

Flight Line

The Official Publication of the CAF

Southern California Wing
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(805) 482-0064

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© Photo by Jessica Bauman



© Photo by Jessica Bauman

Dick Roberts (left) being extolled by our Wing Leader Robert E. Albee at the “Going-Away Party” held for Dick on June 14. Dick has been an extremely hard-working member of our Wing; a crew member on the Spitfire team; a general clean-up guy; and an excellent substitute Docent – great with young and old alike. The plaque which the Wing awarded Dick read: “Southern CA Wing honors Dick Roberts for his loyalty, dedication and services to the Wing, the Museum, and his beloved Spitfire.” We’re all going to miss Dick very, very much!

**Wing Staff Meeting, Saturday, July 11, 2009 at 9:30 a.m. at the
CAF Museum Hangar, 455 Aviation Drive, Camarillo Airport**

[Our CAF Mission: To Honor American Military Aviation Through Flight, Exhibition and Remembrance.](#)

July 2009

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Museum Open 10am to 4pm Every Day Except Monday and major holidays			1	2 Work Day	3	4 Independence Day
5	6 Museum Closed	7 Work Day	8	9 Work Day	10 Air Show Geneseo NY	11 Work Day Staff Meeting 9:30 Air Show Geneseo NY
12 Air Show Geneseo NY	13 Museum Closed	14 Work Day	15	16 Work Day	17	18 Work Day Air Show Milwaukee WI
19	20 Museum Closed	21 Work Day	22	23 Work Day	24	25 Work Day
26	27 Museum Closed Air Show Oshkosh WI	28 Work Day Air Show Oshkosh WI	29 Air Show Oshkosh WI	30 Work Day Air Show Oshkosh WI	31 Air Show Oshkosh WI	

STAFF AND APPOINTED POSITIONS				IN THIS ISSUE
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Finance Officer	* Casey de Bree	(805) 389-9185	scdebree@aol.com	Wing's Sick Bay 3
Operations Officer	* Gary Barber	(805) 659-4319	bearcat69@pacbell.net	Museum Update 3
Maintenance Officer	* Joe Peppito	(805) 498-4187	jocafpeppo@msn.com	Missing in Action, Part 4 4-7
Safety Officer	* Norm Swagler	(805) 482-6994	pswagler@hotmail.com	Air Show Schedule 7
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Gift Shop Manager	Sarah de Bree	(805) 389-9185	scdebree@aol.com	A Little Star 8
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* Denotes Staff Position				
				Submittal Deadline - 15th of the month Commemorative Air Force Southern California Wing 455 Aviation Drive Camarillo, CA 93010-9501

Maintenance Officer's Report by Joe Peppito

Well, June was a banner month for the California Wing's maintenance crews. Congratulations to the C-46 *China Doll's* crew for getting the airplane in the air and to its first air show in a long time – Hill Air Force Base, Utah air show. It was a great trip, and we want to thank all the members who went along to support this operation. Keep it up and flying!

Secondly, it looks like after a very long wait, the engine for the Spitfire has finally been delivered to the Wing. The guys in Tehachapi did a wonderful job on the engine overhaul. The Rolls Royce Griffon 65 looks like a brand new engine. Les Bedding and his crew are feverishly working to get the airplane ready for engine installation, in addition to finishing up the restoration of the airplane so we can get it back in the air. I know that Steve Barber is "chomping on the bit" to get his hands on the controls of the Spitfire again.

I think the SNJ-4 #N6411D is finally complete as far as the aircraft restoration goes. We had a few system glitches and problems that the restoration crew managed to correct and get fixed. This included : the master brake cylinder, the hydraulic control valve and the engine-driven generator. Hopefully, that is the end of our problem systems, and we won't have any systems act up any more. All the paper work is complete and is ready to be sent to CAF Headquarters so we can get the airplane's flight insurance and start flying the airplane.

The F8F-2 Bearcat replacement engine is due to be delivered in the next couple of weeks. Our maintenance crew at Burbank Airport, headed by Ken Gottschall, is making great progress in preparing the old engine for removal and getting the airplane reworked in order to install the new P&W R-2800-CB-3 engine. The biggest job is getting parts and equipment and personnel back and forth from Camarillo to Burbank.

We now have a new bright RED LINE painted on the ramp (thanks to Shirley Murphy and Lloyd McAfee), marking the limit line for taxiing aircraft. It is a safety line to protect members and visitors alike. Please – all pilots, maintenance personnel, and docents – observe this limiting RED LINE – as it is an extremely important safety factor.

