acres of peanuts, corn and soybeans as well as his animals. He said, "I felt the need for the use of aircraft. I have cattle on four different farms and I can fly over them and tell whether all the cattle are there or not. It's a timesaver."

The Flying Dentist Association brought 119 aircraft to the facility in 1972. In 1973 the Southeast Bonanza Society met here. Each month the Williamsburg Chapter of the Virginia Aeronautical Historical Society meets in the second-floor conference room that looks over the runway, as do many local organizations and

civic groups. The Eastern Region of the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and the Aviation Directors of the six states in the Eastern Region met at JGG in 1992, and again at a later date. Then in 1999, the Flying Physicians and the Lawyers Bar Association convened here at the same time and there were many twin engine aircraft on the line.

Jean and Larry have facilitated flights for many famous people and have collected many stories and photos. Their daughter, Michelle, has a fat autograph book, willingly signed by most. Among their famous guests are every Virginia governor since Gov. Linwood Holton who landed at the airport before it was officially open. Other famous politicians include Senator John Warner, President Bill Clinton, Attorney General Janet Reno, the President of Venezuela, Queen Noor of Jordan, British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, Vice President Spiro T. Agnew and Vice President Al Gore.

Some of other famous personalities who have stopped at JGG include Elizabeth Taylor, Merv Griffin, Arnold Palmer, Mickey Gilley, Eric Severied, Roger Penske, the Rev. Jesse Jackson and the DuPont family who loved to shop at the Williamsburg Pottery.

Notable aviators have spent time at JGG as well. Some are Russian Navy pilots, and Dick Rutan and Jeana Yeager, and four astronauts. Don Eiseley, Steve Robinson and Frank Borman all had aircraft based here. David Brown learned to fly at JGG.

A favorite story involves Vice President Hubert Humphrey who was hungry when he landed. Spying the vending machines he dropped in some coins and nothing happened. Like so many of us he began to kick the machine to no result. An airport employee explained that he needed to push the select button. Upon pushing the button Humphrey promptly received his snack. (We can only imagine how red his face was!)

When Robert Redford visited Jean Waltrip kept the news quiet until he had left the area. One of her friends said, "You mean to tell me that Robert Redford was in town and you didn't even tell me about it? What kind of friend are you?"

Another time Walter Cronkite stopped by unexpectedly and a customer noticed him and asked, "Aren't you the one I see on television every night?" "Yes, that's me," Cronkite replied politely. The response? "I thought so. I knew I'd seen you on the Mary Tyler Moore Show."

JGG offers car rental service and Jean goes out of her way to assure that groups and individuals find lodging close-by. On some occasions she has made as many as 20 phone calls to find lodging. One time she was unable to find lodging for a newly wed couple and offered them lodging in the Waltrip home. This couple still remains in contact. Other amenities include limousine and taxi service, bicycles, historic air tours and aircraft rentals.

In 1978 Jean talked to a reporter about the increasing numbers of aircraft landing at JGG. She said, "In the eight years we've been open, we've only had to turn away two airplanes because of not available motel accommodations." This record still stands today. She also said, "When you offer this kind of personal service, the good word gets around the country."

Over the years the Waltrips' efforts have been recognized by their peers. Here are some of the awards they have received:

- 1970 – Staff Sergeant Larry Waltrip was named Outstanding NCO for September by the 192nd Civil Engineer Squadron, Virginia Air National Guard.
- 1982 – Larry was presented a Certificate of Recognition by the Virginia Department of Aviation. Jean received the same honor in 1992.
- 1989 – Certificate of Appreciation for significant contributions to the economic development of James City County.
- 1990 – Award of Excellence by the James City County Planning Commission.
- 1994 – Dudley C. Waltrip was honored posthumously by the Commonwealth of Virginia General Assembly with House Resolution 118 for his foresight and work in James City County and Williamsburg.
- 1995 – Phil Boyer Award presented by the Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association at a Holiday Inn in Norfolk.
- 1998 – Williamsburg-Jamestown Airport was named the Chamber of Commerce Corporate Citizen of the Year.
- 2003 – Award of Excellence by the Junior Women’s Club.
The Waltrips were inducted into the Virginia Aviation Hall of Fame of the Virginia Aeronautical Historical Society.

Both Jean and Larry are locally born and raised. Jean, from Providence Forge, graduated from New Kent High School. Larry graduated from James Blair High School in Williamsburg.

