

Flight Line

The Official Publication of the CAF

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

Vol. XXVIII No. 3

March 2008

Visit us online at www.orgsites.com/ca/caf-socal



© Photo by Dave Flood
Preliminary artist renditions of our new museum.



© Photo by Dave Flood

It was a day for nostalgia, as well as celebration! Our CAF-SoCAWing held a Grand Reopening of its WWII Aviation Museum on February 9, 2008. Many of our dedicated volunteers had worked hard to ensure that all of the county's fire codes were adhered to, and we were able to open our Museum to the public again. The 1940 Mercury belongs to Win Burkhardt, a Friend of the Museum.

**Wing Staff Meeting, Saturday, March 15, 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

March 2008

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
						1 Work Day
2	3 Museum Closed	4 Work Day	5 Museum Closed	6 Work Day	7 Wing Staff Midland, TX	8 Work Day Wing Staff Midland, TX
9 Daylight Sav Time Begins Wing Staff Midland, TX	10 Museum Closed	11 Work Day	12 Museum Closed	13 Work Day	14	15 Work Day Staff Meeting 9:30 AM
16	17 Museum Closed	18 Work Day	19 Museum Closed	20 Work Day	21	22 Work Day
23	24 Museum Closed	25 Work Day	26 Museum Closed	27 Work Day	28 Work Day	29 Work Day
30	31 Museum Closed					

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Finance Officer * Casey de Bree (805) 389-9185 scdebree@aol.com	Mal Stratford at War – Part III 4
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* Denotes Staff Position	

Paul Tibbets: Life After Wartime

by Bob Greene

My mother, who is eighty-eight, told me that it had been a long time since she'd seen Paul Tibbets in the Bob Evans Restaurant on the east side of Columbus, Ohio. She thought this was odd; she ate lunch there so often, and he ate lunch there so often, that his absence worried her.

When he died at age ninety-two, the obituaries centered, of course, on the controversy over the dropping of the atomic bomb from the B-29 piloted by Mr. Tibbets and named in honor of his mother, *Enola Gay*. The half-century-old debate did not rivet him. Perhaps people expected him to be surprised when the subject came up, as if he were somehow unaware of what he had somberly been asked to do by his government during wartime.

Pictures of American exhilaration on V-J Day in 1945 (people dancing in the streets, sailors kissing girls) – the country has always cherished. The nation seemed not quite as eager to commemorate the actions that brought the peace. Mr. Tibbets understood. He knew that when the United States decided it was time to bring World War II to a sudden end, it wasn't in need of a poet or a philosopher. "They were looking for someone who wouldn't flinch," he told me once. "That was me."

He was a precise and careful man, consumed by details. In the sky above Japan that August day, he polled his crew: "Do we all agree that this is Hiroshima?" Afterward, he noted that he could taste the bomb in his mouth. "It tasted like lead."

I was fortunate enough to spend time talking with him and traveling with him and writing about him. On the road, I would see him make up his hotel room or clear his plates in a restaurant. When I would tell him that other people would do that, he would say that no able-bodied man should expect another person to do this work for him.

Once (this was when some championship sports team or other had been invited to the White House for congratulations) I asked him if any president had ever invited him for a visit. He said it only happened once – right after the war, when he got word that Harry Truman wanted to see him. "We met in an irregular-shaped room," Mr. Tibbets said, almost certainly referring to the Oval Office. "It was short and quick. He offered me a cup of coffee. Truman asked me if anyone was giving me a hard time, saying unpleasant things to me because of the bomb. I said 'Oh, once in awhile.'" "Truman said, 'You tell them that if they have anything to say, they should call me. I'm the one who sent you.'" "

On Veterans' Day I will think about the men and women in their 70s and 80s whom I would see when I was with Mr. Tibbets. These were soldiers and sailors, now grown old, who had expected to be sent to Japan for the land invasion, and perhaps to die on those shores. Instead, they had come home. In Mr. Tibbet's presence they would sometimes weep, barely managing to say: "Thank you." He would mostly nod, a little embarrassed.

His hearing was almost shot, the result of years of airplane pistons pounding near his ears. He sometimes seemed a little lonely, and I don't think I have ever known someone for whom the phrase "carrying the weight of the world on his shoulders" had at one time been more literal.

Of the quiet flight back from Hiroshima, he said he had two enduring recollections: "The memory of being so tired. And of believing that the war was finally over."

It was reported that he claimed never to have lost a night's sleep after the mission, and some saw this as a show of indifference. It was the opposite. He slept well, he told me, because "We stopped the killing." He was at peace, he said, because "I know how many people got to live full lives because of what we did."

