



Jason Coontz

Larry Meyer, right, of Jacksonville greets deaf pilot Henry Kisor just after Kisor landed at Jacksonville Airport Friday. Kisor, a friend of Meyer's since 1954, is retracing the 1911 coast-to-coast route of Cal Rodgers, who was also deaf.

## Deaf pilot flies the route Cal Rodgers did in 1911

BY CAROLE HACK

In 1911, deaf pilot Cal Rodgers became the first American to fly coast to coast. He did so in his biplane, the "Vin Fiz."

Retracing Rodgers' route this summer and fall is another deaf pilot, author and editor Henry Kisor, who's writing a book about it.

On Aug. 18, Kisor landed his 1959 Cessna 150 at the Jacksonville airport.

Though Rodgers landed in Springfield, not Jacksonville, Capital Airport is radio-controlled. As a deaf pilot, Kisor does not use a radio, so he avoids radio-controlled airports. Instead, he chooses the closest airports to the more than 80 places Rodgers landed.

Rodgers flew at an altitude of about 1,000 feet and followed the railroads, said Kisor, who does the same.

Some of the railroads are in disrepair now or have been completely removed, with the rail bed planted over in crops. From the air, however, the rail bed is still visible as a change in soil color.

"You can actually follow the ghost of a railroad," he said.

Kisor has completed the eastern leg of his journey. His most memorable sight was the flight up the Hudson River on July 4.

"It was as if New York was putting on a show just for me," he said, recalling the Statue of Liberty to his left, the World Trade Center to his right, and below him New York Harbor — teeming with everything from power boats to tankers.

Kisor compares his plane with the Wright Model EX flown by Rodgers. Both are buffeted by the wind because they are so light. With pilot, Kisor's weighs 1,500 pounds and Rod-

gers' weighed 900.

Kisor's plane can go 100 miles per hour "on a good day," but Rodgers' had a top speed of only about 52 mph.

Kisor was deafened by meningitis at age 3½. Descriptions of Rodgers' speech and mannerisms indicate that he was deaf rather than hard of hearing, according to Kisor.

His first two books, both published by Random House, are "What's That Pig Outdoors?: A Memoir of Deafness" and "Zephyr: Tracking a Dream Across America." The first is autobiographical; the second is about the railroad and includes references to the author's deafness.

"I don't think my deafness has made a bit of difference in my work as an editor and a writer," said Kisor, "except that it has given me something to write about."

Book editor for the Chicago Sun-Times since 1978, Kisor reads and

reviews books and interviews authors. He compares writing an article to writing a book in terms of pain: One is "like scratching your finger," while the other is "like slashing your wrist."

Kisor, who has been flying only 2½ years, said "I became a pilot because I needed an idea for another book. He calls the urge to seek adventure "typical" for males his age, 55. "My wife calls it male menopause," he mused.

In Illinois, Kisor has landed in Chicago, Joliet, Streator, Lincoln and Jacksonville. On Aug. 18, he planned to fly to Mexico, Mo., where he would stay the night and then fly to Marshall and Kansas City, Mo.

He expects to arrive in Los Angeles about Sept. 25. He will then fly home to Evanston. The scheduled completion date for his book is Dec. 31, 1996.