

Flight Line

The Official Publication of the CAF

Southern California Wing
455 Aviation Drive, Camarillo, CA 93010
(805) 482-0064

Vol. XXVIII No. 1 January 2008
Visit us online at www.orgsites.com/ca/caf-socal



© Photo by Al Watts

HAPPY NEW YEAR

FLIGHT LINE GOING PAPERLESS NEXT MONTH – SEE PAGE 6

A unique  holiday gift

FLY ABOARD A PLANE THAT TURNED WWII CADETS INTO PILOTS!

\$300 for a 20 minute flight in the SNJ/AT-6 "Texan"
You choose the date (subject to the availability of the aircraft.)

To order and reserve your flight, call
(805) 479-2221 (805) 522-5061

Offered by the Commemorative Air Force
455 Aviation Dr., Camarillo



Van Gilder Aviation Photography www.vg-photos.com

290 -  NAVY SB

The SNJ/AT-6 was often the last step in flight training—a plane so powerful and nimble that it was actually used by many countries as a fighter and bomber.

VENTURA COUNTY 

Advertisement in *Ventura County Star* – Created by Steve Ordonez – Thanks to Vicki Linares (Walt Metcalf's daughter)

We are now offering rides in our North American SNJ-5 Texan to the public!
See the article on page 6 by Bill O'Neill, who has been instrumental in designing the program.

**Wing Staff Meeting, Saturday, January 12, 2008 at 9:30 a.m. at the
CAF Museum Hangar, 455 Aviation Drive, Camarillo Airport**

THE CAF IS A PATRIOTIC ORGANIZATION DEDICATED TO THE PRESERVATION OF THE WORLD'S GREATEST COMBAT AIRCRAFT

January 2008

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
		1 New Year's Day Museum Closed	2 Museum Closed	3 Work Day	4	5 Work Day
6	7 Museum Closed	8 Work Day	9 Museum Closed	10 Work Day	11	12 Work Day Staff Meeting 9:30 AM
13	14 Museum Closed	15 Work Day	16 Museum Closed	17 Work Day	18	19 Work Day
20	21 Museum Closed	22 Work Day	23 Museum Closed	24 Work Day	25	26 Work Day
27	28 Museum Closed	29 Work Day	30 Museum Closed	31 Work Day		

STAFF AND APPOINTED POSITIONS				IN THIS ISSUE
Wing Leader	* Steve Barber	(805) 485-5405	f8f2@aol.com	Wing Calendar 2
Executive Officer	* Jason Somes	(818) 292-4646	airboss@jasonairracing.com	Staff and Appointed Positions. 2
Adjutant	* Bob Albee	(805) 583-4872	loll@earthlink.net	The Saga of a Downed Lightning, Part I. . . 3
Finance Officer	* Casey de Bree	(805) 389-9185	scdebree@aol.com	Mal Stratford at War-Part I 4
Operations Officer	* Gary Barber	(805) 659-4319	bearcat69@pacbell.net	Fairchild 24 restoration. 5
Maintenance Officer	* (Vacant)			SoCalWing Golf Tournament 5
Safety Officer	* Marc Russell	(805) 955-9404	captmarcr@aol.com	In Memoriam-Robert E. Sterr 6
Facility Officer	Bob Albee	(805) 583-4872	loll@earthlink.net	Update on Friends of the Museum 6
Training Officer	(Vacant)			SNJ Rides 6
Public Info Officer	Pat Brown	(805) 479-2221	(no e-mail)	Flight Line Goes Paperless 6
Personnel Officer	Norm Swagler	(805) 482-6994	pswagler@hotmail.com	Wing Photo Page I 7
Historian	Ron Fleishman	(805) 384-4426	oldplanec46@aol.com	Museum Update 8
Collections Manager	Jim Tierney	(805) 522-7067	jimerniet@aol.com	Wing Photo Page II 9
Museum Director	Sarah de Bree	(805) 389-9185	scdebree@aol.com	Penny for your Thoughts 10
Gift Shop Manager	Sarah de Bree	(805) 389-9185	scdebree@aol.com	Wing Photo Page III 11
Webmaster	Dave Flood	(805) 987-7231	macantuile@yahoo.com	Wing Staff Election Results 11
Air Show Officer	Jason Somes	(818) 292-4646	airboss@jasonairracing.com	2008 Wing Membership Renewal 12
Air Show Coord.	Bill O'Neill	(805) 495-4915	scwairshow@aol.com	
Chief Docent	(Vacant)			
Newsletter Editor	Dave Flood	(805) 987-7231	macantuile@yahoo.com	
Newsletter Production	Casey de Bree	(805) 389-9185	scdebree@aol.com	
Hangar Event Mgr	Dick Burrer	(805) 484-0704	gatjohnston@aol.com	
Grants & Fund Rais.	Jason Vosburgh	(805) 766-3880	jason.vosburgh@att.net	
HANGAR PHONE			(805) 482-0064	Submittal Deadline - 15th of the month
HANGAR FAX			(805) 482-0348	Commemorative Air Force
WEBSITE			www.orgsites.com/ca/caf-socal	Southern California Wing
				455 Aviation Drive
				Camarillo, CA 93010-9501

