

Flight Line

The Official Publication of the CAF

Southern California Wing

455 Aviation Drive, Camarillo, CA 93010

(805) 482-0064



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Merry Christmas, Everyone!

Visit us on line at www.cafsocal.com



© Photo by Ron Fleishman

Col. Lloyd McAfee doing what he does best – putting together a portable steel dolly for our R-3350 engine. Lloyd does many things for our Wing that may not always get noticed. He is always there to make whatever is needed to get a job done – whether it be a special cradle and harness for our Zero on her way to New Zealand, or a special chain barrier to control access to our Maintenance Hangar. Thanks, Lloyd, for all you do!

Wing Staff Meeting, Saturday, December 15, 2012 at 9:30 a.m. at the CAF Aviation Museum Hangar, 455 Aviation Drive, Camarillo Airport

Our CAF Mission: To Honor American Military Aviation Through Flight, Exhibition and Remembrance.

December 2012

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Museum Open 10am to 4pm Every Day Except Monday and Major Holidays						1 Work Day
2	3 Museum Closed	4 Work Day	5	6 Work Day	7	8 Work Day
9	10 Museum Closed	11 Work Day	12	13 Work Day	14 Docent Meeting 3:30	15 Work Day Wing Staff 9:30
16	17 Museum Closed	18 Work Day	19	20 Museum Closed	21	22 Work Day
23	24 Museum Closed Christmas Eve	25 Museum Closed Christmas Day	26	27 Museum Closed	28	29 Work Day
30	31 Museum Closed New Year's Eve	Museum Open 10am to 4pm Every Day Except Monday and Major Holidays				

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Submittal Deadline - 15th of the month

Commemorative Air Force
Southern California Wing
455 Aviation Drive
Camarillo, CA 93010-9501

Viva Volunteers – Part IV

by Dave Flood

To wrap up my four-part series about the tremendous work our volunteers do to make our Wing so special – I'm mentioning a few more people, some of whom are not now members, who have helped us over the years.

There are going to be volunteers who I have missed – many of whom will be new faces who have shown up and contributed in the past couple of years. I apologize to you all, and promise to make up for my oversight in the future when I will see and hear more about you in the years to come.

Our Benefactors: Gary & Steve Barber, Casey and Sarah de Bree, Russ Drosendahl, Jim and Catie Hinckley, Clay Lacy, Esper Petersen, Charlie Plumb, David Price, Jack Rogers, Rich Witten, plus all of our aircraft sponsors.

You have contributed financially and in many other ways to help our Wing attain excellence.

Our Good Friends: Eric Van Gilder (aviation photography); Thomas Van Stein (aviation art); Randy Mytar (aviation art); Jim Scheid (aviation photography); Dick Benchley (aviation photography).

Thanks for your considerable talents in behalf of our Wing.

Our Wing Member Photographers: Sharon Dwyer, Ron Fleishman, Atsushi "Fred" Fujimori, Frank Mormillo, Dan Newcomb, Gene O'Neal, Sheryl O'Neil, Avery Willis, and John Woolley.

You have helped immeasurably in making our "Flight Line" more appealing and colorful.

Our Wing Member "Flight Line" Contributors: Casey de Bree – page setup, alignment, printing, editing, technical assistance, articles; John Woolley – "Museum Update;" Avery Willis – articles & photos; Clifford Brown – articles; Dan Newcomb – articles & photos; Also: Carol & Glenn Bachman; Steve Barber, Sr.; Steve Barber, Jr.; Gary Barber; Ken Barger; Jennifer and Jessica Bauman; Robert Blair; Jo and Jack Brinckerhoff; Pat Brown; Dick Burrer; Dan Cuvier; Russ Drosendahl; Scott Drosos; Ron Fleishman; Alan Gaynor; Jim Hinckley; Jim Hinkelman; Paul Kleinbaum; John Knopp; Ken Kramer; Greg Mead; Walt Metcalf; Shirley Murphy; Alan Nicholson; Gene O'Neal; Sheryl O'Neil; Bill O'Neill; Joe Peppito; Mike Perrenoud; Charlie Plumb; Janet Rizzoli; Marc Russell; David Spence; Jim Stirone; Ceci Stratford; Norm Swagler; Dick Troy; Al & Lois Watts.

Other contributors in the past have been: John Deakin, Sarah de Bree, Charles Miller, Vern Olson, and Stephanie Russell.

My heartfelt thanks to you all! It takes many contributors to make a Wing work, and you all have "pulled your oars!"

Special Appeal from Joe Peppito

To: All CAF Cadets and Members:

Subject: C-46 Repair, Servicing and Operational Training Program

Starting in the near future – sometime in early December – we will be initiating a C-46 Airplane and Engine Restoration Program.

The Cadets of this Wing will be the major participants in this program. They will not only be given classroom instruction on the various systems of the Curtiss C-46 Commando aircraft and its engines, but they will also get "hands-on" experience – performing inspections, repairs, maintenance and operation of the aircraft, its systems and its engines.

At the beginning of each class period (Saturdays) and any other day we may schedule – the Cadets will be given a briefing on the day's planned maintenance activities, plus instructions on the operation and maintenance requirements of the various systems. They will also be given informational literature on the planned maintenance procedures. Once a month the Cadets will participate in a short quiz to determine the ongoing success of the program.

We are enlisting the support of the entire Wing in this endeavor. We hope that many of our volunteer mechanics will step forward and participate with the young Cadets in making this program a success. Please contact me to let me know that you can help with some aspect of the program – engine maintenance, operations, systems, history, anything that will impart to these young people a love of military aircraft and the beginning of expertise in maintaining these treasured aircraft. Believe me, you will be amazed at how much you will get out of it working with these young Cadets.