Note: thanks to Charlie Valentine for this article.



© Photo AP/USAF

Capt. Paul Tibbets, center, with his *Enola Gay* crew.



Mystery Cockpit Number One

Can you identify this aircraft from the cockpit? Send in your answer to: Dave Flood, CAF, 455 Aviation Drive, Camarillo, CA 93010. Or, e-mail: macantuile@yahoo.com.

Mal Stratford At War – Pt. III by Mal Stratford



Lt. Mal Stratford – September, 1942

April, 1942 - Flying Fortress

Upon our return to Karachi, we found the place in chaos – nothing had changed except that I was appointed Supply Officer! Also, I was assigned to be the co-pilot on a B-17 with Bill Nelson. That assignment did not happen, as I had no experience in combat. The original co-pilot was reassigned his seat. Unfortunately for him, as he was shot down in Burma and captured by the Japs. They took no Americans alive.

A few days later, while reading my mail, a classmate, Elmer Morse, who was a fully-qualified Captain in B-17s, spotted me on his way to the flight line. “Hey, Strat! Would you like to fly with me? My airplane needs a check flight. I just had it overhauled.” “You bet I would,” I responded. “I’m ready!”

He climbed into the airplane first, but sat himself in the RIGHT (co-pilot’s) seat. When I got up front and saw him there, I paused and said, “Hey, Elmer, you’re in the wrong seat! Until right now, I’ve never even SEEN a B-17. I know nothing about it!” “Oh, shut up and fly it,” he said. So I did! He gave me slight assistance on the controls on takeoff and landing. Talk about excited! The next day I was re-assigned to Bill Nelson.

Our first assignment was to fly a replacement airplane to the 9th Bomb Group stationed in Alahabad. There we boarded two officers who were New Delhi bound. Our order was to fly the derelict B-17 to New Delhi with our two passengers, Major Knoblock and Captain Dick Cole. They were hitching a ride to General Staff HQ, 10th Air Force, for a debriefing on the famous Major Jimmy Doolittle bombing raid on Japan! We flew our two passengers to New Delhi and proceeded to Karachi and the 129-degree summer heat. During the last leg and just after take-off, one of the four engines quit. We opted to continue to Karachi on three engines.

Doolittle’s Raiders – May 13, 1942

At this time, Lt. Col. Jimmy Doolittle had completed his famous bombing of Japan, and he and his raiders were making their way towards Karachi through the C.B.I. (China, Burma India Theater). In two weeks Cole and Knoblock arrived at our tent in Karachi and made it their home. We were totally impressed by the stories they told us. Dick Cole was Doolittle’s co-pilot, while Richard Knoblock was an airplane commander. In our tent, we had shaving service by a native East Indian. Sharply at 5:00 a.m., this barber gently woke us up for our morning shave – complete with soap and water and a straight-edge razor. We were somewhat dubious when he did our necks, but, like they say, “not to worry...”

More On Karachi

Our B-17 engines (Curtiss-Wright 9-cylinder, R-1820-97 “Cyclone,” 1200 h.p.) had several breakdowns because of lack of parts and the constant blowing sand. Oil consumption increased, bearings had problems. So, before we moved to our next base, Palestine, we had to borrow cylinders from the Navy Lockheed 14, whose cylinders were the same as ours. When that change was made, we were allowed only 40 flying hours for each aircraft, until the next change.

We stripped most of the bullet-protection material off so we could gain more altitude more quickly. We usually cruised at 20,000 ft. for getting to and from the target area. Our bombing altitude usually was 26,000 ft. At night, we would be at 18,000 ft. or 20,000 ft. At Kassarine Pass we were at 12,000 ft., our lowest in the Mediterranean area. Maximum speed was about 287 m.p.h.

Also, at this time, July 1, 1942, we received a message from the Pentagon that General Rommel had advanced his troops eastward to 80 miles short of Cairo. Suddenly, I was in combat! We packed up our gear and headed north-west to Palestine.

When we left Karachi, we had eight airplanes, cut down from fourteen. We sent six airplanes to the 9th Bomb Squadron, part of the 7th Air Force, only to find out that we were going to combat General Rommel and the Italians in North Africa. We left in a hurry, so few men bothered to get their supplies. I was the Supply Officer.

We got our portion on Friday, just as the 9th came swooping in. They had to meet their train for Alahabad that night. We had to take off for Palestine on Saturday – early. I grabbed a cot, a sheet, a blanket and a GI shovel. I already had an air mattress, which I had bought in Bangalor, for which I was pleased.