* Denotes Staff Position

The Saga of A Downed Lightning – Part I

by Ron Fleishman

The Camarillo News, Friday, May 5, 1944.

Two Pilots Escape As P-38s Crash

Two P-38 fighter plane pilots miraculously escaped death shortly before noon Thursday when their planes collided in the air over Camarillo Heights. Both pilots immediately jumped from their planes and were saved by their parachutes. The planes struck the ground about two miles apart and were completely destroyed by fire. Both planes were from the Van Nuys fighter base. Names of the pilots were not disclosed.

One plane crashed and burned near the corner of Las Posas and Arneill Roads on the Thomas Ranch. A number of citrus trees were destroyed by the burning plane. Sight-seers were kept away from the plane by exploding ammunition.

The second fighter plane fell in a canyon in the hills above Camarillo Heights. It too exploded and was completely destroyed by the fire which followed. The blazing plane set fire to the hillside brush and several acres were burned over before the fire was extinguished by the Camarillo fire department.

Portions of one of the falling planes broke power lines, which left this area without electricity for about one hour.

It was built to take men into battle. If the pilot who controlled it made it, and its twin, perform to their maximum capabilities, they would take him as high as eight miles, go more than 400 miles per hour, and fly over 1,000 miles before he would have to refuel.

The twin engines were encased in sleek metal cowlings, and each had the power of 1,325 horses and weighed 1,445 pounds. The aviation engines were called Allison's.

Until one day in May, 1944, they flew and performed with no problems to their pilots or mechanics, or so says the accident report written about them.

The Allison's and the twin-boomed Lockheed Lightning trained pilots as they flew practice gunnery missions – until, in one metal-grinding instant, they dove 6,000 feet uncontrolled into the dirt and sand of the hill in what is now called Camarillo Heights.

In one instant, the engines were buried in the hill – never to fly again, never to train men to fly, never to allow them to ride the plane known as the Lightning.

The two engines became part of the hill, spoken of as a local legend – “The plane that crashed during the war,” and “The plane that the pilot bailed out of.”

What was left of the plane and engines were part of the hill for sixty-five years. The war that they were built for had become history, and the last pilot to control them had passed away. As time passed, and the ownership of the property where the wreckage lay changed hands,

occasionally children would climb the steep hill and find a burned or smashed piece of metal. Part of the plane the engines had powered, or part of the metal had worked its way out of the sand of the hill.

Then one cold and rainy day – one of the many rainy days that January of 2006, the lady who was the owner of the hill became curious about the strange metal object poking its way to the surface.

Armed with a small gardening tool, she began to dig and scrape away the sand. Her name was Paige Hibbits, and she didn't mind getting her hands dirty. She also had a strong desire to preserve the history of her community. So she dug and scraped and cleaned the rusted, charred block of metal that emerged – out of the dirt and into the light of day again.

The hill does not give up easily what has been a part of it for all those many years. At one point, while digging, the engine tried to roll over. The hill had held it for so long, and now it was losing its grip on what was left of the Allison.