Thanks in advance for your cooperation and support in this endeavor. Together we can all "Keep 'Em Flying!"

Joseph Peppito
Cadet Training Officer



Wing Member Bio: Col. Dan Cuvier

by Col. Avery Willis

Approximately two years ago Dan asked Steve Barber: "What are we going to do with that old airplane?" He was looking at the 1946 Navion that two American Airline pilots flew from 1947 until 1967. Then it just sat in a hangar at the Oxnard Airport.

After 31 years in the military, Dan should have expected the answer he got. Steve said, "Why don't you do something with it". So Dan came up with the idea of fixing it up so that kids could sit in the cockpit.

Before going into the Navion, here is a bit about Dan's background that gave him the skills to get the job done and the motivation to do something for kids. Dan's childhood home was Hicksville, Long Island, where he was in Boy Scouts and the Civil Air Patrol in the sixties until 1972. He was his troop's Jr. Assistant Scoutmaster, and Squadron Commander of Squadron 7 of the Long Island Group, Civil Air Patrol. He was also the troop's bugler.

In 1972 he joined the Army with a desire to learn to fly helicopters. He was on the way to flight school with a friend who fell asleep at the wheel and had a serious crash that almost killed Dan. The injuries prevented him from flying helos. He was a paratrooper in the 101st Airborne at that time, and after 4.5 months in 3 different hospitals he was returned to active duty where he transferred into Army Aviation (Air Cavalry) and became a Battalion Flight Operations Clerk.

After the Army, Dan attended El Camino College on the G.I. Bill, earning his B.A. degree. While doing so he acquired a civilian job with the U.S. Air Force in the Star Wars Space Laser SPO, working at Space Division in El Segundo. In 1980 Dan joined the Army National Guard AFRC, Los Alamitos, doing POL, aircraft refueling, mostly for helicopters.

Then in 1984 he transferred to the California Air National Guard as an Air-Cargo Specialist in an Aerialport Sqdn. And was promoted to Air Cargo Specialist Supervisor, NCOIC. He served all over the world performing those duties.

Dan got married in 1989 to his lovely wife Jaime. He transferred into a Medical Evacuation Sqdn. and in 1990 shipped out to serve in the Gulf War with his Medic-Evac squadron. In 1993 he transferred into the Air Education Training Command (AETC) where he became a liaison in CAP/USAF performing inspections of CAP units' files, aircraft, vehicles and buildings throughout the Pacific Region, as well as performing many TDY's around the U.S. as a Safety and Logistics NCOIC. Finally, he transferred into Space Command at Vandenberg AFB, CA. where he served in a Space Operations Sqdn. until his medical retirement in 2006.

After 31 years of service, he now lives with his wife in Thousand Oaks. Dan worked on both of the Constellations that were at our airport as air and ground crew, restoring both cargo aircraft to full flying condition. The EC-121T Warning Star is now at the Yankee Air Force Museum in Chino, and the "Camarillo Connie," a C-121C, is flying with the Super Constellation Flyers out of Basal, Switzerland, and can be seen during the Paris Airshows.

Meanwhile, the L-17 Navion had been languishing in a hangar since 1967. It was in pretty bad shape due to corrosion. However, the cockpit was in good shape and could be restored so that kids could simulate a "real cockpit experience." Dan worked on the aircraft for a year and a half, with the help of Paul Gnitke. Paul did a lot of the body work and made the missiles.



© Photo by Avery Willis

Col. Dan Cuvier on the wing of the Navion L-17

Dan installed a battery using solar power to operate the master and ADF switches. The sounds give the kids a real flying airplane experience. Dan said the hardest part was all the painting. The total restoration cost was only about \$250.00! And much of that was paid for by donations.

As we show kids and parents our NA-143 L-17 Navion, here are a few facts that you can share:

1. There were only 1,110 built between 1945 and 1947. They had Continental O-470-7, 185 H.P. engines with a maximum speed of 163 MPH. The ceiling was 11,000 feet.
2. The Army bought 35 of the original Navions and added improved brakes and fuel tanks.
3. The Rangemaster version L-18 was produced with a 250 H.P engine that could seat five.
4. 5-Star General Douglas McArthur used an L-17A Navion during the Korean War. The kids are sitting in a real warbird.



© Photo by Avery Willis

Another shot of Dan and the Navion L-17

Here are a few requests from Dan of our docents as we show the Navion to the kids and their parents:

1. 1. Ask our guests to treat the aircraft with respect, and gently.
2. 2. When climbing in and out of the cockpit, stay on the black walking pad & off the seats.
3. 3. Docents must stay with the Navion when kids are in the cockpit.
4. 4. Docents can turn on the master and ADF switch to give the best cockpit experience.
5. 5. Remember to turn off the power Master Switch when leaving the aircraft.
6. 6. Close the Navion cockpit canopy at the end of the day (after a quick inspection).



© Photo by Avery Willis

The beautifully restored Navion L-17 cockpit. Kudos to Dan Cuvier, and to Paul Gnitke, for adding this aircraft to our stable of warbirds!

Wendover Army Airfield by Col. Max Rawlings
From *Dispatch*, CAF, Midland, Texas

Since most of you will never make the pilgrimage to Wendover, Utah, the birthplace of Nuclear Delivery Aviation, I thought I would take you there with pictures and an article.



Wendover is about 110 miles west of Salt Lake City on the border of Utah and Nevada and South of the famous Bonneville Salt Flats where world land speed records have been set. Wendover was laid out on the railroad lines in the west desert between Salt Lake City and West Coast cities and at the beginning of the war, the population was only about 100 people.

