

# Flight Line

**The Official Publication of the CAF**

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

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**Some of the honored attendees at our special event "Women In War" held at our WWII Aviation Museum on Saturday, May 9, 2009. Cdr. Valerie Overstreet, USN, our featured guest speaker at the event, joined the women for this photo.**

**See Pages 10, 11 & 14 for the story.**

**Wing Staff Meeting, Saturday, June 13, 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.**

# June 2009

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	1  Museum Closed	2  Work Day	3	4  Work Day	5  Air Show Hill AFB	6  Work Day  Air Show Hill AFB
7  Air Show Hill AFB	8  Museum Closed	9  Work Day  QB Air Show Quiet Birdmen	10	11  Work Day	12	13  Work Day  Staff Meeting 9:30
14  Flag Day	15  Museum Closed	16  Work Day	17	18  Work Day	19	20  Work Day
21  Father's Day	22  Museum Closed	23  Work Day	24	25  Work Day	26	27  Work Day
28	29  Museum Closed	30  Work Day	<b>Museum Open 10am to 4pm Every Day Except Monday and major holidays</b>			

<b>STAFF AND APPOINTED POSITIONS</b>				<b>IN THIS ISSUE</b>
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Maintenance Officer	* Joe Peppito	(805) 498-4187	jocafpeppo@msn.com	The Doll is Back in the Sky, Charlie! . . . . 8
Safety Officer	* Norm Swagler	(805) 482-6994	pswagler@hotmail.com	Wing Photo Page I . . . . . 9
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\* Denotes Staff Position

## Wing Leader's Report

by Robert Albee

### "Behind The Curtain"

When I first joined the CAF several years ago, I was casually introduced to Cliff and Pat Brown. Cliff was the Finance Officer at the time, performing his money magic, while Pat performed as Marketing and Advertising guru.

It appeared on the surface that they had their responsibilities under control, even though hurricanes of concern, challenges and change came through every month.

For Cliff – there was never enough money to pay our bills, but somehow he managed (magic) to keep the doors open and pay our obligations. Pat attended most staff meetings, and always, and I mean always, brought up the subject and importance of attending civic meetings every other day. Little did I know that was just the tip of the iceberg.

Now for a bit of history...Cliff and Pat joined the Wing when it originated over twenty-eight years ago (1981) – at Van Nuys Airport, with the arrival of our beloved C-46 *China Doll*. Pat is one of the first women, along with June Hubbard and Jerri Fleishman, to break the barrier of an all-male club. Does the name "Culpepper Angels" ring a bell to anyone? Her original job was to be our first Newsletter Editor – a position she held for ten years. That included purchasing our first typewriter, learning to type, and purchasing all the necessary supplies, including paper and postage. Only then did she mail the newsletter out to respective members.

In the "spare time," Pat and Cliff attended air shows, and sold items out of the C-46 PX booth. In addition, Pat arranged for member events and meetings, sent out invitations for all types of occasions, and became the first Public Information Officer – just to name a few more duties.

Meanwhile, Cliff continued to improve our accounting department (basically – him), which meant working five evenings a week (for over twenty years) – along with his normal job at a local helicopter company. Today, Cliff works on *China Doll*, belongs to the Financial Resource Committee (FRC), and works on special projects for our Wing. Presently, he is attempting to locate a Bell 47 helicopter for us – which is right up his alley, since he was in Korea during the Korean War, compliments of the U.S. Army. He also has been known to operate our floor washer on occasion, and do other fun things – like answer twenty-thousand questions from new members.

Today, Pat attends in excess of thirty civic meetings a month – keeping our CAF Wing's name in front of our local citizens, and making sure everyone knows about our Aviation Museum. I would like to point out that her participation in all the meetings is at no cost to our Wing, since she and Cliff cover all costs.

We used to be known as the best-kept secret in Ventura County – but that is in the past, due to her tireless efforts, as well as many others. As an example, this past weekend she spent two days at the Strawberry Festival, handing out CAF fliers, which in turn generated quite a bit of business for us, since our Aviation Museum is on the way home for many Strawberry Festival attendees. Pat is also well-known by Camarillo and Oxnard city government people, which is very helpful for our business endeavors.

In addition to all their other activities, Pat and Cliff belong to a neighborhood watch program. Simply put – both Cliff and Pat Brown are what community involvement is all about. We wish that we had more of their type in our ranks.

In closing, I asked both Pat and Cliff what was their most memorable experience in their twenty-eight years with CAF. Simply put, their answers were, "meeting people, and helping the CAF grow."

Thank you both, Pat and Cliff, for all your years of hard work and dedication!