Not knowing what this object was, she sent an e-mail to CAF Webmaster Dave Flood (contacted through the website). Soon several members of the CAF's Southern California Wing went up the hill to see what was there, and Vern Olson identified the remains as an Allison engine.

Dave called G. Pat Macha, an aviation archaeologist, who came to the site and identified the engine as the right-hand engine of a P-38 Lightning fighter plane.

Walt Metcalf climbed to the site with Macha in March, 2006, and was quoted as saying that the CAF would like to put the engine in its museum – if they could figure out how to get it off the hill.

The engine sat on the hill, and its story became part of the tour through the CAF's WWII Aviation Museum at Camarillo Airport. The docents would point to a table of mangled metal pieces that had been brought down off the hill in March, and then point out the hangar door to the hill north of Camarillo, and tell the story of what had happened so long ago.



© Photo courtesy of Ron Fleishman

The Recovery Crew surrounding the engine in Camarillo Heights, brainstorming on the best way to bring it up the hill. Note the narrow path and steep slope.

Mal Stratford At War: Part I by Mal Stratford

Mal Stratford was a Col. in the CAF SoCAWing from 1983 to 1994. He introduced his wife, Ceci, to the Wing, and they were always active there on Saturdays and especially enjoyed going to air shows. Ceci became a Col. after Mal died in 1994. We are proud to publish his memoir over four issues of "Flight Line."

To begin with, I was born in Los Angeles in March, 1918, lived years three to nine in Bakersfield, where I learned about airplanes – I was fascinated by them. However, the family moved back to L.A., too far from airports, so I didn't think much about airplanes until high school (which was close to Santa Monica Airport and the Douglas Aircraft Company).

I graduated from Hamilton High (LA) in 1936. From there I spent 2 ½ years at Santa Monica College, and then to Cal-Berkeley. It was there that the Depression caught me, so I came back home, got a job as a teller at Security Bank. A year later, I bought my first car – a 1937 Chevy – with money I saved, but not enough to get into aviation.

Thanks to my visiting aunt, I got to fly in a 3-place Waco for 15 minutes over Los Angeles. That was in June, 1926. I didn't feel any thrill, so I really wasn't charged up until much later – when I was accepted by the U.S. Army Air Corps. That was excitement!

February 12, 1941, 5:30 a.m. – Basic Training at Hemet Ryan Field

I am leaving home, destination Hemet Army Air Corps base, to learn how to fly! My mother was sobbing quietly, since I was her only son going to war. My Dad, who had been afflicted with asthma, was in a surly mood. He had never flown an airplane, so he assumed that I couldn't do it either. He retorted to Mom, "Forget it, woman. He will be home in six weeks!" I got the message.

Learning How To Fly

In six weeks, I had flown, did aerobatics and soloed. I sent Dad a post card that read, "Well, Pop, I'm still here." I was proud, and when he next saw me, it was on a weekend at the airport, with camera. He, too, was proud!

The drive to Hemet went with mixed emotions. Unpreparedness gave me a few chills. "What do I do now, God?" Orders say, "Report to March Field for enlistment." I was enthralled with March – like, wow! What a beautiful place! Look at all those blue and yellow Army biplanes!

I was lucky to get to fly the Stearman PT-13, while half the class got Ryan PT-16s, whose prop spinners had numerous cracks. At the halfway point, the Air Corps junked the 16s and installed the PT-13s. What a good break for me.

Meanwhile, solo time came closer. On March 17, I soloed on a calm day at a C.A.A. emergency dirt strip, with telephone wires at one end and a rutted dry wash in the

middle of the runway. My three touch-and-goes were perfect. Wowee!! I can fly! (Strangely, I never was assured that I had even landed myself...I always thought my instructor was making small corrections.)

Ground Loops and Dumbbells

The next day was my 23rd birthday, and my second day of solo. Sunday morning came with a blast of Santa Ana winds. I had never made a crosswind landing or takeoff, because the tarmac surface was square, and we always flew into the wind in accordance with the tetrahedron (or "T"). Somehow, natural instincts told me that I had to correct for the 45-degree angle at 45 knots. I did it by lowering my right wing. As I was rolling down the runway, I saw dust at the wingtip – Omigod! I reacted by kicking the left rudder, which resulted in a 360-degree ground loop, while dragging the left wing tip, too. The engine stopped on the runway.