The Army Air Corps began building structures on September 20, 1940 and it officially became an installation on July 29, 1941. The total site was 86 miles long and ranged from 18 to 36 miles wide with acres totaling 1,822,000. Wendover Army Air Base was activated on March 28, 1942 as a B-17 and B-24 heavy bombardment training base. The first unit was the 306th Bombardment Group with four squadrons of B-17's arriving in April of 1942. Training included high-altitude formation flying, long-range navigation, target identification and simulated combat missions.

By the end of 1942 three groups had completed training, and in 1943, thirteen additional groups received training. Bombardment training ended in April of 1994 with the last two groups flying the B-24. All total, there were 21 bomber groups and over 1,000 aircrew that had trained in Wendover.



Wendover Army Airfield, continued...

Fighter training took place in the middle of 1944 when the 72nd wing arrived and trained with their P-47's, and this was the only unit using the airfield when Lt. Col. Paul Tibbets inspected the field for possible use of the Squadron, and they left shortly after his visit.

Tibbets had been given three choices of possible bases, Wendover, Utah, Great Bend, Kansas, and Mountain Home (Boise), Idaho. When Tibbets saw Wendover, he said this would be the base because of its remote location which helped with security, and the runways could handle the B-29. Bob Hope referred to Wendover as "Leftover Field".



Tibbets was told in the summer of 1944 that there were three B-29 Squadrons who had completed their combat training in Harvard, Nebraska, and of the three, he selected the 393rd which would become the core of his squadron because of the type of personnel. Lt. Col. Tom Classen was the squadron commander and he became essential to Tibbets as deputy commander.

Tibbets set up his HQ at Wendover on September 8, 1944, and one week later, the 393rd arrived with their 15 B-29's and their ground crew. Tibbets added many personnel that he had flown with in Europe, and after a couple of months, on December 17th, 1944 (41st Anniversary of Wright Brothers), the 509th Composite Group was officially activated.



The *Enola Gay* Hangar was built at the east end of the ramp and that is where the offices and shops for working

on the bomb hanging mechanisms, bomb ballistics, release mechanisms and other specialty items were built. Also, pits were constructed with hydraulic lifts to hoist the bombs into the bomb bays. "Little Boy" weighed 9,000 lbs. and "Fat Man" was 10,000 lbs. Wendover has the only bomb loading pit from the nuclear era still in existence. Between October 1944 and August of 1945, 155 test units were dropped.



In May of 1945, the 509th received their new B-29's with fuel injected engines, reversible electric propellers, pneumatic bomb doors and a modified tunnel to accommodate the bomb. Tibbets had spearheaded some of these modifications like removing the turrets to get more speed and the 155 degree angle to take once the bomb had been released to get the 8 mile distance required away from the blast.

The 509th departed Wendover in May of 1945 heading for Tinian in the Pacific. They used "pumpkins" to bomb Japan. These were very large bombs filled with high explosives that attached to the same hanging mechanisms as the atomic bombs. They usually flew these pumpkin missions one at a time, but on July 20th they sent eleven bombers out with pumpkins to bomb Japan. The actual atom bomb missions on August 6th and 9th are well documented.

Most of the buildings still remain at Wendover, including the *Enola Gay* hangar, the control tower and the other hangars on the flight line. The bomb pit is still on the east of the airfield directly west of a bomb bunker. And the Wendover Air Base Foundation is trying to preserve all of these structures.

The Airfield is now home to various aircraft including the C-123 used in the Conair Movie, four T-33's, a F-86D and a dual control Mig 15.

I had the good fortune of visiting the base in 2001 with Fifi and Diamond-Lil, and this was the last time that a B-29 and B-24 were on the base. I gathered the information for this article from the website for the base: wendoverairbase.com; and from the books "Return of the Enola Gay" by Paul W. Tibbets and "Enola Gay (American Version)/Ruin From The Air (British Version)" by Gordon Thomas and Max Morgan Witts.

Aviation Art: William S. Phillips



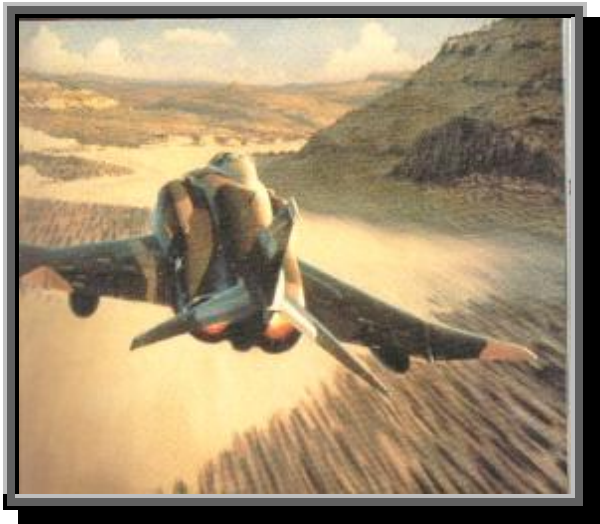
“Last Chance Before Nightfall”

An A-1 Skyraider keeping air cover over a downed pilot in Vietnam until the helicopter can rescue him.



“Sunset Serenade”

Going home, their engines sing a serenade: the deep grumble of the B-17’s big radials and the baritone of the P-51’s Packard-Merlin, now throttled back from the snarling tenor of combat.



“Hot In The Canyon”

A McDonnell-Douglas RF-4 of the Nevada Air National Guard smokin’ along over the Nevada desert.