Our flight of eight planes took us over the Gulf of Oman, Saudi Arabia, the Persian Gulf, Iraq, Baghdad, Syria and Palestine. At Baghdad, we met several Russian pilots flying B-25s, a gift from the U.S. The main oil pipeline was in good view – we used it to swing our compass.

To be continued next month...

Alaskan C-46s Very Much “Alive”

From an article by Michael Prophet in *In Flight USA*, January, 2008 – courtesy of publisher & author

“Early January, 2004, while working at my office in Holland, I received a very interesting phone call: ‘Michael...we are looking for an operational ‘bare metal’ Curtiss C-46 Commando and we want to use it for a ‘winter’ fashion shoot in Alaska!’

No problem, I replied. As it just happened I had recently visited Alaska six months before and I got to meet with the Fairbanks-based Everts Air Cargo and company president Rob Everts. Alaska is the exclusive location (worldwide) to have four operational C-46s, while four examples remain stored at Everts Air’s base in Fairbanks. Later that night I got in touch with Everts Air Cargo and started making the necessary arrangements.

Talking to Rob Everts, we finalized the deal and he told me that a second C-46, N1837M *Hot Stuff* would also be at Kenai should we need to use a back up aircraft. ‘However, there are no guaranties,’ he mentioned, as these aircraft are 60-year old World War II veterans and their R-2800 radial engines can be unpredictable at times. Additionally, the weather can be a major factor and it can play havoc on your flying schedule.

Serving 13 scheduled destinations from Anchorage International Airport, including Fairbanks, Everts Air Cargo flies to Aniak, Barrow, Bethel, Dillingham, Emmonak, Galena, Iliamna, King Salmon, Kotzebue, Nome, St. Marys, and Unalakleet. Everts has seven active Douglas DC-6s and four Curtiss C-46s. With 40 pilots, Everts Air operates 90 per cent of its business from Anchorage and Fairbanks. May to October is the busiest time of the year. ‘We fly vehicles, small trucks and cars, everything from boats to goats, is the standard motto,’ said Everts. Everts Air has flown reindeer from Nome to Anchorage; construction materials to the Brooks Range; and even charters in South America.



© Photo by Michael Prophet
**Everts’s C-46 *Salmon Ella* in a low pass at Palmer.
The Everts are good friends of our CAF-SoCAWing.**

Everts Air Fuel has been in the fuel air-delivery business for 38 years, and it operates two of the four vintage C-46s from Kenai Municipal Airport. It delivers fuel to the bush communities and roadless towns within the interior and along the Alaskan coast. Company owner Cliff Everts notes that the C-46s are invaluable to his business. ‘It’s an airplane that’s very hard to replace, because it hauls twice the load of a Douglas DC-3, which is considered one of the all-time best cargo planes,’ he said.

Most locations Everts Air Fuel delivers to are villages and outposts on the west side of the Cook Inlet (the water passage-way to Anchorage), such as Iliamna and Port Alsworth. But Everts Air Fuel also makes periodic runs to coastal villages like Shaktoolik or Unalakleet, where the landing area is just a short, unimproved strip or a sandbar.



© Photo by Michael Prophet

Unloading fuel from *Salmon Ella* at Beluga River.

According to Les Bradley, one of Everts’s pilots, the C-46 is well suited for operations in Alaska because of its large forward landing gear and tail wheel configuration, which allows it to land or take off fully loaded at a minimum dirt strip length of 3,800 feet! The C-46’s flight characteristics can be compared to flying a big Super Cub, says Bradley. ‘It’s like a heavy Mack truck – a great airplane that requires you to think ahead when flying it. You have to lead it and give yourself several miles. It never has tried to bite me!’

Whether the plane is hauling two 2,000-gallon fuel tanks bolted down on the floor of its cargo bay, or 70 large, 160-pound propane tanks standing on pallets, the Everts’s C-46s can haul enough fuel to run a village for six months. The C-46s are very durable planes and will fly with minimal work, according to Bradley.

The glorious days of daily C-46 cargo runs, such as in Florida, the Caribbean, and South America are unfortunately long gone. Except for two U.S. warbirds, their exclusive domain is Northern Canada and Alaska. If longevity in service is one yardstick by which an airplane’s greatness is measured, then the C-46 has earned such a memorable place in aviation history.”

Who The Heck Was KILROY?

By Charles Christian

KILROY WAS HERE!