**Cliff and Pat Brown. Thanks for all your years of service to our Wing ! We are better because of you !**

### **Wing Air Show Schedule - 2009**

June 5-7	Hill AFB, UT	C-46, F6F-5, A6M3
June 8	QB Air Show, CMA	F6F-5, A6M3
Jul 10-12	Geneseo, NY	F6F-5
Jul 24,25	Milwaukee, WI – Legacy	F6F-5
Jul 27-Aug 1	Oshkosh, WI	F6F-5, A6M3
Aug 22,23	EAA-Wings Over CMA	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	F8F-2, F6F-5, A6M3
Oct 8-11	Airsho '09 (Midland)	F8F-2, F6F-5, A6M3
Oct 16-18	Edwards AFB SNJ-5, PT-19, F8F-2, F6F-5	C-46, A6M3

Note: The above information is subject to change. If you are planning to attend any of the above air shows, please check with us at 805-482-0064 before you go.



## ***Missing In Action: Down Behind Enemy Lines In Italy*** by Capt. Stewart B. Gilbert (Part Three of a Four-Part Series)

One day Paul and I climbed the hill to look at the wreckage of the B-25 we had seen go down near Piagia. It was spread over a large area on the mountain side, and there was hardly a piece of it left large enough to identify. We found part of an officer's shirt and a small piece of scalp from one of the crew, but that was all that remained – that and a few charred bones. Again, we realized how fortunate we had been.

Back in Verchiano one day I met a tailor who offered to make me a pair of pants out of the material we had stolen in our raid on the factory. It was a grey and black tweed material, and I had them cut small at the bottom so that they would fit in my shoes and socks. It would make them more practical for mountain climbing. Paul's were exactly the same, but smaller. They were warmer and altogether quite an improvement over the threadbare black trousers saturated with lice and with a seat that had been patched many times.

Paul and I stayed near Camino and ate in the village with friends for two or three days and, not wanting to wear out our welcome, we left. They insisted that we stay, but we left anyway and said that we would return for another visit. Paul went to San Martino di Verchiano and I went down the valley toward Salano and then up to Piagia and Todi...

I made my way up a twisting, out-of-the-way road, and by midnight had walked to a hilltop near Piagia. This valley at Piagia was a mountain-top valley, and was wide and shallow. More than a valley, it was a glacial indentation upon the mountain top. There were at least half a dozen villages in it, and the rolling terrain was crowded with vineyards and several plots of cultivated land, separated by stone fences or low, thick hedges. The paths between and leading to the fields were just wide enough for an ox team and a sled. Sleds were used instead of wagons. Wood runners slid over the rocky trails...

The villages near Piagia looked peaceful enough, but knowing the danger was very near, I decided not to alarm any of the people by calling on them at this hour. A Partisan I met on the trail that night told me that Paul had become very sick and was back in Camino – so I intended, after a meal in the morning, to go back to Camino as fast as I could.

I was exhausted and found a deserted barn with some straw in the bin. It was a place we had used before as a rendezvous, so I wrote a note and put it behind a removable brick in the wall. I hid my watch and shoes under the straw, and put my pistol within reach. I was so tired after my long day of climbing mountains that I fell asleep immediately after I lay down.

Friday, May 19 – About six in the morning, I was awakened by a rapid succession of machine gun bursts and the explosion of grenades. They were very close this time, and I grabbed my shoes and dashed for the door without bothering to lace them, or to take my watch and pistol. I was going to see if the way was clear, and, if the way was clear, I could get my gun and watch and make a break for it. If I was cornered, a gun wouldn't have been of much help anyway.

Just outside the door, as I was dashing around the building's corner, three Fascist soldiers grabbed me; my situation was hopeless. I'd been foolish for not sleeping in the bushes, even though it had rained most of the night.

They treated me roughly, and hurried me off to Piagia where the troops were gathered. There must have been over 150 of them. I was surprised at their increased strength.

I told them that I was an evading American airman officer, which didn't help matters at all. In fact, I think it made them even more hostile. It's a good thing I had left my gun in the straw, or I certainly wouldn't have lived long this time. I was wondering how long they were going to wait before shooting me anyway. The Italian was of a city dialect, and difficult for me to understand.

The troops had finished their business in Piagia when my captors arrived with me, and we soon started the half-day's march to Salano, about fifteen miles away...I knew that the German SS passed through there frequently, and that would probably be where they would place me in the custody of the SS. At this point my future looked pretty dark, and I blamed it all on my own carelessness in choosing such a spot to spend a night.

Starting down the trail from Piagia, I was hustled along at the point of rifles and the guards were very much on the alert to see that there would be no possible escape for me. We traveled fast all morning, and I was not given even a chance to tie up my shoes. I had to shuffle along the trails sliding my feet to prevent the shoes from falling off. The black shirts seldom spoke to me and when they did, it was no more than a firing of harsh swearing. One young fascist delighted in prodding me along by swatting me with the butt of his rifle, and once hit me so hard on the side of the shoulder that I lost my balance and fell in the ditch beside the trail. I was jerked out bodily, and kicked back into position. Those nearest me laughed and briefly scolded the youngster for hitting me so hard. To oppose their pushing me along probably would have meant my end, but it was all I could do to resist turning around and tearing into them. After several hours, I could feel that my feet were beginning to bleed from the sliding around in my oversized shoes, but I think my anger at the predicament kept them from becoming too painful – or maybe I was just used to it...