“Riding The Thunder”

The SR-71A *Blackbird* coming at you at Mach 3. On a flight from London to Los Angeles, at an altitude of sixteen miles, it crossed seven time zones, and arrived almost 4 hours before it departed!



“The Long Green Line”

A Bell UH-1 *Huey* helicopter “hammers” through a misty, monsoon-soaked Vietnam valley.



“Shore Birds at Point Lobos”

The Blue Angels’ A-4s flying over Monterey, CA
From: “The Art of William S. Phillips: The Glory of Flight.”

Wing Photo Page I: Halloween Party

© Photos by Sheryl O'Neil



Some of the attendees at our 2012 Halloween Party in the Museum Hangar. You know who you are!



Our F6F-5 Hellcat decorated for the occasion. The crew did a phenomenal job of fixing up the hangar to provide creepy displays for the guests.



Here's a member in costume – acting like a bartender. We cannot identify anyone in these photos – their costumes were that good! Besides, they can't sue us.



What – you're in first class and you want a drink? Heh, heh, heh – let me get one for you from my cauldron.



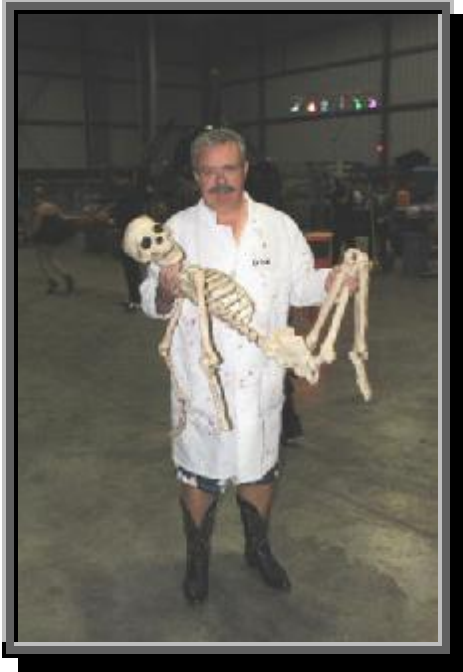
Old mechanics never die, they just spin their props on Halloween.



A "ghostly Gatling gun" out of our C-46 *China Doll's* cockpit window. "Trying to haunt our hangars, eh? Take that, and that, and that!"

Wing Photo Page II: Halloween Party, continued

© Photos by Sheryl O'Neil



Sorry, doctor! We think that patient's a goner!



O.K. - can you tell which one is Che Guevara?



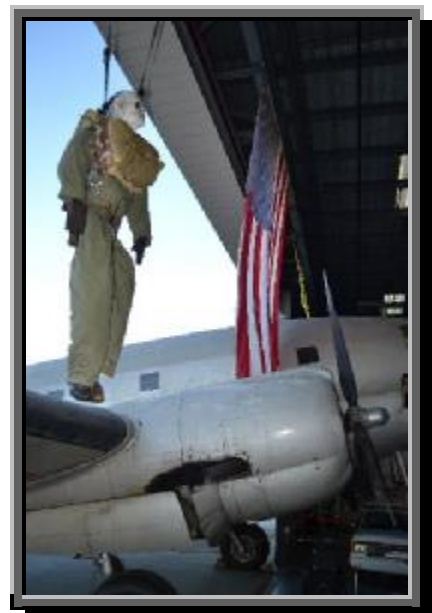
Never mind singing "O Sole Mio!" sir, just put one foot in front of the other on that yellow line!



This bevy of beauties caught in their dressing room – ready for their stage appearance in the “reallllly bigggg shewwww!”



When Paul Gnitke renovated this B-17 ball turret, little did he realize the “Gunner Ghost” would come back to haunt him.



This guest decided to hang around after the Halloween Party was over!

MEMORIAL DAY 2012 AND “A BOAT NAMED BLUE”

by Clifford Brown

I spent this last Memorial Day weekend working in the museum storage area in my new job in Museum Accessions. I was in the midst of organizing the storage of some artifacts when I came across a cardboard package that seemed out of place. I opened it up and was surprised to find it contained a number of Japanese Imperial Navy items from WWII and a non-published manuscript. That is museum-speak for diaries and personal papers.

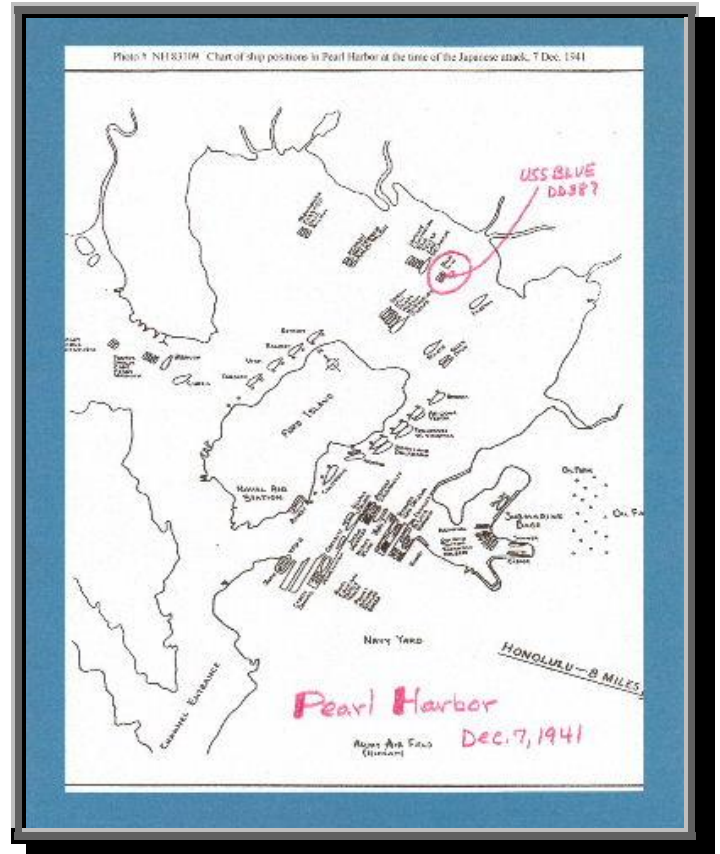
This one was entitled “U.S.S. Blue DD387 A Remembrance” written by Edward Hannah, a brief 1984 note from Forrest Vaughan to a friend named Jordan, and a 1945 page from Forrest’s diary about a souvenir hunt excursion at Yokosuka Naval Base.