Gordon, my instructor, was watching from the sidelines. He got mad for the first time. He slammed his helmet to the ground, got a ride to a telephone booth, called headquarters and waited for another airplane. In came a plane with the head of Flight Operations and a check pilot. They examined the damage, declared it no problem (only fabric ripped on the wingtips), and took off in my airplane, leaving us their plane for us to finish our schedule. The next day at the rousting, I was awarded the 2d Class Dumbbell Medal for the week.

Randolph Field, San Antonio – May 5, 1941

On to San Antone and Randolph Field, the "West Point of the Air," in my new 1941 Chevy with Bob Bjoring and Carl Mathes. What a beautiful and busy place Randolph Field was. We flew BT-9s on our side.

Lt. "Buck" Snipes, from The Citadel, South Carolina, was my basic, and very conservative, instructor. He, too, knew how to get the best out of me, for the "40-hour Check," which was THE check ride that made you or washed you out.! What a relief to pass that one! Thanks to "Buck," a real nice guy.



Fairchild F-24 Restoration

by Dave Flood

Robert Albee, the Fairchild F-24 Crew Chief, is very optimistic about his protégé plane coming together in a systematic, orderly manner, thanks to a cadre of dedicated volunteers, including Norm Swagler, Dave Sica, Al Smith, Howard Ulm, and, at times, George Sands, Gil Brice and the rest of the PBJ Restoration Crew.

Our CAF "Mobile Fabric Covering Crew" (Gil Brice and George Sands) will commence soon to cover the F-24's left wing with fabric. The pitot tube has to be installed before the fabric covering is started.

Cables for the wing flaps have been ordered, and the baggage compartment has been completed.

The engine was run up recently, and did fine. The following have been completed: mags timed; oil lines connected; fuel lines connected; primer lines connected; carb adjusted; oil tank welded and re-installed; and alternator air source completed.

The nose bowl (seen in the photo of Dave Sica in right column) will be sent out for repair.

A special project will be the installation of two spring-loaded shock struts on the gear. They will be custom-made.

The crew currently needs: a Narco radio; and ELT (Emergency Locator Transmitter); and a transponder, with an encoding altimeter.

To become a part of the Fairchild F-24 Restoration Team, send us your donation to:

Col. Robert Albee, Crew Chief
CAF – So CA Wing
455 Aviation Drive
Camarillo, CA 93010

Please specify on your check that your donation is meant for the F-24 Restoration. Thank you for your help. If you will add your address or e-mail, we will keep you updated on our progress. Remember, we will get her up and flying with your help!



First Annual CAF, SoCAWing Golf Tournament
April 28, 2008 - Las Posas Country Club, Camarillo
Cost: \$300 per player, includes dinner & raffle ticket.
For information, contact CAF at 1-805-987-4223
Website: www.cafevents.org



© Photo by Dave Flood

Norm Swagler trying out the left seat of the Fairchild F-24. Thanks to a dedicated crew of volunteers.



© Photo by Dave Flood

Both wings are in the foreground, and the amount of wood framing is evident. Fabric will cover it all.



© Photo by Dave Flood

Dave Sica lending his expertise to the F-24 restoration crew. They've come a long way, baby!

In Memoriam – Robert E. Sterr October 12, 1921 – October 26, 2007

Bob Sterr, a CAF, SoCAWing Member, was born in Cleveland, Ohio. He died of a heart attack in Long Beach, California on October 26, 2007. He was 86 years old.

Bob was a WWII gunner assigned to the 784th Bomb Group at Grafton Underwood, England. He completed 35 missions over Germany.

Bob's love of flying led him to join the then Confederate Air Force. He frequently toured with the B-17 named "Sentimental Journey," attending many air shows.