Keep up the good work and let's all work towards...

"Keeping 'Em Flying."

Wing's Sick Bay

Larry Kates, Dave Long, Al Smith, Don McMillan all need your thoughts and prayers wishing them improved health. Hope to see you soon, guys!

Museum Update

by Sarah de Bree



© Photo by Dave Flood

A new Colonel and a new Cadet form a formidable team! Debbie Henderson and her son Eric are proving extremely helpful in the Museum !



© Photo by Dave Flood

On Saturday, June 27, all planes were out of the Museum Hangar and on the ramp to make room for the annual Ventura County Red Cross dinner.



© Photo by Dave Flood

Scott Stebbins, a Cadet, did a fantastic job restoring one of our P-38 models. Scott will be going to school in Utah soon. It was a pleasure to have you, Scott!

Missing In Action: Down Behind

Enemy Lines In Italy by Capt. Stewart B. Gilbert

(Part Four of a Four-Part Series)

There was a band of about eight partisans camped in the woods only a mile or so from us, and I had known several of them a few months before. They had a larger lean-to, something like ours, and had just recently moved from Resina. They had a box of dynamite that had been dropped by 'chute by the English, and had made several attempts with it to blow out a bridge near San Martino, but each time without success. I was anxious to do something, and, with my knowledge of handling dynamite, and my familiarity with the terrain around this particular bridge, I decided to make an attempt at it. The fellows were all excited, and approved my plan. The largest one of them loaned me his shoes to go down for an attempt at it.

That evening, soon after dark, I started out with my pockets full of dynamite, and as much as I could carry under my arm. San Martino wasn't far, but it was a dark night, and a slow walk along the narrow mountain trails. When I reached the main road, I waited till I could hear no trucks coming, then slipped across into the woods on the other side. I soon reached my objective, and saw in the headlights of some of the trucks passing over that there was a guard on one end. This meant I would have to work quietly, but there was no particular hurry, because it was early in the evening. I checked my Mauser, and slipped down through the gulley leading to the bridge. It was impossible to walk through the gulley without kicking rocks, but walking along the grassy banks helped some. When ever a string of trucks would cross the bridge, I would try to make as much distance as I could, because the noise of the trucks blocked out the noise I was making. I had already prepared my dynamite by taking the paper off of it, and mashing it all together like putty. As a long truck convoy was passing over the bridge, I worked quickly, and packed the putty-like dynamite into the crack of one of the main girders, struck a fuse, and started back up the gulley as quickly as I could. When I reached a safe distance, I sat down to get my wind and waited. I had almost decided that I had used a defective fuse when the explosion came. There was no visible flash, just a big boom, and then everything was quiet.

The confusion caused by the destroyed bridge blocked convoys up for several miles along the road, and they were almost bumper-to-bumper where I had crossed the road, and where I intended to cross back again, so I had to just stay in the woods on the other side of the road all night and wait.

By morning, they had taken all their trucks off the road and camouflaged them in the woods as protection for the following day. The next morning it didn't take engineers long to put a temporary span across the blown-out bridge, but it gave me a lot of satisfaction to know that I had delayed the retreat on that one particular road for a whole night.

When I rejoined the partisan band to give my friend his shoes back, they had already found out about the destruction that had been done. They said two automobiles had been completely destroyed, and about a twenty-foot section of the bridge had blown out. The bridge was over a deep ravine, and not a very long bridge, so this twenty feet was most of its length. It this had happened several months earlier, the SS troops would have made a thorough investigation into the affair, but because their armies were so pressed for time, apparently nothing was ever done about it...

The intensity of air activity was increasing every day. Fighters were continually strafing everything that appeared on the roads. Dive bombers were busy hitting troop concentrations, bridges and road transport convoys...

News had reached us that the Americans were in Rome, and the excitement of it all made every day seem like a week. We spent hours trying to piece together rumors that came through to establish some facts on what was actually happening.