It turns out that these were shipmates on this destroyer named U.S.S. Blue during WWII. I’m not much interested in ships, so I put it aside to concentrate on the artifacts or, as I call it, stuff.

The most interesting to me was an 18” x 24” very tattered Japanese naval pennant which I encapsulated between glass and framed for protection. The pennant was white with red lettering with the “wording” in Japanese: “Explosive.” In the Navy, ships fly pennants or little flags to give notice to those around them of what they are doing. This was probably used to alert others that ammunition was being loaded.

Another item was an armband that was a numbered gate pass to enter the war-era Japanese Imperial Navy base at Yokosuka, Japan. There also was a little book that was a history of the Japanese Empire and a code of conduct for sailors, a small 3” x 5” Japanese flag on very thin silk and one uniform epaulet shoulder board with a button showing the symbolic Imperial Chrysanthemum. Sort of a miniature time capsule of WWII. Wing member Yoshi Abe who had worked at what is now the post war Yokosuka Naval Base before coming to the States made the translation for me.

Eventually, I got around to reading the “non-published manuscript” and boy, was I surprised! The author was Edward Hannah, who described in detail how his ship was sunk during WWII. Pretty special, lots of ships got sunk and there weren’t often survivors. This ship was extra special, it was the U.S.S. Blue, a destroyer, DD-387 that had been at Pearl Harbor on December 7th. Only a few minutes into the attack and with only a skeleton crew on board, four junior ensigns got the ship underway, left Pearl Harbor and put to sea.



A map of Pearl Harbor showing where all the U.S. ships were anchored on Dec. 7, 1941. Note where USS Blue was anchored.

Along the way they depth-charged sonar contacts resulting in oil slicks and bubbles which translated into credit for sinking one, possibly two submarines. These were the miniature submarines we have read about since the war’s end. The deck crew was credited with downing two attacking aircraft. For the next couple of days they patrolled the waters off of Pearl Harbor in the expectation of another attack.

The Captain and most of the crew sat out the whole escapade ashore. Ed Hannah was later commended for his quick action in getting the ammunition locker open and distributing ammunition to the gun stations. He said he did so because he had the master key, a bolt cutter.

From the December 7th attack until the following August, the U.S.S. Blue performed various routine convoy duties around the Pacific, and fire support for the Battle of Guadalcanal. Nice story, but they did not live happily ever after.

On August 22, 1942, in what is now known as “Iron Bottom Sound,” on the north side of Guadalcanal, the U.S.S. Blue was on a hunt with another destroyer, the U.S.S. Hensley, for the “Tokyo Express” which was a Japanese convoy that routinely tried to sneak in reinforcements to the Japanese ground forces on Guadalcanal.

A Boat Named Blue, contd.

At a little before 4:00 a.m., the hunters became the hunted as another destroyer, a Japanese one, the *Kawakaze*, cut in behind and fired a torpedo that hit the stern of the U.S.S. Blue and blew off the rear 40 feet of the ship. The official ship's log entry says it all : "0400 received torpedo hit at frame 183, starboard, shearing off stern at frame 167 rendering engine and steering gear inoperative."

The attacking Japanese destroyer the *Kawakaze* and the Long Lance torpedo they used were considered the best in the world at the time. Better and faster than ours. The U.S.S. Blue was outmatched, with no rudder or propeller - mortally damaged and dying.

But, damage control was able to secure the ship from imminent sinking. The body of one crewman whose duty station had been on the auxiliary steering gear on the stern of the ship "was hanging in the wreckage...Sharks were trying to get at him and couldn't make it—neither could we. He dragged there, trailing blood and attracting sharks, until the final sinking" two days later.

Efforts over the next couple of days to tow the ship to nearby Tulagi were unsuccessful. Early on the second night the ship was abandoned and scuttled. Ed Hannah was the last man off the ship. His parting comment was what Memorial Day is all about.

“Before we left, we had turned on the search light to illuminate the colors”.

And that's what I learned on Memorial Day, 2012 about the story of "A Boat Named Blue."



USS Blue, DD387, a Bagley-class destroyer named for RADM Victor Blue (1865-1928).

Builder: Norfolk Navy Yard
Laid Down: September 25, 1935
Launched: May 27, 1937
Commissioned: August 14, 1937
At anchor, Pearl Harbor, HI: December 7, 1941
Damaged by Japanese destroyer *Kawakaze's* torpedo: August 22, 1942
Scuttled: August 23, 1942

History of CAF-SoCAWing Fabric Work

by Jo and Jack Brinckerhoff

We read Jim Hinckley's article about Gil Brice and the fabric shop in "Flight Line" with great interest. It is always most gratifying when your student is both successful and has continued to pass on what he has learned.