Bob is survived by Mildred, his wife of 59 years; daughter Robin and husband Edward Downey; daughter Renee Snyder and four grandsons: Ryan Downey; Steven, Brian and Gregory Snyder.

All of us at the CAF, SoCAWing send our sincere condolences to Mildred and her family. Many of us have happy memories of our associations with Bob.

Update on The Friends of The Museum

by Ceci Stratford

We now have 30 Friends and they have brought over \$2000 to the Wing. We hope the program will grow significantly in 2008, but we need every member's help in seeking out Friends. Give them as gifts, get neighbors, veterans, and family to become Friends, make a special donation yourself and become a Friend!

Go to our website at <http://www.orgsites.com/ca/caf-socal> and go the Friends of the Museum Page.

SNJ-5 Rides

by Bill O'Neill

AT LAST!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

We are now offering rides in the SNJ to the public. These rides will be 20 minutes in duration and will cost \$300. They will begin around the 15th of January. Certificates are available through the Museum, Pat Brown and Bill O'Neill.

The CAF regulations state that no one under the age of 13 may participate in the ride program and that anyone under the age of 18 must have parental permission, which is a standard form which a parent must sign.

We auctioned off two rides to members during the Christmas Party, and they will be used as Christmas presents.

A ride in our SNJ-5 will make a great gift for birthdays, anniversaries, graduations, etc. Please pass the word

around to your relatives, friends, business associates, etc. that this service is now available to the public!

If you have any questions you can call Bill O'Neill at 805-495-4915.

Editor's Note: Thanks to Bill O'Neill for all the work in setting up this program, and to Ceci Stratford for her early input of the concept.

Flight Line Going Paperless by Dave Flood

Because we want to save money on paper, toner, envelopes, postal permit, postage, preparation time, etc., etc., *Flight Line* will be going online beginning with the February issue.

Starting next month, we will be sending out monthly e-mails to all members who have been receiving *Flight Line* by regular mail, advising them that the current issue of *Flight Line* can be read online by accessing it through our Wing website.

There will be a link on the Home Page of the website to the current issue of *Flight Line*. Previous issues can also be accessed via links on the left column of the website:

<http://www.orgsites.com/ca/caf-socal>.

We are asking each of you to send us an e-mail to:

macantuile@yahoo.com,

telling us your current e-mail address. If you do not have an e-mail address (no computer), then please mail us a notice to that effect at:

**Dave Flood, Flight Line Editor
29 Margarita
Camarillo, CA 93012.**

We will send out future regular "paper" mailings only to those without e-mail addresses.

We need to hear from you, as we want to make sure you will be receiving future issues of *Flight Line* – either online or by regular mail. We not only want to keep you as a reader, but to expand our readership in order to spread the news about our Wing and its important work in keeping the spirit of the combat aircraft of the world alive and flying. Thanks so much for your cooperation!

Wing Photo Page I: Nellis Air Show



© Photo by Ron Fleishman

Our *China Doll* staff telling war stories to some Nellis AFB Air Show attendees (all true, of course!).



© Photo by Ron Fleishman

Here's the stellar crew who flew to Nellis for the show! Top Row: John Jones, Cliff Brown, Lloyd McAfee, Dan Cuvier, Ron Fleishman, Al & Lois Watts, Leonora Darcel, Pat Brown. Bottom Row: Dick Updegraff, Wilfred Whyte, Gene O'Neal, Charlie Valentine, Jason Somes.



© Photo by Ron Fleishman

Some of our CAF, SoCAWing members ready for the avid warbird fans who soon descended on them.



© Photo by Charlie Valentine

The venerable *China Doll* attracting visitors at Nellis. She's now in our Restoration Hangar undergoing extensive work – out of action until spring of 2008. Our PBJ-1J Restoration Team is helping Charlie Valentine, Gene O'Neal and C-46 crew in the cleanup work.



© Photo by Al Watts

The beautifully restored B-25J "Heavenly Body," next to "Executive Sweet." The two flew formation to Nellis.



© Photo by Ceci Stratford

Ceci Stratford took this intriguing shot from "Executive Sweet," while buzzing the desert at low altitude.