There were so many troops passing through that we were not able to get into Camino for about the last ten days of our stay in that locality. I just wandered through the woods, watching the airplanes overhead, and talking with some of the farmers in their isolated fields on top of the mountains. Giovanni's brother had a plot on top of one of these hills, and to pass the time away I tried my hand at plowing with an ox team, using one of their crude wooden plows. The ground was so hard and rocky that I found it was not nearly as easy as it looked. (Note 3 – There was a drastic shortage of ox teams which were essential to the farmers for plowing the fields. The Germans had confiscated many teams for their food supply. The German army used a great many horses to pull equipment. I was able to catch several of these harness-trained horses and, with them, we got some plowing done. It did not go well, as the horses only knew German commands, so I very soon turned them loose. The villagers, however, were greatly delighted.)...

The combat troops that were coming through now were dirty, unshaven, and wearing ragged uniforms. They had no regard or respect for anything. They did as much plundering as they could in the time that they had. Many of the villages were completely burned, and all the peoples' cattle were driven off ahead of the retreating army.

Camino feared the worst, but fortunately was spared from any serious damage. However, the people were not unprepared. The men and boys had all found guns and ammunition, and were determined to make the last stand for it before any of their houses could be burned. If any such thing had happened in Camino, I would have gone to the help of my friends with the gun that I still had, and I don't doubt that we would have fought to the last man.

...two drunken German sergeants were tearing up the town, infuriated because the people wouldn't give them any more vino. Two German officers came to the village,

Missing In Action, cont'd.

and finding the sergeants in such a condition, apologized to the people for the soldiers' behavior. They then marched the sergeants out of Camino about a hundred yards, ordered them to march so many paces out, and turn around. They were shot dead on the trail. After shooting the sergeants, the officers returned and took over where the sergeants had left off, drunkenly looting and tearing apart everything they could find.

Because of these activities, all the women and children had been taken out of Camino, and were hiding in a well-protected ravine over near my lean-to. They had all their hogs, sheep and chickens with them. The children all cried, and their frightened mothers were continually trying to quiet them. Paul and I went down to visit with them often. The women had slaughtered several of their hogs, so every time we visited them, we ate well.

During most of this time, the Germans were coming through on their retreat. The men were up high in the hills taking care of Camino's sheep herd. They were far enough back so that there was a good safety margin between the main road and the well-traveled trail used by the German troops. It was a long hard climb up there, but Paul and I went up several mornings, spent the day up there, and returned to our lean-to at night.

One day we had a ring-side seat for the nicest piece of air coordination that we had seen. It was early in the morning, and there were still about a mile of German transports spread out along the highway. Four P-47s came into view in elements of two ships each. The first two peeled off and dive-bombed the front of the convoy, placing a one thousand pounder right in the middle of the road, and destroying several of the trucks. At almost the same time, the other two P-47s dive-bombed the rear of the convoy, and one of their bombs hit a gasoline tender. It caught fire immediately, and a huge black column of smoke rose over the spot. The P-47s hadn't been gone more than a few minutes when low-flying Spitfires came in over the mountains and strafed the entire convoy in trail formation, and then turned around and strafed it the other way. Most of the troops had disbursed themselves in the bushes on the sides of the hills, so casualties were light, but the entire convoy was destroyed, and the equipment had to be moved off the road before the road could be used again.

By the middle of June, the British Eighth Army was very near, and we could hear the continual chatter of the smaller guns all night. Standing on a hill at night, we could see artillery flashes all the way to the horizon in the East, and the same in the West. It looked like a peacetime fireworks celebration, and it was hard to believe that this was actually a war.

On the 18th of June, the flow of traffic along our road suddenly stopped, indicating that the road had been cut off by the English between us and Foligno. That same afternoon people excitedly told us that there was a British



P-47 Thunderbolts bombing a German truck convoy.

patrol in Salano, and by that night the whole sector would be under allied control.

There were no Germans to be seen anywhere now; in fact, there were no troops at all, and, except for the artillery barrages blasting away in the distance, one would never know that we were in the middle of a war.

What had actually happened was that the British Eighth Army had bypassed our section and cut off the road down the valley toward Foligno. There were no military objectives in our area, and as long as the road was cut off, this section was of no use to the enemy...

Paul and I wandered down to the highway in hopes of contacting a British patrol, as one had been reported coming from the direction of Salano. But, to our disappointment, a German armored car echelon came around this bend going toward Salano. Paul and I jumped into the ditch to avoid being seen.

We returned to Camino, and the people said they were sure that the English had passed through Casanova, so not wishing to waste any time, we started out. It was hard saying goodbye to all our friends in Camino, and several of the men and women whom we had known best cried as we left town. They had begun to feel toward us as they did toward their own sons. Just before we left town, we made the rounds of all the houses, and had several drinks of vino in each place, and there was much handshaking, etc.