Here's a brief history of fabric work at SoCal as we know it:

Prior to 2002, there was an established Fabric Shop lead by Merle Smith and Bill Benner in the old nose hangar. I don't recall when Merle and Bill "Went West", but, after they died, there was no fabric work done in the Wing until we attended Tom Reilly's "Warbird Restoration School" in Orlando, Florida, in October, 2002. At that school we (the class attending) covered an aileron of a B-17 that was undergoing a "ground up" restoration. As an aside, that B-17 would later be named "Liberty Belle" when she was delivered to her owner, and later become famous as she burned in an Illinois corn field. But we digress.....

Upon our return from Florida (still October, 2002), and anxious to apply our newly learned skills, we approached Marc Russell about the need to re-cover the control surfaces of the PBJ/B-25. Marc agreed we should start on the elevators and rudders. But there were more hurdles to overcome. First, there were no tools for the work. No saw-horses, irons, scissors, needles, temperature measuring devices, or the multitude of other implements needed. So we headed off to various stores in the area, purchased everything needed, donated it all to the Wing, and went to work on one of the elevators. By the way, all the consumable materials (fabric, tapes, coatings, etc) were provided by the PBJ restoration fund.

It soon became our habit to stop our work and explain the role of fabric-covered control surfaces and to briefly explain the process to visitors brought into the Maintenance Hangar by the museum docents. That brief introduction also included an invitation to join the Wing and become involved. Both of us clearly recall the day that the visitors included a rather diminutive gentleman whose eyes simply lit up when I made the invitation. That gentleman was Gil Brice. The following workday, he arrived bright and early with his membership application completed and check in hand. As soon as the formalities were completed, he made a beeline to the corner of the hangar we had carved out.

Training and working with Gil was both a wonderful and sometimes frustrating experience. The frustrating part only happened when he would arrive without his hearing aids!! Anyone who tried to carry on a conversation with Gil without them knows what we mean.

Shortly after Gil had joined the Fabric Shop, Greg Schuh also accepted our invitation to become involved, but left the Wing for unknown reasons shortly thereafter.

History of CAF-SoCAWing Fabric Work, contd.

We became aware of Gil's "past life" as a high school wood shop teacher about the same time it became apparent we did not have an adequate work space nor storage for tools, supplies, and equipment. We worked out an agreement. Gil would build a roll-around cabinet/work table if we would buy the materials. We presume that cabinet is still in use by the Fabric Shop as they continue their work on the F-24. By the way, the storage rack Gil built was done without our involvement.

As it became clear that Gil was quite capable of carrying on without us, we returned to our wandering ways and headed out for Heaven knows where. Apparently our judgment of Gil's ability was accurate, as we are quite aware of the excellent work he accomplished after we left. In fact, we find it especially rewarding that Gil's students are continuing the work we started. Like everyone there, we too miss him and are certain he is happily re-feathering angel's wings.

In 2009, we decided we would take the Fabric Shop "On The Road". We again purchased the necessary tools and have now covered and/or trained personnel at the Rio Grande Valley Wing, Lake Superior 101 Squadron, The Lobo Wing, and The Maxine Flournoy 3rd Coast Squadron, and will soon be at The Highland Lakes Squadron. Our plan is to continue to offer the "Mobile Fabric Shop" to any and all Commemorative Air Force organizations (including SoCal) and to other Warbird Restorers as long as health and other circumstances allow.



© Photo by Dave Flood

Jo and Jack Brinckerhoff during a visit in 2011.

Wing Christmas Party

It's about time you got your check to Casey de Bree for \$35 per person for our Christmas Party. It's on December 13 (Thursday) and it's at The Wedgewood Banquet Center, 5880 Olivas Park Drive, Ventura. Festivities start at 6:30 p.m. We'll all be there. Aloha!

If you haven't voted – get all the materials and instructions you need in the "O Club." But Vote!



© Photo by Dave Flood

Ron Fleishman and Sheryl O'Neil, two of our Custom Display Designers, with Dan Calderon looking on, are setting up a new display which will highlight memorabilia from the Landreth family.



© Photo by Dan Newcomb

Cols. Gary Barber (pilot) and Mike Hohls (passenger) after Mike's ride in the P-51 Mustang.

This was Mike's second Mustang flight. Thirty years ago he had his first flight in a P-51, and in between those flights he managed to graduate from the Air Force Academy and then spent several years flying military jets from Korea to Germany to Tucson, AZ – with a side trip to the Bosnian conflict.

Mike flew Fairchild A-10 "Warthogs" and loved it! He still flies planes starting with the letter "A," but they are Airbus A-319s and A-320s - for United Airlines.

Now, as a mere mortal (as opposed to being a "sierra hotel" fighter pilot), I would have assumed that Mike would have found the Mustang a little sedate. Well, as the Chinese say, "a picture is worth a thousand words." Just check out that smile. *Submitted by Dan Newcomb*

The Forgotten Fifteenth – Part I

By Barrett Tillman

The goal was to take advantage of good weather and proximity to the Romanian oil fields. Fifteenth Air Force found the going tougher than expected.

The AAF's Fifteenth Air Force was a war baby, born in Italy after a brief gestation and as the result of induced labor. It had a short life—just 22 months. It lived in the shadow of its older and much bigger brother and strategic partner, the England-based Eighth Air Force.



A B-24 of 15th A.F. slogs through mud and Water at an airdrome in Italy.

During the war, the public heard much about "The Mighty Eighth" and little of "The Forgotten Fifteenth." Veterans of the Italian campaign have an explanation of sorts: "If you were a war correspondent, would you

rather sip scotch in a London hotel or swig vino in a tent at Foggia?"