Museum Update

by Sarah de Bree

As you have no doubt noticed, the Museum has finally made the return trek to the true gift shop location from it's location by the six big sliding doors where it has been operated for almost six months.

Some of Santa's helpers, also known as the museum staff, pitched in last week and cleaned all the display counters and moved the merchandise back, including the holiday table that is conveniently, and enticingly, located next to the Wing's Christmas tree. I hope to see all of you as you come by to pick up that last minute gift for 'little Johnnie', or perhaps even 'big John'.

We are anticipating that the fire department will lift it's closure order in the near future. We have been told that panic bar door hardware and a voice enunciating fire alarm system must be installed before the order will be lifted. The panic door hardware installation on all museum doors was completed in late November, and a contract was awarded for the fire alarm upgrade in late November as well. Because of the approval cycle required by the County authorities, the fire alarm upgrades will probably not be completed until sometime in January. This is a complex system and will have alarms and loudspeakers in each of the restrooms, the Officer's club, and throughout the museum hangar. We are also required to have available hand-held amplification devices for use by hearing-impaired visitors so they may hear the fire alarm should it go off.

The Wing has spent considerable money in complying with these requirements. The panic bar door hardware cost \$4,500 and the fire alarm upgrade cost \$7,000. The closure order has cut museum revenue in half from it's former \$50,000 annual rate. I expect that it will take some time to build back up to our former museum attendance level after the Fire Department's closure order is lifted. So, the Fire Department closure order has hit us hard in the wallet.

We have also spent \$13,000 in architect fees to determine how the new building and occupancy codes effective January 1 will affect our museum operation, and to bring the museum into full compliance with those codes.

While it is difficult to see a silver lining in all this right now, there is no doubt in my mind that we will emerge stronger and better when all of this has been worked through and it will have been worth all of the hardships we have endured. Throughout the ordeal, the museum staff has kept the faith and put up with difficult conditions. All of you are absolutely wonderful.

I wish to commend and extend my heart-felt thanks to everyone on the docent staff for giving so much of themselves under difficult circumstances. They endured considerable hardship in keeping the museum open during the closure order. To comply with the order, it was necessary to escort visitors around the outside of the hangar and let them view the aircraft from the wide-open hangar doors, and browse the gift shop on tables set up just inside the sliding hangar doors. Then they were escorted back around the outside of the hangar when they left. Not only did this make operating the museum very

difficult during windy and cold days, it required the docents to walk considerably farther on legs that were often not up to the extra walking required. It was also difficult for visitors who walked with the aid of a cane or walker. Our docents also endured fierce Santa Ana winds and cold days in front of open hangar doors. Please stop by and thank our docents.

Since the museum displays and artifacts were off limits to visitors during our shutdown, we have not worked on them during this time. In the New Year we will direct our attention towards completing new displays of artifacts for World War II, the Korean War, and the Viet Nam war and add materials to the displays around the aircraft display room.

On behalf of the museum staff, we wish everyone a wonderful holiday season and a happy and prosperous New Year.

Until next time....



© Photo by Dave Flood

Museum Director Sarah de Bree showing off some of the Christmas items on sale in our Museum Gift Shop – just right for Christmas giving.



© Photo by Dave Flood

Some special items for the grandkids (or nephews, nieces, neighbors) that members and visitors could add to their Christmas Shopping Cart.

Wing Photo Page II



© Photo by Dan Newcomb
Marc Russell making his approach to Camarillo Airport in his Beechcraft T-34, with Dan Newcomb in the rear seat.



© Photo by Dan Newcomb
Camarillo Airport, with our hangars on left, as seen from Marc Russell's T-34.



© Photo Courtesy USAF
A USAF F-22 Raptor flying over Virginia's Fort Monroe. Note the moated citadel on the isthmus. A young Lt. Robert E. Lee helped to build the citadel.



© Photo by Dan Newcomb
Welcome the newlyweds – Tim and Crissy Kutzbach, recently married at The Hartley Botanica in Somis on November 17. What a lovely couple! We all wish them many years of happy married life!



