

## The 'Flying Wing' of Baragwanath

This is not a story with a 'happy ending'! .....

Elsewhere on this forum I posted a photograph of a 'flying wing' design, ZS-UEC. Regrettably, I do not have any good quality photos of this aircraft ..... we always treated it as a bit of a 'joke'.

I cannot tell you much about the aircraft or of its owner other than he was a Hollander. In fact, I no longer remember his name! We seldom saw him at the airfield but when he did show-up he was always assured of a lot of curious spectators. For the purpose of this story I am going to give him the name of 'Jan' .... which rings a bell for me.

I believe the 'Flying Wing' was a Japanese design. It was not kept at Baragee and the reason for this will become clear as the story unfolds.

Over a period of 4 years or so, I witnessed no more than 6 flights of 'The Wing'. Let me be more specific as to what I witnessed!

..... I saw it 'waffle' into the air 6 times!

..... I then saw it waffle about the sky 6 times!

..... And then I saw it 'crash land' 5 times ..... this is the story of its 6th return to earth!

But first, a typical day's flying for 'Jan' would be an arrival at Baragee with the 'Wing' on a trailer. And this was a 'family' affair. Mom and the kids would all pitch-in and help 'Jan' to assemble the contraption. This was no simple task and would take a couple of hours. Jan was meticulous in his pre-flight .... he had to be .... every flight was a 'first' flight, or, to be more precise .... a 'test' flight.

Now all of this activity allowed us time to go to the clubhouse to get Cokes and pies .... and fire extinguishers .... and then go find ourselves a prime spot along the runway to witness the day's entertainment. The trick was to determine where the 'final' touchdown would take place. Jeff Sharman used to take bets on the side!

Picture the scene .... 'Jan' preparing 'The Wing' .... the family helping him .... 20 or 30 loads of spectators spreading themselves along the runway .... getting out deck chairs, drinks and pies .... and fire extinguishers .... taking bets on the side as to where 'The Wing' would finally come to rest ..... and then cheering loudly as it 'waffled' past us and into the air! I once saw it take-off - fly - and then crash land .... all within the length of the 3 000 ft runway. If it climbed away .... we all cheered wildly!

'Jan' would then fly around for 30 minutes or so and then he would practice his approaches. Now this was very important! The aircraft was visibly unstable. It had a 'sickening' way of flying. The best way I can describe it is to say it was in a constant state of 'Dutch Roll'! Now I am not being derogatory to 'Dutchmen' .... but the aircraft was constantly 'yawing-pitching-rolling'. All of this took place at about 50 mph.

After a couple of passes, 'Jan' would attempt the landing. Welllllll! 'Landing' is not the word for what it looked like. It was an 'arrival' of note. For a 'brief' moment it looked like a glider approaching ..... but then the 'grace' of the glider would disappear and the thing took on the appearance of a Walrus diving into a cupful of water. It would hit the runway; the tail fins looked like they were going to flip over the canopy; .... invariably one wing would 'dig-in'. A cloud of dust .... and out would step 'Jan' .... with a smile on his face! Another successful flight completed. We would be rolling around splitting our sides from laughter by this time!

We would then join his family, walking down the runway picking up any pieces we could find. 'Jan' would collect them all and take the whole collection back home for the re-build. And then 5 or 6 months later ..... the whole drama would be repeated!!!

Now, at this time, there were many members of the JLPC who had been wartime pilots on both sides of the divide. Among this group was one Fred Huber, ex-Luftwaffe BF-109 and FW 190 pilot .... a real 'pilot's pilot' and a very knowledgeable and pleasant man to boot! One evening in the JLPC pub Fred announces that he was going to fly 'the Wing'. We were dumbfounded!

.... "Fred, you have got to be out of your mind!" we said. Fred would not be swayed! .... "I have flown some very difficult aircraft ... this one does not worry me!" he told us. I recall that Fred had flown the Me 163 rocket fighter as well.

Some weeks later, 'The Wing' arrived after its latest rebuild, and Fred was going to fly it. That day I was duty Tug-pilot for the gliding club so I did not do the 'fire extinguisher and drinks' routine along the runway. I kept an eye on the proceedings on the 'power' runway.

I cannot remember whom it was I was tugging but I recall taking off on 03 L and turning towards the Orlando Power Station. I was searching for a thermal and trying to keep the glider in sight. Some of the glider pilots would go into a 'low-tow' position and you would lose sight of them. I was in a turn over the power station and as we turned south I saw 'The Wing' no more than about 200 m in front of me and about 200 ft above us. But there was something not right with the way it was flying! I could see that the pilot was having difficulty with the aircraft. It was pitching and yawing rapidly! He was not going to get out of my way .... so I steepened my turn, hoping like hell that the glider pilot could see what was in front of us and would stay with me in the turn.

Before we had completed 180 deg of this steep turn, the glider pilot released and banked away, no doubt cursing me! I leveled out and then looked back to where 'The Wing' was last seen. And then I saw it ..... and my heart stopped beating in an instant! The aircraft was tumbling like a ruler .... tail over nose! It then stopped tumbling and immediately went into a spin. The spin looked to be flat ... and surprisingly rapid! The aircraft was 'right-side' up! I watched it all the way down! 'The Wing' hit the ground about 50 m from a small dam and completely disintegrated.

The site of the crash was where the Johannesburg Prison now stands .... close to the Baragwanath Hospital.

By the time I landed a search and rescue party had already left for the accident scene. There was nothing I could do to help! Fred was killed on impact!

A sad day!  
Noel