At its peak, the Fifteenth was about half the size of the Eighth. It had 21 bomb groups, compared to 41 in the Eighth. The Fifteenth had seven fighter groups; the Eighth had 15. Americans have heard much about the Tuskegee Airmen of the 332nd Fighter Group, a famous part of the Fifteenth, but almost nothing of the other bomber, fighter, and reconnaissance groups.

Even so, the Fifteenth did at least its part in the war, consistently doing more than expected, taking the air war to the Axis factories and refineries beyond the reach of Britain-based aircraft. Most importantly, the pilots of the Fifteenth in the spring and summer of 1944 turned off the Wehrmacht's Balkan oil taps, wrecking the Ploesti refinery complex in Romania with strategic effects felt throughout the theater.

The Fifteenth attacked targets in a large number of Axis and Axis-occupied countries, including Italy, Germany, Bulgaria, Austria, France, Romania, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Greece, Poland, and Yugoslavia. When the Fifteenth was established on Nov. 1, 1943, it began life with a famous commander, Maj. Gen. James H. Doolittle. He had not only led the 1942 raid on Tokyo but had served as commander of Twelfth Air Force and the joint North African Strategic Air Forces.

Twelfth Air Force contributed its heavy bomb groups to Doolittle's new command. Meanwhile, Maj. Gen. John K. Cannon turned the Twelfth itself into the Mediterranean tactical air arm.

The Fifteenth was brought into being as a result of two factors: geography and climate.



15th Air Force bombers score hits on oil storage facilities in Regensburg, Germany.

Geography was crucial. Allied strategists had long recognized the importance of Romanian oil in fueling the Axis war machine. Romania lay a daunting 1,300 miles from Britain, putting the Balkan oil fields beyond the reach of Eighth Air Force bombers. On the other hand, the oil

fields were less than 600 miles distant from the big Allied air base complex at Foggia, Italy.

Weather also equally important to the Allied planners. Britain and northern Europe were notorious for their overcast and soggy weather. Italy, in sharp contrast, was viewed as being mostly sunny and clear. The Foggia complex, in this view, would be able to support a continuous strategic air campaign against the Third Reich. Thus, when the Fifteenth stood up in November 1943, top airmen reckoned that they would be flying in a more permissive environment.

The predictions were wrong.

Take weather, for example. During the first two months of life, the Fifteenth's heavy bombers managed to conduct operations on just 30 days. Throughout 1944, the Eighth actually operated 20 percent more often than did the Fifteenth.

The Fifteenth also faced geographical realities few Americans had ever encountered. Its bombers flew westward across the Tyrrhenian Sea, Corsica, and Sardinia to French targets; northward over the Alps to Austria and Germany; eastward over the Adriatic to the Balkans, Carpathian Mountains, and Greece. Meanwhile, Doolittle absorbed units from XII Bomber Command. His fledgling force comprised three B-17 and

two B-24 bomb groups plus three P-38 Lightning groups. Temporarily attached were a number of medium bombers.



B-29 named for war correspondent

Ernie Pyle – killed by sniper in Pacific Theater.

mission that netted excellent results," he said. "That facility was turning out about 250 fighters a month. We estimated we put it out of action for at least two months."

Doolittle recalled that some 150 German fighters attacked the Allied bombers before, during, and after their bombing runs, even flying through their own flak. He lost six B-17s and five B-24s that day.

Though Wiener Neustadt Messerschmitt production was cut roughly 75 percent, the Germans proved exceedingly resilient, and soon the rate began rising again. A restrike policy became mandatory, as proved by postraid regeneration at Ploesti, Regensburg, Schweinfurt, and other hard targets.

The Army Air Forces' industrious aviation engineers struggled against rain, mud, and shortages of heavy equipment to bring Foggia and other bases up to fighting trim. By the end of March 1944, 20 bases in the Foggia aviation complex had become operational, affording adequate facilities for the growing air force.

In January 1944, mere months after it started operations, the Fifteenth underwent a sudden command change. Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower, the Supreme Allied Commander, tapped Doolittle to take over Eighth Air Force. The famous airman had barely had time to "shake the stick" before he left for England, turning the command over to Maj. Gen. Nathan F. Twining, future Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

The Fifteenth launched its first heavy bomber mission on Nov. 2, 1943. It was a long-range attack on the Messerschmitt factory near Vienna. Because the badly damaged Foggia complex of bases was still under repair, the B-24s flew from Tunisia. In his memoir, *I Could Never Be So Lucky Again*, Doolittle described the first mission: "Our B-17s and B-24s hit the Messerschmitt factory at Wiener Neustadt, a 1,600-mile (round trip)



15th AF B-17s score hits on ball-bearing factory in Italy.

bombing of Monte Cassino), and carrying out a strategic bombing campaign against Germany's aircraft industry.

The latter effort, officially designated Operation Argument, was better known as "Big Week."

Shooting Their Way In

Bombers of the Fifteenth Air Force, during the period Feb. 20-25, 1944, joined with the Eighth for three missions against Luftwaffe production sites in Germany and Austria. Because most of the targets lay at the edge of P-38 coverage, the "heavies" mostly had to shoot their way in and out.

And so they did, along the way striking aircraft plants at Regensburg on Feb. 22, at Steyr, Austria, on Feb. 23, and again at Regensburg on Feb. 25. B-17s and B-24s inflicted significant damage on Messerschmitt factories, but the Luftwaffe itself exacted a grim price. Nearly 40 bombers were shot down, as were four fighters. B-24 flight engineer Loyd Lewis recalled the Feb. 22 mission in the 449th Bomb Group's history, *Maximum Effort*. Lewis, flying with Lt. Carl Browning, said, "Everything seemed to be going OK, when all of a sudden I spotted fighter planes very far out at 3 o'clock. They were diving down into the clouds and out of sight. I remember getting on the intercom and announcing the enemy planes. This was the last I remembered. I was hit ... and knocked unconscious."