In 1946 the American Transit Association, through its radio program, "Speak to America," sponsored a nationwide contest to find the REAL Kilroy, offering a prize of a real trolley car to the person who could prove himself to be the genuine article.

Almost 40 men stepped forward to make that claim, but only James Kilroy from Halifax, Massachusetts had evidence of his identity.

Kilroy was a 46-year old shipyard worker during WWII. He worked as a checker at the Fore River Shipyard in Quincy. His job was to go around and check on the number of rivets completed. Riveters were on piecework and got paid by the rivet.

Kilroy would count a block of rivets and put a check mark in semi-waxed lumber chalk, so the rivets wouldn't be counted twice. When Kilroy went off duty, the riveters would erase the mark.

Later on, an off-shift inspector would come through and count the rivets a second time, resulting in double pay for the riveters.

One day Kilroy's boss called him into his office. The foreman was upset about all the wages being paid to riveters, and asked him to investigate. It was then that Kilroy realized what had been going on.

The tight spaces he had to crawl in to check the rivets didn't lend themselves to lugging around a paint can and brush, so Kilroy decided to stick with the waxy chalk. He continued to put his checkmark on each job he inspected, but added KILROY WAS HERE in king-sized letters next to the check, and eventually added the sketch of the chap with the long nose peering over the fence and that became part of the Kilroy message. Once he did that, the riveters stopped trying to wipe away his marks.

Ordinarily the rivets and chalk marks would have been covered up with paint. With war on, however, ships were built so fast that there wasn't time to paint them inside.

As a result, Kilroy's inspection "trademark" was seen by thousands of servicemen who boarded the troopships the yard produced. His message apparently rang a bell with the servicemen, because they picked it up and spread it all over Europe and the South Pacific. Before the war's end, "Kilroy" had been here, there, and everywhere on the long haul to Berlin and Tokyo.

To the unfortunate troops outbound in those ships, however, he was a complete mystery; all they knew for sure was that some jerk named Kilroy had "been there

first." As a joke, U.S. servicemen began placing the graffiti wherever they landed, claiming it was already there when they arrived.

Kilroy became the U.S. super-GI who had always "already been" wherever GIs went. It became a challenge to place the logo in the most unlikely places imaginable (it is said to be atop Mt. Everest, the Statue of Liberty, the underside of the Arch De Triomphe, (and even scrawled in the dust on the moon).

And as the war went on, the legend grew. Underwater demolition teams routinely sneaked ashore on Japanese-held islands in the Pacific to map the terrain for the coming invasions by U.S. troops (and thus, presumably, were the first GIs there). On one occasion, however, they reported seeing enemy troops painting over the Kilroy logo! In 1945, an outhouse was built for the exclusive use of Roosevelt, Stalin, and Churchill at the Potsdam Conference.

The first person inside was Stalin, who emerged and asked his aide (in Russian), "Who is Kilroy?" ...

To help prove his authenticity in 1946, James Kilroy brought along officials from the shipyard and some of the riveters. He won the trolley car, which he gave to his nine children as a Christmas gift and set it up as a playhouse in the Kilroy front yard in Halifax, Massachusetts.

So Now You Know!



Thanks to Dick Burre for this.

Warbird Flight Program

by Dave Flood

The first flights of our SNJ-5 #290 in our new Warbird Flight Program got off the ground on Saturday, February 2, 2008, with four very happy people taking rides along with our pilot, Jason Some.



© Photo by Dave Flood

Carolyn Duncan waving to family prior to takeoff. To schedule a ride in our SNJ-5 call (805) 482-0064

Wing Photo Page I



© Photo by Dan Newcomb

No, not Switzerland....it's really Camarillo, with the snow-capped mountains adding class to our scenery.



© Photo by Dave Flood

Our Fabric Gurus, George Sands and Gil Brice, doing a precise detail job on the Fairchild F-24 wing. They will eventually do a unique stitching job on the wing.



© Photo by Dave Flood

A Martin-Baker ejection seat from an F8-U Crusader now on display in our WWII Aviation Museum.



© Photo by Dan Newcomb

Jeff Birdt inspecting the condition of the framework of *China Doll's* fuselage – getting her ready for spring. She'll have a new “non-wrinkled” skin and smooth inside walkways when she gets rolled out .



© Photo by Dave Flood

Ken “Gunny” Barger and Marc Russell cleaning up the stringers from *China Doll's* frame. Painstaking work!



© Photo by Dave Flood

Gino “Leonardo” Dellanina rolling the prime coat of paint on a piece of floor board for *China Doll*. The primer will be covered with a coat of battleship gray..