...it started to rain again, but with what we had to look forward to, the rain didn't make any difference to us...

Giovanni, Paul and I left Verchiano, and started down the road from Casanova. There were numerous small villages all the way along the road. Giovanni stayed ahead of us several hundred yards to see if the coast was clear, or if there was still any German troops in the area. The road was littered with German equipment, and dead horses and men were everywhere, and the odor was suffocating.

Missing In Action, cont'd.

About a week earlier, the shoemaker from Verchiano had given me an ancient pair of work boots that I had been wearing around the past few days, and, although they hurt my feet, they at least made it possible for me to walk down the rocky road. Paul had recovered from his malaria stroke of three weeks before, but now was getting another and felt terrible all the way down.

In Casanova, we found that the English had first come through there the night before, and we heard a story that sounded like something from Hollywood. A German captain had been killed riding a motorcycle. Twenty-five hostages from Casanova were taken to be shot that same evening. First they burned almost every house in Casanova, and completely destroyed the town. The hostages were taken out into a field near the edge of town, where they were to be shot. They already had some of them blindfolded, when an English armored car echelon came into the other end of town. The Germans changed their plans immediately, and fled for the hills, and, of course, then the people couldn't praise the English highly enough. Probably, several days before, they had disliked the English because they were so slow in getting there, or so they thought.

An armored car echelon had just passed through the town, before we arrived, to do some mopping up near Colfiroita. As we were standing around looking at the ruins of the fire from the night before, one of our jeeps, driven by a Scottish messenger came into town, and even Paul, felling as badly as he did, was overjoyed at the sight of that jeep. After hailing the jeep down, we told the driver who we were, but could hardly understand a word of his Scotch. We finally managed to understand him to say that the British armored car echelon had passed through and that they would pick us up as they returned to Foligno. So he drove on, and we waited.

When the British armored cars returned to Casanova, they had been notified by the Scottish messenger that we would be waiting there, and I have never seen anything that looked so good as those heavy armored cars as they rolled into town. The column pulled to a halt where we were waiting in the middle of the town, and there was a lot of handshaking.

It was hard to believe that the day we had prayed and hoped for so long had finally come, and our days of living in fear had ended.

Many thanks go to Diane Gilbert, Stew's daughter, for her generous agreement to let us publish excerpts from his memoir of his extraordinary three months hiding out in the hills of central Italy with the amazing help of the Italian people who populated those remote villages, and the generous sacrifices of those people in caring for Stew and his crew. It is heartwarming to know of the true allegiance of the Italian people toward our servicemen in WWII.



*Photo Courtesy of Stewart and Diane Gilbert
One of the many generous and loving Italian couples
who helped Stew Gilbert and his crew survive.*



Map of central Italy and the area mentioned in the memoir.



*Photo courtesy of Stewart and Diane Gilbert
Stew Gilbert as a TWA Captain after WWII.*

Missing In Action..., cont'd.

Epilogue by Diane Gilbert, Stew Gilbert's daughter

In 1962, when I was almost eleven, my father took my mother and me to Italy. I knew my father had been shot down during the war and that he had lived in the mountains and was very fond of the people who had helped him. I knew some of the stories, but I never could have imagined a place so different from any I had known.

We rented a car in Rome and began to drive through the country. We eventually got to a town called Verchiano, where the road seemed to end. My father wanted to go to Camino, which was a few miles further into the mountains. He talked to someone and they offered to walk us there. Our guide had one donkey, which I got to sit upon.

The track was steep and very muddy. I think someone must have gone ahead to announce us, because when we arrived in Camino, the church bells were ringing, and they had let all the children out of school. The entire village of possibly forty people was standing outside to greet us. They had not seen an outsider for eighteen years, and that last person had been my father. The older ones who remembered him were overjoyed, and they declared a holiday.

We were taken to the mayor's house and treated like royalty. A three-day feast and celebration followed, and my father warned me to eat everything that was offered to me. There was much dancing to music from a wind-up phonograph. The adults drank wine, and I was very surprised to discover my father spoke Italian! Our hosts gave us their bed with the finest linen and hot rocks in the foot of the bed to warm our feet. There was only one water spout in town, and when my mother and I asked about the bathroom, the women led us to the cow barn. Life in this village had not changed much in four hundred years.