Salano was larger than most of the villages in this part of the province, and was located on a mountain road leading

## Missing In Action, cont'd.

from Foligno to cities on the Adriatic. The road was not heavily traveled at this time, but later it was one of the main escape routes for the Nazis as they retreated northward. I was placed in what had been the town jail. There was only one cell and it was on the ground floor. It smelled of filth and had nothing but a large wooden box in it.

Asking for food and water was futile, and the only answer I got from the fascists was a spit through the bars. I noticed several women asking the guards if they could bring me food or water, but they were always rudely turned away. That night I tried to sleep by sitting on the box and leaning against the wall, but the night was bitterly cold, and sleeping was hopeless.

By standing on the box, I could see out of the small barred window onto the village main street. About the middle of the night, some German trucks rumbled through town right next to my window. They were en route to the front, and I could tell that they were heavily loaded, but it was too dark to observe what cargo they carried. It was a miserable night, and when the first light began to show in the morning, I felt weak and had a terrific headache. It had been twenty-four hours since I had had food, and no water since the day before, when I had been locked in the cell. Time passed slowly, and I had nothing with me to attempt to bribe the guard for a drink of water. About the middle of the morning an SS patrol came into Salano and the fascists proudly turned me over to the Jerries.

With the Germans my treatment was a little better. They apologized for their shortage of rations and said that it would be only a few days until I would be taken to a prison camp where I would wait for transportation to Germany. Instead of getting no food at all, I was given the equivalent of about four slices of black bread in the middle of the morning, and about a pint of water in the evening. The Germans definitely had no water shortage, as there were several good springs in the village. The Italian women in the village continued trying to bring me more water and bread, but were always turned away by the guards.

After a day or two, the lack of food was beginning to show. I had a constant headache, always felt weak, and was too uncomfortable to sleep much...On the third or fourth day, a German patrol came through, led by a captain. I was taken to a house they had commandeered as their headquarters, and, after reporting to the captain, he generously offered me a cup of wine. It was the first I had had for several days, and it tasted very good.

The captain spoke fluent English, and talked to me for some time before he got around to asking me the routine questions – name, rank, and serial number – all of which he already had on his report. Then began his attempt at trying to get an explanation of my recent activities – when and where I had been shot down; where I had been staying since; and who had helped me. After giving him no satisfaction, he became angry and warned me that if he

didn't obtain this information now, things would go worse for me later... Later I thought of many things I could have said, but in my weakened condition, I didn't feel like talking much and perhaps it was best that I didn't. He told me that I would soon be transported to a prison camp, and called for the guard to take me back to my cell.

I went through some more of the same misery for the next four days. Bread and water once a day, watching the trucks go by, and wishing I were someplace else.

By this time about thirty of the young Italians had been captured, and a bus was sent up to take us all down to one of the larger towns in the valley. I was happy at the thought of going someplace. It seemed like nothing could be worse than that filthy cell, and anything could be better... The bus was a typical Italian civilian bus, with huge showcase windows, and it still had ragged old curtains in the windows. We were ordered to line up by the side of the bus, and everyone had to take his shoes off. The shoes were all put in a bag, and were to be given back to us when we reached our destination...

I was first in line, and went all the way back to the last seat in the bus, sitting down beside one of the windows that had been smashed out. Instead of replacing the window, a heavy canvas sheet had been nailed over the opening. Two German guards climbed in after the bus was loaded, and sat down next to the Italian driver on the front seat.

It was just about dusk when we started out, and the road through the mountains was long and crooked, and in some places hardly more than a long trail. I knew the road well because I had already spent so much time in this section...

By some time after midnight, I had elbowed loose the bottom edge of the canvas that covered my window, and had stretched it open far enough to slip out under the bottom edge. The guards hadn't walked through the aisle for several hours, and were apparently asleep. As the bus was noisily grinding up a steep grade in low gear, I quickly slipped out under the canvas and dropped down into the ditch beside the road. I watched the bus closely, and, just before it disappeared, they stopped. There was some shouting in German, and in a few minutes they were on their way again, much to my relief. Probably some of the boys had seen me go out, and were caught trying to follow. I was surprised when they didn't come back to search for me, but evidently they didn't even bother to count their prisoners.

I was bare-footed, and it rained without a let-up all night, so even though I was at least temporarily free, things were far from being right... It was almost dark when I struggled into Verchiano. I knew some of the people there well, and those that saw me first could hardly believe their eyes. They all knew that I had been recaptured, and escaping from the Germans was practically impossible as far as they were concerned. To them this was a big occasion, and they thought that it should be celebrated. (Continued)

## ***Missing In Action: Down Behind Enemy Lines In Italy*** by Capt. Stewart B. Gilbert

I was in no mood to do any celebrating, and was most anxious to find Paul. They told me, with tears in their eyes, that Paul was still in Camino, and was very sick. Camino is a village of only seven families, and only about a twenty-minute walk from Verchiano. I started up the trail, and hadn't gone far when one of the men in town came alongside me and insisted that I wear his shoes, and that he follow me along, bare-footed, to Camino and then get his shoes back. He didn't have to insist very long. We sat down on a rock and he generously handed over his shoes, then walked to Camino with me, bare-footed, and there I gave his shoes back with many thanks, and sincerely told him I hoped he could come to see me in America some day.