The Gathering of Mustangs and Legends – The Final Roundup

by Justin Lean, Singapore Airlines pilot and So CA Wing member

They came from all over the USA and beyond, making the journey for what is probably the final time the world would see so many WWII P-51 Mustang veteran pilots gathered. To honor them, an attempt has been made to gather as many airworthy P-51s as possible at this historic event. Inspired by Lee Lauderbeck and his Stallion 51 Corporation, the gathering took place at Rickenbacker Airport (KLCK), Columbus, Ohio on the last weekend of September, 2007.



© Photo by Justin Lean

P-51D Mustang 25NA in the colors of Capt. Gentile of the 336th Fighter Squadron, 4th Fighter Group, 8th Air Force.

A reported total of 102 P-51 Mustangs arrived at Rickenbacker. The longest journey made was by the Fighter Collection's P-51D "Twilight Tear," which was shipped from its home base at Duxford, UK for the event. "Twilight Tear" was a 78th Fighter Squadron aircraft actually based at Duxford during the war. Existing airworthy P-51s go through a painstaking restoration process. In the years after WWII, until the 1960s, P-51s sold for as little as \$1,000. Today, P-51s are rare and spare parts are harder to come by. The skills required by ground crews to maintain them are also fast disappearing. Given the iconic nature of this legendary WWII airframe, P-51 Mustangs now price in the region of \$1.6 million, depending on the quality of restoration. There has been a renewed interest in making authentic restorations, complete with accurate paint schemes, nose art and squadron markings. Not only does this serve as a tribute to the men and women who flew the P-51, but also to the people who made its existence and operation possible during WWII.

Over 150,000 visitors from all over the world were able to see three days of Mustang and aviation history celebrated. No less than three Heritage Flight Demonstrations were put on each day. The Heritage Flight grand finale consisted of an F-16C Falcon, an F-15 Eagle, an F-22 Raptor and a P-51 Mustang. Flying the P-51 was a legend himself, Brigadier General (Ret.) Regis Urschler. Although General Urschler did not fly in WWII, he is one of

the highest-time P-51 pilots alive today, with 3000 flight hours in the type. He refers to the WWII Legends at the Gathering as the guys who are his inspiration to serve his country and learn to fly. General Urschler regularly flies a P-51D named "The Gunfighter" at airshows throughout the United States, promoting the message of freedom and love of aviation. To cap off the USAF's dedication to the event was a daily performance by the Thunderbirds.



© Photo by Justin Lean

Heritage Flight, with F-22 Raptor, F-16 Falcon, P-51 Mustang and F-15 Eagle.

As the Gatherings of Mustangs and Legends closed each day, a Missing-Man Formation was flown by four P-51s. As they streaked in the finger-four formation towards show center, the sound of their Merlin engines resounded with the playing of *Taps*. The Mustang in the number three slot pulls up and heads west, towards the setting sun, honoring the fallen.

Looking at the ramp where all the P-51s were parked, some veterans remarked, "Gosh, I haven't seen so many Mustangs parked together since the war." The sight was indeed impressive, but it also probably will be the last time so many of these aircraft and legends are brought together.

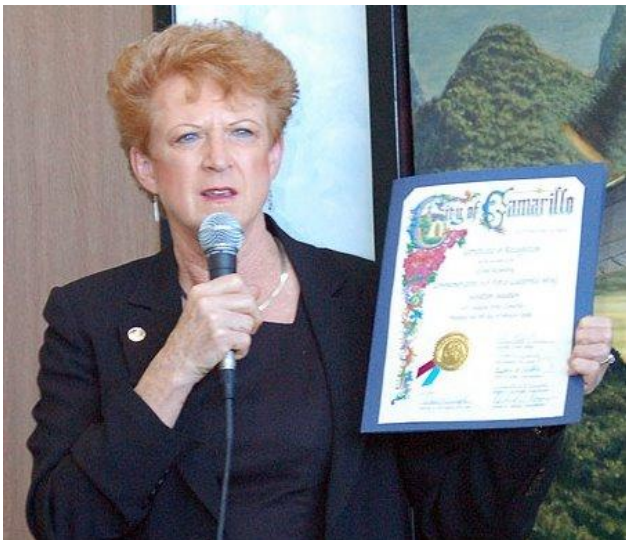


Our good friend and CAF, SoCAWing sponsor, Reg Urschler, in the cockpit of his P-51D Mustang "Gunfighter," waving the flag for freedom.

Wing Photo Page II – Museum’s Grand Reopening Day a Solid Success !