I made friends with two girls a little older than I was, even though we could not converse. They were twelve and fourteen, and the fourteen-year-old girl was about to get married, which greatly impressed me. They had an atlas in their house and, by gesture, asked me to point out where I lived. I found the United States and pointed to Illinois, and then they flipped through the pages and pointed to Mars with what seemed to be a serious question.

When we left, they offered to send some lunch along, and my mother said, "Yes, that would be very nice." Lunch was a live chicken! Everyone in Camino showed us great kindness and generosity and obviously thought of my father as a hero and a friend. It was a remarkable experience.

Note: Diane Gilbert is now an artist and educator, living in Arizona.



Photo Courtesy of Diane Gilbert
Here is Diane (left) at the age of eleven in 1962 with one of her new friends in the village of Camino, Italy.

Wing's Air Show Schedule – 2009

July 10-12	Geneseo, NY	F6F
July 24,25	Milwaukee, WI – Legacy	F6F
July 27-Aug 1	Oshkosh, WI	F6F, Zero
Aug 22,23	Camarillo EAA Show	All aircraft
Aug 28-30	Chico, CA SNJ-5, PT-19, C-46,	F6F, Zero
Sep 25-27	Redding, CA SNJ-5, PT-19, C-46,	F6F, Zero
Oct 6,7	Tucumcari, NM	F6F, Zero
Oct 8-11	Midland, TX Airsho 2009	F6F, Zero
Oct 16-18	Edwards AFB, CA SNJ-5, PT-19, F6F,	C-46, Zero

Note: The above information is subject to change, so please be sure to check with CAF-SoCAWing at (805) 482-0064 before you plan to attend.



© Photo by Dave Flood
Fashioned beautifully by member Walt Metcalf, this "Bearcat Fundmeter" in the "O Club" keeps track of the donations received from approximately 60 members – amassing 83% of goal so far.

How “Sweet” She Is!

by Dan Newcomb

For years she has served as an inspiration. She’s the wrong color, blue would be my choice, but she cleans up well and I guess you might call her handsome. She sits outside on the ramp waiting for my visits. We have had many a conversation regarding her sister that resides in the nice warm and dry hangar near by. She’s not jealous however, because she is just as loved as her sibling and she can do something that the other girl can’t do just yet. She can fly!

For years I have watched a group of dedicated people attend to her. Fog, rain, freezing temperatures, fierce Santa Ana winds – nothing keeps them from their task. If I get frustrated working on the PBJ, all I have to do is look outside and see those guys working on Sweet, and it helps to put things into perspective.

After several months of work she flew to Madera yesterday for an air show. I was lucky enough to see it.

To John, Dana, Rick, Dave, Chuck, Dan and all the rest. Good Job! Someday if it is meant to be, you will see a very large blue Polish Blueprint closing on your wingtip.



© Photo by Eric Van Gilder

North American B-25J Mitchell *Executive Sweet* flying at the recent Quiet Birdmen Air Show in honor of the late Jack Broome.

A Little Star

by Cliff Brown

When we see our nation’s military leaders on television, their chests are covered with colored ribbons. These are abbreviated versions of medals that they have been awarded.

We all recognize the very rare Congressional Medal of Honor, which is generally worn on a ribbon around the neck, instead of on a pin above the breast pocket. Earned by the wearer for an enormous amount of courage and bravery, and many times awarded posthumously – the Congressional Medal is our nation’s highest military award.

A less obvious award, but more plentiful, is a little purple ribbon. It was first given to wounded soldiers by their

general, George Washington, during the Revolutionary War. It later became the Purple Heart. It differs from all other decorations in that an individual is not “recommended” for the decoration, but instead he or she is entitled to it when wounded during action with an enemy of the United States. You got to get shot.

Another award – more obvious – is a 3-inch rectangular silver bar with an infantry-blue field, upon which is superimposed a 1776-style musket. It’s the Combat Infantryman Badge. You had to be an infantryman, and had to have been in combat to get it. Your MOS (military occupational specialty) had to be that of infantryman. A pilot or a tank driver didn’t qualify. This was first awarded in World War II, but you see a lot around, as we always seem to need infantrymen.

On my DD214 Form (my entire military record on a single sheet of paper) is block 27, which says in cryptic military abbreviations that I am awarded the Korean Service Medal with one bronze service star. It’s a blue and white ribbon. It means that I was in the Army in Korea during the Korean War. That distinction is important. I lead a Combat Intelligence Section in a Field Artillery Battalion, 40th Infantry Division, California National Guard (Activated).