Paul had taken another stroke of malaria, and was very sick in one of the Camino houses. When I first saw him, he was lying on a hearth bench by the fire in a cold sweat, and was almost too ill to speak. There was nothing that could be done for him except to keep him warm, and try to keep the flies away.

After a few hours in Camino, a boy rushed into the house with the bad news that the Germans were coming up the trail. I quickly put Paul over my shoulder, and started out for the woods. Several of the villagers offered me their coats as we left town, and I just had time to grab a couple of them under my arm. The troops were just coming in one end of town as we were leaving the other end. I thought surely that the excited mood of the people because of our narrow escape would cause the troops to be suspicious, but they were only interested in finding a place to spend the night.

I left Paul well hidden and bundled up as best I could in the thicket and climbed the hill to see if there was any activity in town. My vantage point was only about two hundred yards from Camino, so I could easily see everything on the one street. All seemed to be quiet enough, but the Germans were still there, making arrangements for the night. It was just turning dark when I went back down the hill to join Paul, and, as luck would have it, it started to rain again.

It was about nine o'clock when I recognized our friend Giovanni's voice on the trail. He was calling for us in a whisper, and I summoned him up to our position in the thicket. He had some bread and a flask of wine, and apologized for not being able to get away any sooner, because the Germans were sleeping in his house. They were occupying all the beds, so that the family had to sleep on the first floor with the hogs. He also had brought with him an Italian army raincoat, which is shaped like a tarpaulin, but has a head hole in the center, with a button-down flap. This we stretched between some branches, and made a sort of crude lean-to, which at least helped to shed

most of the water. Giovanni bid us goodnight and promised that he would let us know when it was safe to come back to town the next day.

Giovanni was forth-eight years old, and had never married. He lived with his brother, his brother's wife, their three small children, and his sixty-eight year old mother. Giovanni had been to America when he was young, and had worked for a short time in a coal mine in Pennsylvania. He still remembered a little English, so that when we spoke with him, the conversation was in both English and Italian.

During the night we were given a scare by a few of the soldiers staying in Camino, walking by on the trail, and passing within twenty feet or so of us.

The Germans remained in Camino all the next day, so we had to stay in the woods. But the sun came out, making a beautiful warm day, and, by that evening, Paul was beginning to feel better. During the day I managed to get several bags of straw, and we moved our hiding place to a more secure position farther back in the woods. The trees were large, and in between them were thick bushes four to five feet high.

Our location was on a hill so steep that it was necessary to level a place out of the ground to sleep on. I stretched the canvas over the leveled-off spot, and padded the ground well with straw. The ground, of course, was still muddy, but the straw was thick enough to give us a comparatively dry bed. Paul slept well most of the afternoon, and we were so completely hidden that anyone could have walked within ten feet without seeing us.

Military activity had greatly increased in this section, and it was becoming increasingly difficult to wander around the hills and yet dodge all the troop concentrations. From walking bare-footed over the rough rocks, my feet were badly cut up, and several places had become infected. Giovanni and his friends in Camino had offered to feed us in the woods until the allies came, and, although I hesitated about accepting this because of the danger involved to them if we were found, it seemed like the only wise thing to do. So this lean-to in the woods was our home for the next three weeks. (Note 2 – The villagers hung their laundry on grape trees to dry, and we had a signal system worked out. I could observe this area from my hiding place, and, by their location, various signals were sent. For instance, three shirts on one tree meant "German soldiers in town – do not approach!").

The good people in Camino worked out a system for feeding us. It was a rotation plan, whereby all the families in town would take turns feeding us, either in town when the Germans weren't there, or in the woods when there were troops in town. Suspicion was avoided when our food was brought to the woods because the men were out in the fields, and usually the children were sent out to take their lunches to them. An extra loaf of bread, a flask of vino, or a plate of ministra dropped off to us in the woods

## **Missing In Action, cont'd.**

wasn't noticed.

Our hiding place was so secure that only a few of the people bringing our food knew exactly where we stayed. When it was about time to eat, we would come part way down to Camino and eat our lunch along the trail, or, if they gave us the "all clear" from town, we could go down and into one of the houses. Someone would always meet us at the edge of town and guide us to the house where we were scheduled to eat. This was always a treat because we could wash our faces and hands at the village spring; but sometimes the interval between chances to wash was two or three days. And it felt good to sit at a table, too, once in a while...

