



## South Norfolk Airport

As told to Norm Crabill and Scott Gross by Alston "Steve" Stevens

South Norfolk Airport was opened in 1946 by the Todd family who operated it until '54 or '55, when Don Wilson took over. In 1971-72 it was jointly operated by Wilson and "Steve" Stevens, and then operated solely by Stevens till it closed November 5, 1985. It was a hub of GA activity, with 60 tie-downs at its peak. In addition, there was a cow barn for a hangar which had 4 *Citabrias*, plus 2 private hangars, and the main hangar with 3 airplanes and equipment. In its time, many types of aircraft, besides the typical single-engine light planes, flew out of there, including a Cessna T-50, Wesley Braggs' Beech 18, and a King Air. A stolen C-90 was dumped at South Norfolk after delivering somewhere-else a load of drugs from South America.

They had flight instruction, sales, service, crop dusting, banner towing, glider flying, and more Piedmont pilots based their personal planes there than at ORF. (The *Tidewater Soaring Society* operated out of *South Norfolk* before moving to *Garner*, a site donated by VAHS member Fleetwood Garner). It was a huge family oriented business, where costs were kept low so youngsters could learn to fly and make money instructing and banner towing and working at the airport. This way, some went on to become professional pilots. Our VAHS 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice President Scott Gross went up the ladder this way, soloing in 1976 at South Norfolk; today he flies a *Hawker* for *Ethyl Corporation* out of Richmond. So did Mike Williams, who flies for *American*. Many others did it this way too and are now flying for the majors.

They also had air shows, usually sponsored by the *HRA Club* and the *Portsmouth Flyers*. *South Norfolk's* picture is on the cover of Duane Cole's book (Cole performed his Acrobatic show at *South Norfolk*). There are also impromptu unsponsored airshows on unannounced occasions. Jim Tarkington, now operating *Avidyne* at *HRA*, says he didn't know that an 85 hp *Ercoupe* could perform that many rolls and loops at such a low altitude (by an unnamed pilot - NOT Jim)! And there were other happenings too, like the time Frank Sadler landed on top of a '55 *T-Bird* with a *Clipped Wing Cub*, and one pilot lost a wheel from his *Lake* amphibian after take-off and was waved off by Steve who raced down the runway in a car holding up the wheel just before his attempted landing. With that warning, the pilot was able to land OK in a nearby creek.

And it all went away November 5, 1985. Many went to Hampton Roads Airport, and you can still find some of them there, doing what they were doing before. Steve is rebuilding a 7AC Champ, just like the one he soloed in at South Norfolk in 1947. Hampton Roads has paved runways, an NDB approach and a lunch counter, several FBOs, including helicopter rental and flight instruction, but the aura of those old grass fields lingers on for some of us.



Steve Stevens

**In the 40s and 50s, there were mostly (only?) tail draggers at  
South Norfolk, although there was that *Ercoupe*....**

Steven Shils, Chesapeake, Virginia  
via Jim Tarkington



**Some of the 60 airplanes based at South Norfolk Airport (W33) in July 1985 shortly before it closed on November 5, 1985**

An aerial view, showing proximity to Battlefield Boulevard and I-64 and the silos, which were easily recognizable landmarks before GPS. With the highway and silos you could always(?) find good old *South Norfolk*. The *Lake* amphibian that lost its wheel is on the last row to the right, third airplane up from the bottom.



Detail from Washington Sectional Map  
September 14, 1967, showing South Norfolk Airport at the mid-point of its career.

The photographs for this article were digitally processed by  
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