© Photo by Ken Barger
China Doll approaching the empty Restoration Hangar. It took twenty men, several tugs, and three shoe horns to get her into the hangar. She's in there 'til spring.



© Photo by Dave Flood
Five planes are now squeezed around China Doll!

Mechanics in History: Penny For Your Thoughts

by Giacinta Bradley Koontz

Excerpted from *Aircraft Maintenance*, July, 2007 issue

The first penny I saw affixed to a Pratt & Whitney engine was on the nose of a fully-restored AT-6C owned by Jim Levrett, a retired captain with FedEx (he hired on when it was still Flying Tiger Airlines). Levrett is now an AI who works on his own aircraft in a sumptuous hangar at Kingman, AZ. I accepted his invitation to take an air tour over Lake Havasu in his warbird last year (spectacular!), and, from his photos, I already knew this “6” was a “10.”

Safe from Arizona’s frequent wind-blown dirt, the engine looks like it just came off the assembly line at Pratt & Whitney. Up close and personal, I noticed the penny, inserted and held in place with tiny stainless-steel wires which criss-crossed over the recessed inner diameter of a large nut. (Levrett described it more precisely as a “safety wire over a press-fit threaded insert on the sump cover.”)

Many important aspects of engine parts, performance and history would surely have captured the attention of a pilot or mechanic, but I was transfixed by the penny. How did it get there...and why?

The experts to ask are those who study and build engines as a profession. Graham White is vice-president of the Aircraft Engine Historical Society, Inc., located in Huntsville, AL. Author of several books, including “Allied Aircraft Pistons of WWII,” White speculated that the tradition had nothing to do with Pratt & Whitney manufacturing practices and most probably began following WWII, when engines were overhauled in the transition from military to civilian use.

Retired P&W engineer Roger Burse responded quickly to my request for help. “I find your subject very interesting...I have received information that the bolt head accommodates the precise size of a U.S. penny by coincidence, not [by a P&W] design or spec.” This requires some documentation to be sure, but it seems probable.

Levrett explained that he placed the penny on his engine himself as soon as he received it from Tulsa Aircraft’s top wrench Sam Thompson in Tulsa, OK. Levrett picked up the custom from a crop duster, who wouldn’t think of flying without a penny on his own P & W. Pressed for further information on where the tradition began, by whom, and when, Levrett drew a blank.

“It’s just one of those things some of us do, but probably don’t know why.” He speculated it could be placed there to signify the last overhaul, like a date stamp. When asked, Thompson and his shop foreman, Rex Vaughan (mechanics who specialize in P & W engines), had more than one answer because each customer had a different reason for placing a penny on the engine. Some preferred to keep the power plant’s original penny for good luck, and some insisted it be replaced with a coin dated the same year as the overhaul.

My next encounter with a penny on an engine occurred at the restoration hangar for the Southern California Wing of the Commemorative Air Force (at Camarillo). As the guest of veteran pilot and CAF volunteer, Ceci Stratford, I met Col Joseph Peppito, chief maintenance officer, who gave me a tour of their facility. The shop was a flurry of activity, with a dozen volunteer mechanics working on the “China Doll” (C-46), a vintage Fairchild, and engines for a restored Hellcat, a Bearcat, and a Spitfire. Peppito gracefully answers visitor’s questions while overseeing five or six separate projects at one time. Amid disarticulated props, wings, wheels, and engines, Peppito led me to two P & W engines adorned with a penny. He could not recall the first time he’d seen it done, but he was certain he had read about it “somewhere in a magazine.” So far, he hasn’t been able to locate his source, but I doubt he’ll ever give up looking.

Neil Marshall, a marine archaeologist from California, who I ensnared into a brainstorming session, made the analogy between the copper penny on an aircraft power plant and a mariner’s tradition dating back to Greek and Roman cultures.

According to Marshall’s research, at the time of ship construction, a coin was placed under the foot of a mast – inside the socket called the “mast-step,” for various reasons. Legend and myth suggest the coin was a good luck piece, or that sailors stashed their toll across the river Styx, or as a tithe to the God of the Winds. So steeped in custom has this become that it continues today, although no two boat or ship owners agree on why.