One day I walked over the hills to the barn in which I had been captured near Piagia – to look for my watch. I had hidden it under the hay, and, in the excitement of leaving, forgot all about it. I found it just as I had left it.

During the days that followed, we spent much time in Camino, and became well acquainted with all the families in the village. We even made a few trips into Verchiano, a distance of about three kilometers, but it wasn't good to even let the people in Verchiano know that we were staying near Camino. Giovanni, Antonio Stella and their families became our best friends. There was not much we could do but wander around in the fields, and help the farmers what little we could.

As time went on, there was an increase in allied air activity, and this helped to support some of the rumors we had heard about advances on the front. It soon became so that there was not a moment of the day when we could not hear allied aircraft overhead, or see them nearby. The B-17s and the B-24s enroute to targets in Germany passed overhead, often going northward early in the morning and returning to their bases late in the afternoon.

About two miles from Camino was the main road from Salano to Foligno, and along this road every night passed the long German truck convoys, taking replacements and supplies to the front. Each morning, before daylight, the truck convoys were taken off the roads to the woods, and fully camouflaged as protection from aircraft.

During the last days of May, we heard that the American Fifth Army had joined the Anzio beachhead front, and were on the march for Rome. In support of this rumor, we could hear the heavy artillery barrages growing louder night by night. Previously, most of the air activity had been by bombers, sometimes with fighter escort; but now fighters were beginning to make low altitude sweeps and to keep a constant vigil of all the roads through the mountains. The majority of the heavy German equipment was protected by camouflage during the daylight hours, but whenever a scout car or motorcycle would attempt traveling the roads by daylight, the Spitfires, P-40s and P-47s were on the spot...



**A British Supermarine Spitfire, Mk VIII, typical of the Spits that were seen attacking German truck convoys in central Italy during WWII**

On one of these mornings, the German convoy pulled into the valley below Camino to make camp, and all day long there were hundreds of German soldiers walking around through the hills, firing their small arms at anything they might see; so on this day Paul and I stayed in our lean-to, well out of sight.

As the artillery barrages grew louder night by night, a significant thing happened – THE FLOW OF TRAFFIC REVERSED DIRECTION, and we knew that the long-awaited big retreat was on. Every imaginable type of vehicle was moving along the road, and about three-quarters of all the equipment was horse-drawn. They had beautiful, big, well-fed horses, and an amazing amount of equipment, but judging from the amount of breakdowns, it was obvious that their equipment was in very poor shape...

Every day there were more and more soldiers coming through Camino, and this made it increasingly difficult for the people to get our food out into the woods. Sometimes it was necessary for them to leave us food enough in the woods to last for several days at a time...

...the Jerries were getting...pressed for time, ...they were forced to travel a little earlier in the evening, and a little later in the morning...

We were awakened early one morning by the roar of Spitfires scarcely 400 feet over our heads. We saw them banking and turning about to make another pass at the highway. As they went back in at the highway, we could hear the roar of their four .303 machine guns, and the burst of their 20 mm. cannon shells as they poured into the equipment on the highway. We got up quickly and climbed to the top of a nearby hill so that we could see better, and, just as we reached the top one of the Spitfires was making a right angle pass at the highway, and we could see the smoke from the wing guns, followed immediately by their roar, and then he buzzed directly over our heads, missing us by about thirty feet. (*To be continued...*)



## The *Doll* Is Back In The Sky, Charlie !

by Dan Newcomb

As I left the hangar on Tuesday, May 5, the last guy I saw was Dick Troy. He asked me if I was going to come back down on Thursday to see the *Doll* fly. I told him that I didn't think that I could for several reasons. Personally, I was a little disappointed. I really wanted to see her fly again after almost two years.

On the long drive home I thought about it. All day Wednesday I thought about it. Most of the guys had other commitments for Thursday and it is no fun to go all the way down and work alone on the PBJ. Well Wednesday night I was talking to wife Karen, who suggested I call Scott Drosos on the chance that he might be able to go. Appointments were cancelled and schedules were rearranged.

Both of us had several reasons to go yesterday. We were both part of a crew that stopped work on our PBJ Restoration Project to help the C-46 guys replace corroded metal. The job ended up taking 10 months to complete.

Scott damned near got killed after a ladder collapsed as he was climbing down from the wing. Thank God he wasn't. and thank God it didn't end his career. His arm was shattered. I know - I was there to see it. He will have scars and pain the rest of his life from that little fall.

And then there was Charlie Valentine – *China Doll's* venerable Crew Chief. We all loved Charlie. We knew how much that plane meant to him. Let me tell you a quick little story.

A few years ago, Scott and I were up on *China Doll's* wing helping Charlie fuel the airplane. As we were doing this, it started to rain. As we hurried to finish the job, gas overflowed onto the already wet wing and that made things very slippery. Charlie lost his footing and started to go over the side. It is a long fall, and he would have been hurt for sure. I was able to grab on to him and stop his slide but I had nothing to stop my slide and I started to go over with him. Scott was able to grab onto my belt and stretch his other arm out far enough to grab the sill of the emergency exit over the wing and then pull both of us up to safety.

