

Some citizens in Humboldt County are attempting to increase the availability of air passenger service to our area, a difficult task in this day and age. I hope that they are successful in their endeavors. General aviation in our county has a long and colorful history. My late brother-in-law, Ellsworth Pine, learned to fly at Murray Field in the Nineteen Thirties. He told me of flying a bi-plane south to the bay area, using Highway 101 as a visual guide. A field located on the north side of the highway in South Legget was used for emergency landings. As a kid in the Thirties, I witnessed some of the local early air traffic. My parents and I drove down to the foot of Del Norte Street (then Murray Street) to view some navy seaplanes that had landed on the bay and were tied up next to a log pond for the night. There were either two or four of them; single engine, each carried two men in tandem cockpits. Some years after that, I remember standing on our street watching a huge navy dirigible fly over at low altitude. My father enjoyed airplanes and we would watch take offs and landings on a Sunday afternoon at Murray Field. One aircraft that really caught my eye was an autogyro, a winged propeller driven airplane equipped with a large rotor overhead. At another time, two twin engine Martin Bombers had landed at Murray Field with one upending on its nose when the landing gear got stuck in the mud. It was a few days before the aircraft was repaired and able to fly out. Murray field was not built to handle such large airplanes. The most memorable air event for me was in Nineteen Thirty Five when a Ford tri-motor passenger plane came to town and advertised twenty minute rides over Eureka. Dad purchased two tickets and away we went on my first flight. I was not only thrilled, feeling the plane lift off the ground, but I was also taken by the fact that, looking down, you could see the different shades of blue as the waters of the bay changed color according to depth. I found out just a few years ago that an old school friend, Hugh Metcalf, had ridden the same plane during the same period, also his first flight. The beginning of World War Two brought more air traffic to our area with Navy blimps based near the Coast Guard Station as was a flight of single engine seaplanes used for anti-submarine patrol. Navy Hellcat fighters and torpedo bombers, stationed at McKinleyville, often flew over town. One night, I heard a multi-engine plane about ten PM, circling the city with his landing lights on, looking for a place to land. A coastal War blackout did not help. He finally crash landed at the blimp base. Those were exciting times for a boy just learning about the world outside.

Fred Nelson for Community Comment