In another place, marked “Authentication,” it says “Korean Service from January 11, 1952 to June 13, 1953.” I was there. On the ribbon is a small star made out of dull bronze, less than an eighth of an inch across. You really have to look for it. That little star means I have spent a winter in Korea. Specifically the “Third Korean Winter,” and that it was that important – and, I might add, that it was very difficult, too. I was there and I qualify. A lot of that time I lived outside in the snow or, at best, in a hole in the ground. I didn’t just serve in Korea – I was there in the Third Winter. After almost 60 years – I still haven’t gotten warm yet.

Today, when I see someone with a Korean Veteran’s hat or t-shirt, I ask “Were you there?” Often they respond, “No, I just got the hat or the shirt.” If they say “Yes,” I give a nod and look for the little blue and white ribbon and see if they have any little stars on it.

This June 25th was the 59th anniversary of the start of the Korean War. And it hasn’t ended yet. Remember – there was only an “armistice.”



Cliff Brown’s Korea Service Ribbon, With Star (center)

See the following website for further information on medals awarded during the Korean War:

<http://www.paulnoll.com/Korea/medal-Korean-service-US.html>

**Wing Photo Page I
Quiet Birdmen Air Show 2009**



© 2009 Eric Van Gilder
© Photo by Eric Van Gilder

In honor of Jack Broome, longtime friend to WWII warbird restoration who died on April 10, 2009, many warbirds came from all over So. CA to fly in the annual Quiet Birdmen air show over Jack's ranch. The above is the Planes of Fame SBD Dauntless.



© 2009 Eric Van Gilder
© Photo by Eric Van Gilder

Paul Besterveld's shiny P-51D Mustang.



© 2009 Eric Van Gilder
© Photo by Eric Van Gilder

Clay Lacy flying the Grumman F7F Tigercat.



© 2009 Eric Van Gilder

© Photo by Eric Van Gilder
Chris Rushing in our Grumman F6F Hellcat. Other CAF-SoCAWing planes included the Zero and PT-19A.



© 2009 Eric Van Gilder

© Photo by Eric Van Gilder
An unusual North American NA-50 replica showed up.



© 2009 Eric Van Gilder

© Photo by Eric Van Gilder
A beautifully restored Howard DGA-15 replica, "Mr. Dickenson," came in from Santa Paula.

In Memoriam: Sharon Smith, RIP

All of us at SoCAWing offer our heartfelt condolences to Sarah de Bree on the death of her twin sister, Sharon.



© Photo by Frank Mormillo

O China Doll!

Thou, too, fly on, O China Doll!
Fly on, Camarillo Commando, through
"Heaven's Gate."

Our wing members, with all our fears,
With all the hopes of future years,
Are hanging breathless on thy fate!

We know that Curtiss made you fine,
In Buffalo – on Erie's line.

What workmen wrought your ribs so
strong.

Who drove each rivet with a "bong."
What anvils rang, what hammers beat,
In what a forge and what a heat,
Were shaped your mighty wings so long!

Fear not the sudden sound and shock,
'Tis of the air, and not the rock.
'Tis but a churning of the prop,
And not in altitude a drop.

In spite of downswings in the funds
today,
In spite of false lights on our Wing's
runway,
Fly on, nor fear to breast the sky!
Our hearts, our hopes, on you rely!

Our hearts, our hopes, our prayers, our
tears,
Our faith triumphant o'er our fears,
On you forever we rely – on you forever
We rely!

(apologies to Henry Wadsworth Longfellow)

Wing Photo Page II



© Photo by Dave Flood

The PBJ Crew is currently working to bring our SNJ left wing up to specs. Once renovated, it will be placed on the market.



© Photo by Dan Newcomb

Like father, like son. Here are Jeff Birdt and his son Kevin working on the PBJ – a nice way to spend Fathers' Day!



© Photo by Dave Flood

Jim Tierney modeling our Bearcat T-Shirt. To get your shirt, and help us pay for the new engine – send your donation of \$140 or more to Casey de Bree. Thanks!



© Photo by Dave Flood

Wayne Brancato in the cockpit as the SNJ-4 #N6411D had a successful engine run-up recently. The crew is now working on solving a generator problem.



© Photo by Dave Flood

Jerry Burkhardt and Gary Barber milling our new portable tow bar made for the C-46 by Lloyd McAfee. The tow bar will be easier to transport to air shows.