I passed this story on to Charlie's daughter, Sue Evans, when I met her on the flight line on Thursday, May 7. She told me that near the end her dad told her that *China Doll* would never fly again. She told him that it would fly again. That somehow she would see that it would. It was a promise to a dying man.

As the *Doll* approached the numbers yesterday, I was out on the ramp shooting pictures of her landing. Charlie's daughter stood next to me. I heard her whisper, "Dad, I told you they'd do it."

A promise kept...



© Photo by Dan Newcomb

**Lift off! After 18 months, *China Doll* is aloft !**



© Photo by Dan Newcomb

**Coming in to land at CMA after her 1 hour plus flight – looking real good and ready for some air shows !**



© Photo by Dan Newcomb

**Charlie Valentine's daughter Susan Evans, who had promised Charlie before his death that *China Doll* would fly again. She was there to witness the flight!**

Kudos to the C-46 crew (Dick Troy, Gene O'Neal, Jeff Whitesell, Gino Dellanina, Wilfred Whyle, Dave Sica, Larry Simmer, Joe Catrambone, and Eric Lange) and to the pilots (Jeff Whitesell, Terry Cedar, David Baker, and Jason Somes) and the Flight Engineer (Gene O'Neal) for all their successful work in getting our "Mother Bird" *China Doll* into the air again. Charlie would have been very proud!



## Wing Photo Page I



© Photo by Dave Flood

**Larry Kates with the beautiful wooden wings he built for our newly decorated "O" Club. The wings have three woods – oak, walnut and ash. Larry is an accomplished wood craftsman, having built many distinctive pieces. Kudos, Larry !**



© Photo by Steve Barber, Jr.

**The cadre of our Wing's Finest – WWII Aviation Museum Docents – in a group photo taken May 8, '09.**



© Photo by Dave Flood

**Ray Dieckman ready to fly our Hellcat to San Diego for a special Legacy Flight – May 8, 2009.**



© Photo by Larry Kates

**Wayne Brown, in left seat of our C-46 *China Doll*, was a pilot who flew C-46s "Over The Hump." He visited our WWII Aviation Museum on March 31, 2009, along with Pitch Johnson (right), who flew Wayne down to CMA from San Jose in his Gulfstream 200.**

Wayne graduated from flight school in 1944. He became an I.P. for the C-46 Commando. They practiced flying over the Sierras. In December, 1944 he was transferred to India. He flew from India to Kunming, China for the remainder of WWII, and then some, since he didn't have enough points to go home at war's end.

Most of Wayne's missions involved carrying 130 octane gasoline for the aircraft stationed in China. They would strap 12 drums of fuel on each side of the cargo space, and fly at night at 28,000 feet loaded and then 33,000 feet empty. Wayne loved the C-46 – he thought it was a terrific airplane.

Both men subsequently made generous donations to our Wing. We are very pleased that Pitch and Wayne visited our Doll, and look forward to seeing them again in the not too distant future. Thanks to them for helping us to "Keep 'Em Flying," and to Bill O'Neill for this article.



© Photo by Dave Flood

**Photo taken with Steve Brown, CAF's President, on his visit on May 16. From left: Norm Swagler, Steve, Robert Albee, Joe Peppito, Cliff Brown, Sarah de Bree, Casey de Bree, and Ceci Stratford.**

## “Women In War” – A Glorious Tribute

by Dave Flood

Some of them came in wheelchairs, a few with walkers, and a number with canes – but all of them came with bright eyes and smiling faces. They were the honorees of our Wing’s special event – “Women In War,” held on Saturday, May 9, 2009 in our WWII Aviation Museum.

They were women in their 80s and 90s, and they all participated during WWII in various aspects of the war effort that were so essential to our overall success in WWII. From 1941 to 1945, they were storekeepers, pilots, aircraft fuelers, security guards, riveters, pharmacists, machinists, nurses, crane operators, and gunners mates, among other essential occupations. They pitched in to help run the armed services on the home front when the men went to war. There even were nurses who went right up to the front with the soldiers and sailors in order to take care of the wounded.

We wanted to honor these lively ladies and to show them that we appreciated deeply their contributions to the important war effort that helped keep us all free. Of the forty-seven women who were originally scheduled to be honored guests at our event, forty-two attended. The rest could not make it due to health reasons.



© Photo by Gene O’Neal

**CDR Valerie Overstreet, USN (left) with honoree Capt. Melanie Holmes, USNR (Ret), and Ceci Stratford.**

A featured speaker at the event was CDR Valerie Overstreet, USN, new commander of the VAW-117 Hawkeye Squadron, the “Wallbangers.” She flies Grumman E2C Hawkeye aircraft off aircraft carriers – carrying on essential communications functions for the fleet in all areas of operations. She is scheduled to deploy to the Middle East in a few weeks.