© Photo by Frank Mormillo
Sarah de Bree, Museum Director; Casey de Bree, Finance Officer; Camarillo’s Mayor Charlotte Craven; and Wing Leader Steve Barber at our Reopening.



© Photo by Eric Van Gilder
Mayor Charlotte Craven presenting a certificate from the City of Camarillo to the Wing in appreciation of the Museum.



© Photo by Frank Mormillo
Wing Leader Steve Barber thanking Mayor Craven and all who attended the Museum’s Grand Reopening.



© Photo by Eric Van Gilder www.vg-photo.com
Jim Hinckley, with a big smile after his ride in SNJ-5 #290, with Ken Gottschall as the pilot. Ken and Jim did a high flyby for the appreciative crowd.



© Photo by Eric Van Gilder
Another crowd-pleasing flyby was Ken flying the Fairchild PT-19A, with Stephanie Tagliaferri aboard.



© Photo by Eric Van Gilder
The Museum’s Grand Reopening on Saturday, February 9 was attended by hundreds of interested visitors, who for the first time in months were able to walk through the Museum and around the planes, thanks to the hard work of Wing volunteers who helped to bring the Museum’s safety status to code.

Museum Update

Sarah de Bree

February 9th was our Grand Reopening of the Wing Museum and the day was rewarding and very delightful. The public support was great, and everyone seemed enthusiastic over the Museum's artifacts, displays and airplanes that were once again open to the public to see and experience.



We were delighted that Camarillo's Mayor, Charlotte Craven, was able to attend. Mayor Craven presented the Museum with a Grand Reopening Proclamation as is shown above and on page 9. Mayor Craven has been enthusiastic about our museum and it's importance to the City of Camarillo. She is a member of our Friends of the Museum programs and both she and her husband enjoyed a tour and hearing about our plans for a new building.

A special thanks to everyone who participated in this event; cleaning, setting up and coming in to help as Docent to our many visitors.

Speaking of the new building, the plans are coming along on schedule. We have approved the general layout and elevation of the building. We are working on the exterior colors to reach an agreement with the Camarillo airport so that we are both happy with the 'new look' of our new Museum.

Come and see the new items added to the Korean and Vietnam War displays. In them, you will see a collage of photos depicting Ken Barger's days in Vietnam.

Remember, we need Docents. If you know anyone whom might 'fill the bill' please let me know and I will put them to work.

Until next time...

A Day on The U.S.S. Ronald Reagan

by Dan Cuvier

On Saturday, 19 January, 20 members of a fellow aviation unit stationed here at Camarillo Airport, C.A.P. Squadron 61, USAF Auxiliary, drove down to Naval Base Coronado, near San Diego.

After the three-hour drive, we finally arrived at the base, had lunch, and then boarded CVN-76 U.S.S. Ronald Reagan at 12:50 hours for a two-hour tour.

This Nimitz Class Super Carrier is the biggest and newest of the four similar types of carriers in the fleet. What I found to be rather interesting was the fact that the U.S.S. Nimitz was docked right next to the Reagan on that exciting day.

During our tour, we learned much about the ship, i.e.: it has a top speed of 30 knots (34.5+ mph); its displacement is 97,000 tons; the beam of the ship (at waterline) is 134 ft.; it typically carries 80+ aircraft; weapons on board include – NATO Sea Sparrow missiles, rolling airframe missiles, guns and electronic warfare countermeasures; the flight deck is 1,092 ft. long, covering 4.5 acres; its height from keel to mast is 244 ft., towering 20 stories above the waterline; its four propellers are made of bronze, each 21 ft. across & weighing 66,200 lbs.; the propulsion system consists of two nuclear reactors that can operate for 20+ years without refueling (now wouldn't you like to have a car like that?!)

The mission of the U.S.S. Ronald Reagan is to carry out our nation's tasking in peacetime, during times of crisis and as part of combat operations in support of war.

The ship's crew numbers approximately 6,000 sailors when the Air Wing is embarked. The ship is truly the biggest and mightiest the world has ever seen.

And God help any country that picks a fight with us, because this ship will surely be there to answer the call.

As well as the mighty CAF, of course!



Photo courtesy Dan Cuvier
Col. Dan Cuvier with CVN-76 U.S.S. Ronald Reagan.

Ode To The Blackbird – Part I

In April 1986, following an attack on American soldiers in a Berlin disco, President Reagan ordered the bombing of Muammar Qaddafi's terrorist camps in Libya. My duty was to fly over Libya and take photos recording the damage our F-111s had inflicted. Qaddafi had established a "line of death," a territorial marking across the Gulf of Sidra, swearing to shoot down any intruder that crossed the boundary. On the morning of April 15, I rocketed past the line at 2,125 mph.