He regained consciousness a couple of days later in an Austrian hospital, where he learned his bomber had been attacked by Me-109s and FW-190 fighters firing cannon shells. The bomber pilot was stunned by a shell burst, and the aircraft went into a dive. The copilot managed to right the bomber and help the crew bail out.

By late January 1944, the Fifteenth had sprouted stronger wings. It now comprised a dozen bomb groups and four fighter outfits, including one equipped with P-47s.

The new year brought multiple tasks: supporting Allied troops on the Anzio beachhead, conducting tactical operations (including the controversial



Generals Spaatz, Patton, Doolittle, Vandenberg, and Weyland.

At the end of Big Week, Twining counted a horrendous cost: 89 bombers and seven fighters lost. The attrition amounted to about 16 percent of total

bomber sorties—four times the maximum sustainable rate. Already short of fighters, the Fifteenth conducted no further deep penetration missions until the situation could be redressed.

On the way, however, was some help: P-51 Mustangs. The Eighth already had P-51s by the time of Big Week. The Fifteenth needed them too. Spitfire groups transferred to the Fifteenth and converted to Mustangs. At the same time, the 325th exchanged its P-47s for Mustangs, and by early July, the 332nd had also done so.

The Spitfire outfits—the 31st and 52nd—managed an orderly transition while the 325th "Checkertails" parked their P-47s on May 24 and flew their first Mustang mission three days later.

The US strategic air commander was Lt. Gen. Carl A. Spaatz in London. He oversaw the efforts of the Eighth and Fifteenth, maintaining cordial relations with Lt. Gen. Ira C. Eaker, commander of Mediterranean Allied Air Forces. Spaatz had a huge task, requiring co-ordination of vast air fleets at opposite ends of the European continent. By and large, it worked.

The run-up to D-Day in mid-1944 placed strategic air forces under the direct control of Eisenhower. At that time, strategists differed in supporting either "the transportation plan" or "the oil plan" as the best way to defeat Germany. As commander of the Allied Expeditionary Force, Eisenhower naturally leaned toward the transport plan. Wrecking German communications in northwestern Europe would directly support Operation Overlord, whereas focusing on oil would pay benefits over a longer term.

In August 1943—three months before the Fifteenth was established—a low-level B-24 mission against Ploesti had produced spectacular losses for marginal results, proof that many industrial targets required persistent bombing. However, because Romanian oil lay within reach only of Italy-based bombers, Mediterranean commanders chafed under the transport plan. Eaker and Twining began attacking the Ploesti complex in April 1944, near the end of the transport phase. They were directed to strike the rail

yards, presumably preventing oil from being shipped elsewhere. With a wink and a nod from Spaatz, however, bomber leaders began moving aim points closer to the 10 refineries circling the city. It was a rare case of de facto insubordination, but it began paying dividends. Meanwhile, two Fifteenth airmen received the Medal of Honor for missions against Ploesti petroleum targets.

Romanian Danger

On June 23, 1944, 2nd Lt. David R. Kingsley was a 97th Bomb Group bombardier on a B-17 that was hammered by flak and chased by fighters. When the pilot ordered the crew to bail, Kingsley unhesitatingly gave his parachute harness to a badly wounded gunner. The Fortress, with Kingsley aboard, crashed in Bulgaria, where local residents established a memorial to their neighbors killed in the crash—and to the selfless Kingsley.

First Lt. Donald D. Pucket was a 98th Group B-24 pilot. Two weeks after Kingsley's sacrifice, Pucket's B-24 was crippled by AAA bursts, which killed one man and wounded six. Pucket nursed the damaged Liberator 150 miles southwest of Ploesti before ordering a bailout. With the bomber rapidly descending, Pucket returned to the cockpit rather than leave three men who either could not or would not jump. His attempt to bring the bomber under control failed, with the loss of all crew still aboard.

[To be continued in next month's "Flight Line"](#)



B-24s of 15th Air Force over Ploesti Oil Fields.



Wing Photo Page III



© Photo by Dave Flood

We can now direct visitors to our Aviation Museum by saying "once you are on Eubanks Street, look for the big 4-bladed propeller." We will be doing a special edition of "Flight Line" on this wonderful new display.



© Photo by Eric Van Gilder

A flight of planes from Camarillo and Van Nuys flew to Santa Barbara to participate in a fly-over commemorating Veterans' Day. In the middle is Marc Russell's T-34.



© Photo Courtesy of Butch Alandy

The last Shuttle, *Atlantis*, being moved to its new location at a museum near Cape Kennedy. An important era in space exploration is now history.



© Photo by Avery Willis

Ray Beck, just out of the hospital, was surprised by fellow docents with a model replica of his F4U Corsair night fighter that he flew during the Korean War. Charlie Carr, Jr. (middle, standing) made the model. Giving support were Jim Tierney and John Woolley. Jim is also back after a prolonged hospital stay. It's really good to see his smiling face again.



© Photo by Dave Flood

Here's a new *Spitfire Mk XIV* shirt on sale in our fabulous Aviation Museum Gift Shop. Go in and see the great selection of shirts, caps, new polo shirts, jackets for you and your wife or girl friend, plenty of toy airplanes and models for the grandchildren. Do your Christmas shopping in our Gift Shop and help our bottom line. No lines – great prices and service!