CDR Overstreet spoke of her early interest in aviation, and the support and encouragement she received from her mother and father to pursue her dream. She showed the assembled women a power-point presentation which included a photo of her dad, who was a Naval aviator, returning from a mission and ready to give her a big hug.

She was about ten years old at the time. A later photo in the presentation showed Valerie, now a young woman, in her flight suit, greeting her dad with a hug after she had returned from a mission.



© Photo by Frank Mormillo

**CDR Valerie Overstreet telling the assembly about her career as a Navy pilot and Squadron Commander.**

All the honorees were met at the door of our WWII Aviation Museum by Pat Thomas and Sheila Collier of the famous **99s**, a women’s pilot group which dates back to 1929. Also helping with the greetings were Museum Intern Debra Henderson and Malynda Seeger, a CAF Friend of the Museum. They generously gave of their time to help out at our event. Then the ladies were presented with corsages, and had their pictures taken. They were served a luncheon before the presentation.

Ceci Stratford, a member of our Wing, and also a member of the 99s, made the introductory remarks and welcomed all the honorees to our museum. After Camarillo’s Mayor, Don Waunch, welcomed the honorees on behalf of the city, Sarah de Bree, our Museum Director, made a presentation concerning the history of the “Women In War,” showing the various women who were instrumental in organizing the Women’s Army Corps (WAC), the Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASPs), and the home-front effort to employ women in the manufacturing of all the equipment needed to wage the war – including airplanes.



**Sarah de Bree giving her presentation on WASPs.**



## “Women In War,” Part Two



© Photo by Gene O'Neal

**Note the beaming faces of these women, who are all smiles at the “Women In War” special event honoring them and dozens of their comrades.**



© Photo by Gene O'Neal

**Some of the lovely ladies who participated in so many ways during WWII. We were honored by their presence**



© Photo by Gene O'Neal

**A number of the women brought photos and scrap books of their time spent in service to our country.**



© Photo by Dave Flood

**Mayor Don Waunch of Camarillo giving the official welcome from the City of Camarillo to all the women attendees. Ceci Stratford is at his side. Ventura County Supervisor Kathy Long was also an attendee.**



© Photo by Dave Flood

**Our “Women In War” special event drew some 200+ people to our WWII Aviation Museum. Some of the honorees had relatives attend with them from far-away states.**

Congratulations to Sarah de Bree, Ceci Stratford, Shirley Murphy, and Pat Brown for organizing the event, and to Jim Tierney, Ron Fleishman, Casey de Bree, Brian Hartil and the many members and Friends who helped set up the Museum Hangar and clean up and reorganize after the event. Thanks also to Lloyd McAfee, Gene O'Neal, Dave Flood & Chuck Kamphausen for providing transportation.

Thanks also to Avril Roy-Smith, who read beautifully two letters sent by Cornelia Fort, the first of 38 WASPs who died while flying for the U.S. in World War II.

It was an event that our Wing will long remember, and the heroes of the event were the honorees, who were an inspiration to us all.



## Maintenance Officer's Report by Joe Peppito

We have had a lot of airplane maintenance activities during this past month of May. First there was the engine failure on the F8F-2 Bearcat. Thanks to the exceptional flying ability of Steve Barber, we still have an airplane to work on and fly.

We are getting a newly-overhauled Pratt & Whitney R-2800-CB-3 engine from Ray Anderson, who has started the overhaul of this engine. Thanks to Ken Gottschall, Chris Rushing and Mike Perrenoud – work has started on removing the old engine from the airplane.

Hurray ! The C-46 *China Doll* is back in the air and flying. Thanks to Dick Troy and his fabulous crew. The landing gear problem has been solved, and the engines were pre-oiled and running well. Jeff Whitesell and Terry Cedar are being checked out as Pilots in Command (PICs) . We also have two more candidates for this position.

If you are looking for the Fairchild F-24 fuselage, look no more – it is now in the fabric work area waiting to have its fabric covering applied. We will miss Gil Brice's expertise in doing this work – but, thanks to George Sands, we now have the capability to complete this operation.

The PBJ (B-25) crew is still hard at repairing the airplane's outer wing panels, making a lot of noise and pounding a lot of rivets. This hard-working crew has made great progress on the airplane's major components, including flight control and engine control cables and cockpit equipment installation. Their biggest set-back is lack of money to procure all the hardware and services they need. However, we have a lot of confidence in this crew, and we know that they will succeed.

The restoration of the SNJ-4 #N6411D airplane is just about complete – except for a few minor touchup jobs. I would like to thank all the mechanics who have worked on this airplane: Keith Bailey, Alan Nicholson, John Jones, Sib Bosso, Alex Ferrasci, Howard Ulm, Wayne Brancato, George Sands and anyone else who I might have left out. All that is left now is a weight-and-balance check and all the paper work.

Les Bedding got some good news – the engine for his Spitfire was test-run on Tuesday, May 12. I haven't heard the results yet, but I am assuming that it was a good run and Les will have his engine soon to install on the Spitfire.