© 2009 Eric Van Gilder
© Photo by Eric Van Gilder

What a beautiful sight – after all the years of waiting! Our Rolls Royce Griffon 65 engine is in the shop, waiting for installation on the Spitfire Mk XIV. Les Bedding and his crew are working feverishly to get the power-plant installed. We can't wait to see this historic aircraft in the air again. Way to go, guys!

Stretching A 747 To The Limit

This is from the NASA pilot who just ferried the Shuttle back to Florida. It was his first ferry flight. For those of you who don't know, there is a highly modified Boeing 747 that is used to move the Shuttle from one place to another. When it lands at Edwards AFB in CA, it has to be moved back to FL to be launched. I have seen this huge configuration from the air as well as on the ground and it is a very impressive and unforgettable sight.

Well, it's been 48 hours since I landed the 747 with the shuttle Atlantis on top and I am still buzzing from the experience. I have to say that my whole mind, body and soul went into the professional mode just before engine start in Mississippi, and stayed there, where it all needed to be, until well after the flight...in fact, I am not sure if it is all back to normal as I type this email. The experience was surreal. Seeing that "thing" on top of an already overly huge aircraft boggles my mind. The whole mission from takeoff to engine shutdown was unlike anything I had ever done. It was like a dream...someone else's dream.

We took off from Columbus AFB on their 12,000 foot runway, of which I used 11,999 ½ feet to get the wheels off the ground. We were at 3,500 feet left to go of the runway, throttles full power, nose wheels still hugging the ground, copilot calling out decision speeds, the weight of Atlantis now screaming through my fingers clinched tightly on the controls, tires heating up to their near maximum temperature from the speed and the weight, and not yet at rotation speed, the speed at which I would be pulling on the controls to get the nose to rise. I just could not wait, and I mean I COULD NOT WAIT, and started pulling early. If I had waited until rotation speed, we would not have rotated enough to get airborne by the end of the runway. So I pulled on the controls early and started our rotation to the takeoff attitude. The wheels finally lifted off as we passed over the stripe marking the end of the runway and my next hurdle (physically) was a line of trees 1,000 feet off the departure end of Runway 16. All I knew was we were flying and so I directed the gear to be retracted and the flaps to be moved from Flaps 20 to Flaps 10 as I pulled even harder on the controls. I must say, those trees were beginning to look a lot like those brushes in the drive through car washes so I pulled even harder yet! I think I saw a bird just fold its wings and fall out of a tree as if to say "Oh just take me". Okay, we cleared the trees, duh, but it was way too close for my laundry. As we started to actually climb, at only 100 feet per minute, I smelled something that reminded me of touring the Heineken Brewery in Europe...I said "is that a skunk I smell?" and the veterans of shuttle carrying looked at me and smiled and said "Tires"! I said "TIRES?? OURS??" They smiled and shook their heads as if to call their Captain an amateur...okay, at that point I was. The tires were so hot you could smell them in the cockpit. My mind could not get over, from this point on, that this was

something I had never experienced. Where's your mom when you REALLY need her?

The flight down to Florida was an eternity. We cruised at 250 knots indicated, giving us about 315 knots of ground speed at 15,000'. The miles didn't click by like I am use to them clicking by in a fighter jet at MACH .94. We were burning fuel at a rate of 40,000 pounds per hour or 130 pounds per mile, or one gallon every length of the fuselage. The vibration in the cockpit was mild, compared to down below and to the rear of the fuselage where it reminded me of that football game I had as a child where you turned it on and the players vibrated around the board. I felt like if I had plastic clips on my boots I could have vibrated to any spot in the fuselage I wanted to go without moving my legs...and the noise was deafening. The 747 flies with its nose 5 degrees up in the air to stay level, and when you bank, it feels like the shuttle is trying to say "hey, let's roll completely over on our back".. Not a good thing I kept telling myself. SO I limited my bank angle to 15 degrees and even though a 180 degree course change took a full zip code to complete, it was the safe way to turn this monster.