We will have decades ahead to ponder pennies on air-worthy P & W engines. As Jim Levrett put it, “These are still some of the best piston engines going. Some were developed long before WWII. Their reliability and performance continually evolved, especially with the introduction of leaded high octane fuels. Many have lasted over sixty years, and, if maintained properly, they’ll probably last another sixty.”



© Photo by Dave Flood

Here’s the penny on the sump cover of our SNJ-5 #290

Wing Photo Page III



© Photo by Ron Fleishman

Ron Fleishman's buddy, Richard Vandenberg, from TWA in Kansas City, came over to our hangars to paint the remaining wing for SNJ-4 #6411D.



© Photo courtesy of Ron Fleishman

Here's Ron congratulating Richard on a job well done! Thanks so much, Richard, for your stellar work. Come back and see us often!



© Photo by Ron Fleishman

Lloyd McAfee giving the "thumbs up" signal for the *China Doll* crew at Nellis AFB. They did a great job in selling tours and PX items – making the Wing some much-needed money at our last air show of 2007.

Wing Staff Officers Elected for 2008/2009

Wing elections closed on November 15, 2007 and all ballots received were counted by the election committee headed by Bill O'Neill.

Three positions were on the ballot; Adjutant Officer, Operations Officer, and Finance Officer. Candidates running for these offices were all unopposed.

There were a total of 41 ballots received, and four of those were invalidated. The new officers are:

Adjutant Officer	Robert Albee
Operations Officer	Gary Barber
Finance Officer	Casey de Bree

We extend our appreciation to these members for their willingness to serve on the Wing Staff, and we thank those members who cast their ballots.



© Photo by Al Watts

The Inland Empire Wing's Douglas C-53D Skytrooper, showing her classic lines on the flight line at Nellis. This aircraft was used exclusively for towing gliders and transporting paratroopers.



© Photo by Al Watts

Our Mitsubishi A6M3 Zero, with Jason Somes in the cockpit, flying tight formation with *China Doll* on the way to Nellis AFB – somewhere over the California mountains. What a beautiful sight !



Southern California Wing
 455 Aviation Drive
 Camarillo, CA 93010

2008 WING MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL NOTICE

December 15, 2007

Dear Wing Member,

It's time again to renew your annual membership in the Southern California Wing of the Commemorative Air Force. We sincerely hope you will retain your affiliation with our wing since we expect exciting things to happen in 2008.

We are one of the leading wings in the CAF with more than 300 Wing members and 8 assigned aircraft. Our museum has become a major attraction in the Camarillo area and both attendance and museum income have risen steadily. Our plans are to continue this growth and we want you to be a part of these exciting happenings.

To renew your membership, just remove this page from the newsletter (or make a copy of it), complete the information requested, enclose your check payable to the Southern California Wing, and return by March 1, 2008 to:

CAF Southern California Wing
 455 Aviation Drive
 Camarillo, CA 93010
 Attn: Personnel Officer

Any contribution in addition to your \$50.⁰⁰ annual dues will be greatly appreciated. Contributions are welcome to help us complete the many projects we are undertaking, such as building the new museum facility, the B-25/PBJ restoration, the SNJ-4 restoration, the Fairchild F-24 restoration, the Spitfire restoration and any other project you may wish to support.

If you joined the Southern California Wing in October, November, or December 2007 your dues are considered paid for 2008, but any contribution to any of our projects that you wish to make will be greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Steve Barber, Wing Leader

2008 Wing Dues	\$50. ⁰⁰
Hangar/Museum Building Fund	_____
B-25/PBJ Restoration	_____
SNJ-4 Restoration	_____
Fairchild F-24 Restoration	_____
Spitfire Restoration	_____
Other _____	_____
Total	_____

Name: _____ Col. #: _____

Street: _____ City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Home Phone: _____ Work Phone: _____ Cell Phone: _____

E-mail: _____

THE CAF IS A PATRIOTIC ORGANIZATION DEDICATED TO THE PRESERVATION OF THE WORLD'S GREAT COMBAT AIRCRAFT
CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE CAF ARE TAX DEDUCTIBLE