The F6F-5 Hellcat, A6M3 Zero, SNJ-5,"290," and PT-19 are all in flying status and are doing well – going to air shows and giving rides.

Let's hope that we will soon have more airplanes in flying status and going to air shows and making money for the Wiing.

Till then..."Keep 'Em Flying!"



© Photo by Gary Barber  
**Mike Perrenoud lending his expertise to work on replacing the Bearcat engine at a Burbank hangar.**



© Photo by Atsushi "Fred" Fujimori  
**Collings's B-17 and B-24 on their way to Paso Robles.**



© Photo by Dan Newcomb  
**Scott Drosos and Marc Russell attaching sheet metal to one of the PBJ's wings with clecos for later riveting.**

Consider becoming a "Semper Fi Sponsor" of the PBJ restoration. You can send your contribution to:

Col. Marc Russell, PBJ Restoration Crew Chief  
CAF, So CA Wing, 455 Aviation Drive,  
Camarillo, CA 93010.

Many thanks!

## Memorial For Gil Brice

by Dave Flood

On Saturday, May 23, 2009 Wing members assembled in the Restoration Hangar to honor a fallen comrade. Gil Brice, our Aircraft Fabric Specialist, had passed away on April 11, 2009, after suffering an embolism while working at his craft in our Restoration Hangar.

Jim Hinckley and George Sands, co-workers of Gil in the Fabric Shop, put together a fitting tribute to their friend, including the unveiling of a special memorial board, with photos of Gil's co-workers, including Jim and George, along with photos of many of Gil's co-workers.

At the top of the board, in wooden letters, is the new name of the Fabric Shop – "Gil's Place."

In the middle of the board is a beautiful plaque, with a color photo of Gil and quotes from a number of his friends as remembrances of their friendship with Gil. The background of blue sky and white clouds was painted by Shirley Murphy.

George Sands spoke of his deep affection for Gil after the memorial unveiling, followed by some words of remembrance by Jim Hinckley. Gil's widow, Gilda "Jean" Brice, was in attendance, along with her son Cameron, and her grandson Anthony. Cameron spoke for the family in thanking all of the CAF-So CA Wing members for their special tribute and for their friendship and love for his dad.

Joe Peppito also spoke for the Wing in portraying to Gilda how deep was our affection for Gil. Jim presented the family some gifts – tokens of our respect for her husband.

George, Jim and Mike Hohls, a new member, will carry on in "Gil's Place." We can almost hear Gil saying, "Come on, guys, get going on the fabric covering of the F-24 fuselage, and be sure to get it right!"



**Jim Hinckley speaking at Gil's testimonial. Seated, left to right, are George Sands, Anthony Brice, Jean Brice and Cameron Brice.**



**Thanking all the members for their friendship for his dad was Cameron Brice.**



**Overcome with emotion at the outpouring of affection for her late husband, Jean Brice let her son Cameron speak for her and her grandson, Anthony.**

George Sands adds: "I want to thank and congratulate Jim Hinckley on the fine job he did in organizing Saturday's tribute to Gil. Jim did a first class job and we are all very grateful to him and his wife Katie for making it a success."





All I can say is that the 'Women in War' Special Event on May 9<sup>th</sup> was a huge and wonderful success. The Museum Team put together a program that told the story of the women's contributions during WWII. Our special guests, almost 50 women who were part of the subject of the event, made the day particularly meaningful as they recognized themselves in the words spoken about the contributions of the 'Women in War'.

There they were; sparkling eyes on their beautiful faces; bodies bent by time, but words that belied those years as they spoke of their experiences with tears that told of memories that perhaps were painful to recall but told anyway...because they were there.



**Sarah de Bree presents the story of the Women in War.**

We, who put the day together with much work and determination to get the story told, were particularly humbled to have vicariously shared their experiences and have them say "no one has ever recognized our efforts before". What a sad commentary on our society in history. We were honored and grateful that we had decided to make our Special Event day about these wonderful ladies shown above in the group photo. They were delighted in the material presented and for the gracious way they were received with a special luncheon; corsages and name tags that gave their identity as well as the tasks performed for our country at war. They were very thankful that, at last, someone said "Thank You".

Another special guest was Commander Valerie Overstreet USN, from Pt. Mugu who brought our story full circle by sharing her very good experiences with today's military and how she was given encouragement as she rose in rank to become the first women Commander of a flight squadron, the VAW-117 E-2Cs. Her humor and ease at storytelling was well received by all. Thank you Val!

I want to give a special thanks to Shirley Murphy and Ceci Stratford for help in planning and executing this event; Jim Tierney and Jim Hinkelman for being the 'everything' guys' especially in taking care of the last minute 'I forgot(s)' and Ron Fleishman and his 'band of merry men' (otherwise known as 'Docents') who were everywhere as needed. There are many other names of helping hands and I want them to know that I appreciate their efforts very much. Thank you everyone!

Until next time