Airliners and even a flight of two F-16s deviated from their flight plans to catch a glimpse of us along the way. We dodged what was in reality very few clouds and storms, despite what everyone thought, and arrived in Florida with 51,000 pounds of fuel too much to land with. We can't land heavier than 600,000 pounds total weight and so we had to do something with that fuel. I had an idea...let's fly low and slow and show this beast off to all the taxpayers in Florida lucky enough to be outside on that Tuesday afternoon. So at Ormond Beach we let down to 1,000 feet above the ground/water and flew just east of the beach out over the water. Then, once we reached the NASA airspace of the Kennedy Space Center, we cut over to the Banana/Indian Rivers and flew down the middle of them to show the people of Titusville, Port St. Johns and Melbourne just what a 747 with a shuttle on it looked like. We stayed at 1,000 feet and since we were dragging our flaps at "Flaps 5", our speed was down to around 190 to 210 knots. We could see traffic stopping in the middle of roads to take a look. We heard later that a Little League Baseball game stop to look and everyone cheered as we became their 7th inning stretch. Oh say can you see...

After reaching Vero Beach, we turned north to follow the coast line back up to the Shuttle Landing Facility (SLF). There was not one person lying on the beach...they were all standing and waving! "What a sight" I thought...and figured they were thinking the same thing. All this time I was bugging the engineers, all three of them, to re-compute our fuel and tell me when it was time to land. They kept saying "Not yet Triple, keep showing this thing off" which was not a bad thing to be doing. However, all this time the thought that the landing, the muscling of this 600,000 pound beast, was getting closer and closer to my reality. I was pumped up! We got back to the SLF and were still 10,000 pounds too heavy to land so I said I was going to do a low approach over the SLF going the opposite direction of landing traffic that day. So at 300 feet, we flew down the runway, rocking

our wings like a whale rolling on its side to say "hello" to the people looking on! One turn out of traffic and back to the runway to land...still 3,000 pounds over gross weight limit. But the engineers agreed that if the landing were smooth, there would be no problem. "Oh thanks guys, a little extra pressure is just what I needed!" So we landed at 603,000 pounds and very smoothly if I have to say so myself. The landing was so totally controlled and on speed, that it was fun. There were a few surprises that I dealt with, like the 747 falls like a rock with the orbiter on it if you pull the throttles off at the "normal" point in a landing and secondly, if you thought you could hold the nose off the ground after the mains touch down, think again...IT IS COMING DOWN!!!

So I "flew it down" to the ground and saved what I have seen in videos of a nose slap after landing. Bob's video supports this! Then I turned on my phone after coming to a full stop only to find 50 bazillion emails and phone messages from all of you who were so super to be watching and cheering us on! What a treat, I can't thank y'all enough.

For those who watched, you wondered why we sat there so long. Well, the shuttle had very hazardous chemicals on board and we had to be "sniffed" to determine if any had leaked or were leaking. They checked for Monomethylhydrazine (N₂H₄ for Charlie Hudson) and nitrogen tetroxide (N₂O₄). Even though we were "clean", it took way too long for them to tow us in to the mate-demate area. Sorry for those who stuck it out and even waited until we exited the jet.

I am sure I will wake up in the middle of the night here soon, screaming and standing straight up dripping wet with sweat from the realization of what had happened.. It was a thrill of a lifetime. Again I want to thank everyone for your interest and support. It felt good to bring Atlantis home in one piece after she had worked so hard getting to the Hubble Space Telescope and back.

Jack Nickel
"Triple Nickel"
NASA Research Pilot

JACK 'TRIPLE' NICKEL- NASA RESEARCH PILOT.

All fighter pilots get a nick-name and Jack Nickel became known as 'Triple' Nickel. He joined the United States Air Force as a fighter pilot. and for 25 years flew such aircraft as the F-4C/D Phantom, AT-38B Talon, F-15 Eagle and the F16 Fighting Falcon. He retired in 1997 at the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. Triple joined NASA Flight Operations in 1989 as a research pilot at the Johnson Space Center, Houston. His current NASA duties include teaching astronaut pilots how to land the Space Shuttle in the Shuttle Training Aircraft. He also pilots the C-9 'Vomit Comet,' which simulates weightless conditions, as part of the astronaut training program.



© NASA Photo
NASA 747-100 (SCA) landing with a shuttle aboard. Note the "nose-up" approach. Easy does it !



© NASA Photo
A rear-view shot of the 747 (SCA) with shuttle atop, after landing at Columbus, Mississippi for refueling.



© NASA Photo
The shuttle being lifted off the 747 (SCA) by the Mate-Demate Device – at the end of the journey at the Kennedy Space Center in Florida.

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ENTERTAINMENT, PLUS
FLYING DISPLAYS OF
MILITARY, EXPERIMENTAL
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