N-13PH being set up for display. The battery is to power the tape deck in the cabin – soft music greeted those who looked in.

THE RESURRECTION OF A SPARTAN

By Jack Cox

“Restoration” is perhaps a more technically accurate term to describe the process some antique airplane enthusiasts go through to put their old birds back in flying condition, but in a few cases the amount and extent of the work is such that a stronger word seems necessary to more fully describe the blood, sweat and tears that have been expended on a pile of near junk to make it fly again. This is the story of such a project, one that might be called “The Resurrection of a Spartan” — for it was quite literally brought back from the dead.

N-17614 was Serial Number 13 of the Spartan 7W Executives to come off the production line in Tulsa and for a good part of its existence it appeared this mystical (to some) number was, indeed, an omen of bad luck. For too many years the aircraft sat on the Martinsburg, West Virginia airport gradually deteriorating and probably would have been scrap aluminum today except for the interest and determination of Spartan buff Pete Bryce (EAA 86354). At least once or twice a year Pete would look in on the old girl, turn the engine over, see the door was closed and whatever else he could do to stave off the ravages of the elements. All the while he was attempting to buy the Executive, but to no avail.

N-17614 had a special appeal to Pete because in addition to being the 6th oldest Executive left on FAA’s records (it was built in 1938), this one was by far the lowest time 7W left.

As time passed Pete Bryce acquired several Spartan Executives, including his present one, N-111PB, Serial Number 14 (that’s the striking blue and green machine recently featured in Alumigrip ads). Thus it was that when in late 1972 he was finally able to buy N-17614, it was surplus to his needs — but, at least, he had been successful in saving it from the scrap pile and could insure that ol’ Serial Number 13 would end up in the hands of someone who would give it the TLC such a magnificent old bird so richly deserved.

That someone turned out to be Pat Hartness (EAA 27545) of Greenville, South Carolina. Already an avid homebuilder with one of the first plans-built Volksplanes to his credit, Pat was looking for a new and more challenging project. He found it in an unusually common manner — Pete Bryce’s ad in Trade-A-Plane. The remains were purchased, brought to South Carolina and were shortly laid out in a vacant corner of Pat’s Pepsi bottling plant awaiting the ministering hand that would bring on the resurrection. Pat has a very comprehensive scrapbook and slide collection today to show how N-17614 was quite literally taken apart down to the last castle nut and put back together again with new parts and materials where needed. There are no exaggerations intended here — the engine, prop and complete airframe were literally remanufactured, so that for all practical purposes the Spartan emerged as a new airplane.

Since it was to be used as an Executive was originally intended to be used, as an ultra plush piece of private transportation, the aircraft was changed and added to in order to make it just as up to date from an equipment point

(Photo by Jack Cox)
of view and as plush by today's standards as the aircraft was in the world of 1938 when it was first built. For instance, Cessna 310 wheels and disc brakes were substituted for the originals to make ground handling in crosswinds a little less exhilarating. A completely new instrument panel was fabricated and filled with every electronic goodie commonly used today in executive aircraft with the exception of radar (see picture). It even has a stereo tape deck for music loving passengers.

When it came time to do the upholstery, the Exec was turned over to Stevens Aviation of Greenville. This outfit is more accustomed to fitting custom threads in the likes of Lears and Gulfstreams, but they spared no effort in fitting N-17614 with one of the most beautiful interiors ever put in a single engine airplane.

The final touch was the paint. It had been hoped that the skin could be polished out but the years of neglect had taken their toll and it just wasn't possible to attain a polish that was up to the standard of the rest of the restoration. Instead, it was decided to paint the entire airplane a silver gray and trim it in a red and yellow factory trim design. Pat has some humorous stories to tell regarding the paint job. Briefly, it was painted at least three separate times using some well known super finishes, but they simply weren't good enough to suit Pat. Each time the paint was stripped off and a new start was made using another brand. Finally, a specially formulated acrylic paint was used that proved to be satisfactory. The resulting finish is one of those that always looks wet and about an inch deep ... really stunning.

As the Executive neared completion, a new N-number was applied for. The Serial Number 13 had never held any terror for Pat Hartness — in fact he looked up on it as a talisman of sorts. He was born on the 13th of the month and always considered it his lucky number. When he heard the serial number of N-17614, he knew this was meant to be his airplane. It will come as a surprise to exactly no one to learn that the new registration number is N-13PH. The fuselage also contains the logo of Hartness Engineering, another of Pat's business ventures, which adds an element of authenticity to the appearance of the plane since most Executives were purchased new for corporate use.

After all the little detail items and a few mechanical bugs were worked out and the Exec was flying nicely, Pat and his wife Jo (who, incidentally, was selected Mrs. EAA during the 1971 Oshkosh Fly-In) decided the plane should have a coming out party. Invitations were sent to various friends, owners of all the remaining Spartan Executives and well known Spartan enthusiasts. They even ordered good weather ... and got it!

On Friday, October 11, four of the 16 or so Spartan 7W Executives still on FAA's records landed at the Greenville Downtown Airport and taxied up to Thermal Belt Aviation's large hangar, which had been emptied out, scrubbed and polished for the big occasion. Sitting right in the middle of the vast open space in pristine splendor was Pat and Jo's N-13PH, flanked by two beribboned Bird-of-Paradise arrangements on tall stands ... an impressive setting for an impressive airplane.
The Executives flying in were: Peter Bryce of Bryce's Mountain Resort (Ski Bryce), Basye, Virginia in N-111PB (Serial Number 14); Colgate Darden III of Cayce, S. C. in NC-17633 (Serial Number 21); Floyd Duncan of Burbank, California in N-17658 (Serial Number 27); and George Men­nen of Morristown, N. J. in N-34SE (Serial Number 34).

That evening a champagne buffet was enjoyed by a large number of local and out of town guests — right in the hangar around the flood lighted Spartan. A special ramp had been put in place so everyone could walk up over the wing and admire the cabin.

It goes without saying that Spartan gab sessions went on until the wee hours of morning, however, all the owners rousted out early the following day for pictures and some buddy hopping. Five Spartan Executives may not sound like many, but so spread out around the country are the planes that these five constituted the largest gathering of the Model 7W any of the owners could recall probably since the factory days. An invitation was extended to all to attend Oshkosh '75, so perhaps an even larger number will be there next summer.

A lot of nautical terms and customs have been carried over into aviation. New boats and ships have been christened before their initial launch as far back as there are any records. Most of us in the EAA world fly for fun and the social side of aviation is important to us. We think it's a great idea to have a christening or send off party for new and just-restored aircraft. Why should those boat nuts have all the fun??

(PHoto by Jack Cox)

This close-up shows a lot of the tremendous work that went into the rebuilding of this Executive. Few aircraft have had such a glorious send off - the graceful floral stands are topped with Bird of Paradise arrangements.

(PHoto by Jack Cox)

Pat and Jo Hartness - hosts for debut of Spartan N-13PH.
Coke Darden – his Spartan is said to be the most original of those flying.

A once-in-a-generation photo – 5 Spartan Executives and their owners. Left to right, George Mennen, Floyd Duncan, Pete Bryce, Coke Darden and Pat Hartness.