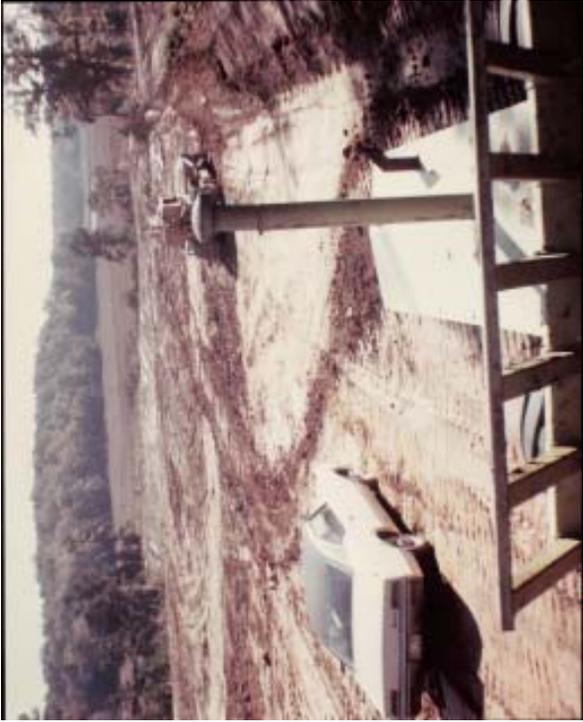
Larry opened Larry’s Marine when he was only 17. They met at an event sponsored by Larry’s Marine in 1967. They were married in 1968. Jean said she feels like she married the airport because it was in the planning stages when they began dating. Their two children, Larry and Michelle, kept them involved in community affairs for many years.

Even though the children are now adults Larry and Jean continue to be active in Williamsburg and James City County organizations by supporting the ballet and cancer research. Jean is well-known for her beautifully decorated cakes. Her biggest cake served 800 people. They both speak at various community meetings and do what they can to encourage youth to follow their dreams.



Norm’s Notes: This is Sharon Dillon’s third *Eagles* story. In our January/February/March issue we ran her story on Buz Rich. Last time, it was her story on the Rogallos. Sharon is a free-lance writer who lives in Williamsburg. Her sources for this story are on file at the VAHS.

The Waltrips are celebrating the 35th anniversary of JGG with an Open House on Saturday, October 8, 2005 10 a.m. – 4 p.m. The EAA will provide a pancake breakfast from 8 a.m. – 10 a.m. The ceremonies begin at 10 a.m. and go through 4 p.m. Jean and Larry invite you to attend and will be there to personally greet you all.



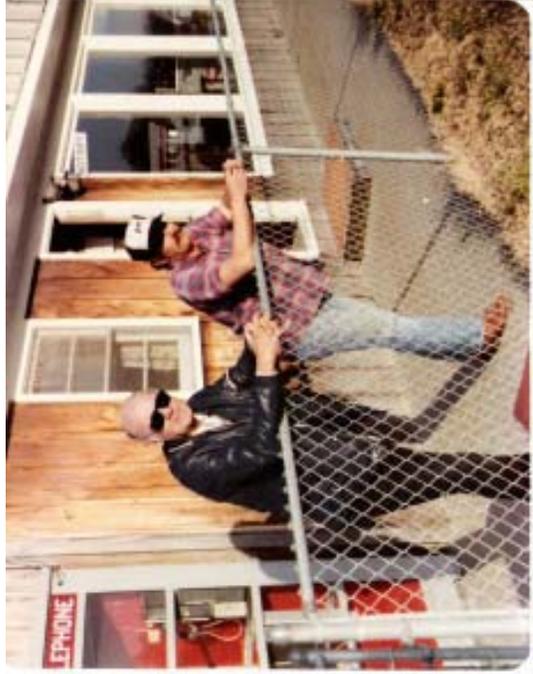
Larry Waltrip

1967 - The carving out of the runway begins



Larry Waltrip

October 24, 1967 - The roughing out phase is complete



Jean Waltrip

John Fischer and Lance Foor holding down the fence at the old FBO building in February 1983 at W-70



From the Waltrips

April 1972 - The Dupont DC-3 was a frequent visitor



From the Waltrips

The 20th anniversary - September 1990 - (l to r) Ken Rowe, Jean Waltrip, Gov. Linwood Holton, and Larry Waltrip



From the Waltrips

July 1990 - Terminal entrance from the parking lot, JGG - Larry and Jean Waltrip



Greg Wright

Cessna Pilots Association meeting at JGG and the new ramp, June 22-26, 2005



From the Waltrips

The "new" terminal, about 2001, from the ramp