I was piloting the SR-71 spy plane, the world's fastest jet, accompanied by Maj. Walter Watson, the aircraft's reconnaissance systems officer (RSO). We had crossed into Libya and were approaching our final turn over the bleak desert landscape when Walter informed me that he was receiving missile launch signals. I quickly increased our speed, calculating the time it would take for the weapons—most likely SA-2 and SA-4 surface-to-air missiles capable of Mach 5 - to reach our altitude. I estimated that we could beat the rocket-powered missiles to the turn and stayed our course, betting our lives on the plane's performance.

After several agonizingly long seconds, we made the turn and blasted toward the Mediterranean. "You might want to pull it back," Walter suggested. It was then that I noticed I still had the throttles full forward. The plane was flying a mile every 1.6 seconds, well above our Mach 3.2 limit. It was the fastest we would ever fly. I pulled the throttles to idle just south of Sicily, but we still overran the refueling tanker awaiting us over Gibraltar.

Scores of significant aircraft have been produced in the 100 years of flight, following the achievements of the

Wright brothers, which we celebrate in December. Aircraft such as the Boeing 707, the F-86 Sabre Jet, and the P-51 Mustang are among the important machines that have flown our skies. But the SR-71, also known as the Blackbird, stands alone as a significant contributor to Cold War victory and as the fastest plane ever—and only 93 Air Force pilots ever steered the "sled," as we called our aircraft.

As inconceivable as it may sound, I once discarded the plane. Literally. My first encounter with the SR-71 came when I was 10 years old in the form of molded black plastic in a Revell kit. Cementing together the long fuselage parts proved tricky, and my finished product looked less than menacing. Glue, oozing from the seams, discolored the black plastic. It seemed ungainly alongside the fighter planes in my collection, and I threw it away.

Twenty-nine years later, I stood awe-struck in a Beale Air Force Base hangar, staring at the very real SR-71 before me. I had applied to fly the world's fastest jet and was receiving my first walk-around of our nation's most prestigious aircraft. In my previous 13 years as an Air Force fighter pilot, I had never seen an aircraft with such presence. At 107 feet long, it appeared big, but far from ungainly.

Ironically, the plane was dripping, much like the misshapen model I had assembled in my youth. Fuel was seeping through the joints, raining down on the hangar floor. At Mach 3, the plane would expand several inches because of the severe temperature, which could heat the leading edge of the wing to 1,100 degrees. To prevent cracking, expansion joints had been built into the plane. Sealant resembling rubber glue covered the seams, but when the plane was subsonic, fuel would leak through the joints.

The SR-71 was the brainchild of Kelly Johnson, the famed Lockheed designer who created the P-38, the F-104 Starfighter, and the U-2. After the Soviets shot down Gary Powers' U-2 in 1960, Johnson began to develop an aircraft that would fly three miles higher and five times faster than the spy plane—and still be capable of photographing your license plate. However, flying at 2,000 mph would create intense heat on the aircraft's skin. Lockheed engineers used a titanium alloy to construct more than 90 percent of the SR-71, creating special tools and manufacturing procedures to hand-build each of the 40 planes. Special heat-resistant fuel, oil, and hydraulic fluids that would function at 85,000 feet and higher also had to be developed.

In 1962, the first Blackbird successfully flew, and in 1966, the same year I graduated from high school, the Air Force began flying operational SR-71 missions. I came to the program in 1983 with a sterling record and a recommendation from my commander, completing the weeklong interview and meeting Walter, my partner for the next four years. He would ride four feet behind me, working all the cameras, radios, and electronic jamming equipment. I joked that if we were ever captured, he was

the spy and I was just the driver. He told me to keep the pointy end forward.

We trained for a year, flying out of Beale AFB in California, Kadena Airbase in Okinawa, and RAF Mildenhall in England. On a typical training mission, we would take off near Sacramento, refuel over Nevada, accelerate into Montana, obtain high Mach over Colorado, turn right over New Mexico, speed across the Los Angeles Basin, run up the West Coast, turn right at Seattle, then return to Beale. Total flight time: two hours and 40 minutes.

One day, high above Arizona, we were monitoring the radio traffic of all the mortal airplanes below us. First, a Cessna pilot asked the air traffic controllers to check his ground speed. "Ninety knots," ATC replied. A twin Bonanza soon made the same request. "One-twenty on the ground," was the reply. To our surprise, a navy F-18 came over the radio with a ground speed check. I knew exactly what he was doing. Of course, he had a ground speed indicator in his cockpit, but he wanted to let all the bug-smashers in the valley know what real speed was. "Dusty 52, we show you at 620 on the ground," ATC responded.

The situation was too ripe. I heard the click of Walter's mike button in the rear seat. In his most innocent voice, Walter startled the controller by asking for a ground speed check from 81,000 feet, clearly above controlled airspace. In a cool, professional voice, the controller replied, "Aspen 20, I show you at 1,982 knots on the ground." We did not hear another transmission on that frequency all the way to the coast.

The Blackbird always showed us something new, each aircraft possessing its own unique personality. In time, we realized we were flying a national treasure. When we taxied out of our revetments for takeoff, people took notice. Traffic congregated near the airfield fences, because everyone wanted to see and hear the mighty SR-71. You could not be a part of this program and not come to love the airplane. Slowly, she revealed her secrets to us as we earned her trust.

One moonless night, while flying a routine training mission over the Pacific, I wondered what the sky would look like from 84,000 feet if the cockpit lighting were dark. While heading home on a straight course, I slowly turned down all of the lighting, reducing the glare and revealing the night sky. Within seconds, I turned the lights back up, fearful that the jet would know and somehow punish me. But my desire to see the sky overruled my caution, I dimmed the lighting again.

To my amazement, I saw a bright light outside my window. As my eyes adjusted to the view, I realized that the brilliance was the broad expanse of the Milky Way, now a gleaming stripe across the sky. Where dark spaces in the sky had usually existed, there were now dense clusters of sparkling stars. Shooting stars flashed across the canvas

every few seconds. It was like a fireworks display with no sound.

I knew I had to get my eyes back on the instruments, and reluctantly I brought my attention back inside. To my surprise, with the cockpit lighting still off, I could see every gauge, lit by starlight. In the plane's mirrors, I could see the eerie shine of my gold spacesuit incandescently illuminated in a celestial glow. I stole one last glance out the window. Despite our speed, we seemed still before the heavens, humbled in the radiance of a much greater power. For those few moments, I felt a part of something far more significant than anything we were doing in the plane. The sharp sound of Walt's voice on the radio brought me back to the tasks at hand as I prepared for our descent.



NASA Dryden Flight Research Center Photo Collection
<http://www.dfrc.nasa.gov/gallery/photos/index.html>
NASA Photo: EC99-43203-1 Date: July 1998

SR-71 in air refueling with KC-135 tanker

In 1990, confronted with budget cutbacks, the Air Force retired the SR-71. The Blackbird had outrun nearly 4,000 missiles, not once taking a scratch from enemy fire. On her final flight, the Blackbird, destined for the Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum, sped from Los Angeles to Washington in 64 minutes, averaging 2,145 mph and setting four speed records.

The SR-71 served six presidents, protecting America for a quarter of a century. Unbeknownst to most of the country, the plane flew over North Vietnam, Red China, North Korea, the Middle East, South Africa, Cuba, Nicaragua, Iran, Libya, and the Falkland Islands. On a weekly basis, the SR-71 kept watch over every Soviet nuclear submarine and mobile missile site, and all of their troop movements. It was a key factor in winning the Cold War.

I am proud to say I flew about 500 hours in this aircraft. I knew her well. She gave way to no plane, proudly dragging her sonic boom through enemy backyards with great impunity. She defeated every missile, outran every MiG, and always brought us home. In the first 100 years of manned flight, no aircraft was more remarkable.

To be continued next month.

Wing Photo Page III



© Photo by Dan Newcomb

Ceci Stratford, our Resident 99s Pilot, giving her “thumbs up” as she leaves CMA in her Piper Cherokee 180.



© Photo by Dave Flood

Recent visitors to our WWII Aviation Museum was this family from Flagstaff, AZ. Ed Harmon, the father, is a Seabee getting ready to deploy to Iraq.



© Photo by Dave Flood

Two of our Wing’s mascots – Jacob Van Gilder and “Colonel” Bogie – enjoying our Museum Reopening.



© Photo by Dave Flood

The F-24 Team’s “Hall of Fame” – created by new team member Jim Hinckley. This team is now “shipshape.”



© Photo by Dave Flood

John Jones and Ken Kramer doing an inspection of the SNJ-4 #N6411D’s landing gear linkage.



© Photo by Ron Fleishman

“Tail-Waiting” – these birds are lining up on Jeff Whitesell’s Martin 404 tail to hop a flight to Arizona.



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