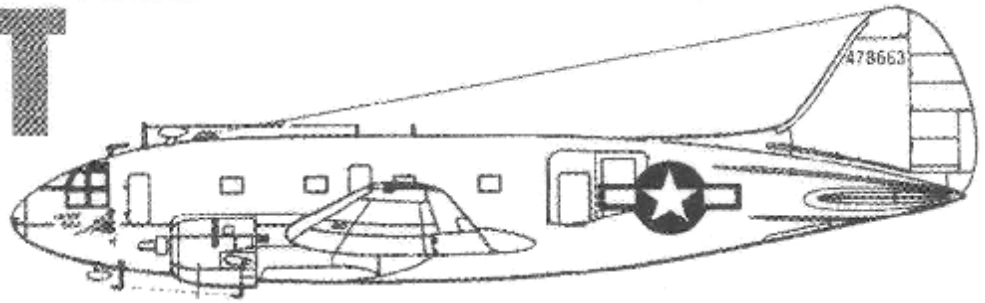


FLIGHT LINE



THE OFFICAL PUBLICATION OF THE SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA WING OF THE CAF

Vol. XXVI No. 3

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March 2006

AND THE WINNERS ARE ...



Photo by Larry Simmer

The winners of the "Valentine Flight" raffle awaiting to board the C-131 are, front row from left to right, Tony and Christafore Rollins, from Woodland Hills, Calif., Cindy and Dr. Paul Gilbert, From Pasadena, Calif., and the top row, Kimberly and Russell Jurco, from Libertyville, Ill.

Story on page 4

**WING STAFF MEETING, SATURDAY, MARCH 4, 2006 AT 9:30 AM AT
THE CAF HANGAR, 455 AVIATION DRIVE, CAMARILLO AIRPORT**

THE CAF IS A PATRIOTIC ORGANIZATION DEDICATED TO THE PRESERVATION OF THE WORLD'S GREATEST COMBAT AIRCRAFT – 1939-1945

March 2006

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
			1	2 Work Day	3	4 Work Day Staff Mtg 9:30AM
5	6	7 Work Day	8	9 Work Day	10	11 Work Day
12	13	14 Work Day	15	16 Work Day	17	18 Work Day St. Patrick's Day
19	20	21 Work Day	22	23 Work Day	24	25 Work Day
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Executive Officer * Dave Long (805) 497-8306 toropoo@adelphia.net	Staff and Appointed Positions. 2
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Finance Officer * Jason Vosburgh (805) 766-3880 jason.vosburgh@att.net	A Great Success 4
Operations Officer * Gary Barber (805) 659-4319 bearcat69@pacbell.net	Oh What A Day it Was 5
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	Commemorative Air Force Southern California Wing 455 Aviation Drive Camarillo, CA 93010-9501

Wing Leader's Report

by Casey de Bree



It occurred to me that those readers who do not live close to our Camarillo airport hangars might have wondered why we featured the Polikarpov I-16 so prominently last month. We didn't tell you that the aircraft is on display in our museum hangar and will remain here for some time. If you haven't seen it, you

will be amazed how small it is. It only has a useful flight time of about 30 minutes, so it is transported on a specially built trailer. The wings separate from the fuselage, each being held on by four threaded fittings, and the aileron pushrods can be quickly connected. The wings fit on the trailer underneath the fuselage in a wooden cradle.

There have been a number of rumors circulating pertaining to the A6M3 *Zero* N712Z and the C-131 N131CW and I want to let everyone know what is happening with these aircraft.

First the A6M3 *Zero*. I believe all of you are aware that the CAF is purchasing the green A6M3 *Zero* N712Z from David Price. The aircraft is being paid for by a combination of funds from CAF Headquarters aircraft acquisition account and the proceeds from the sale of the gray A6M2 *Zero* N58245, which was undergoing restoration, with the final payment being made to Mr. Price when the A6M2 was sold. As I reported in my column last month, the A6M2 was sold to the Pacific Aviation Museum in Hawaii and the CAF is ready to complete the purchase of the A6M3.

Because of the California sales tax laws, if the purchase of the aircraft is completed within the state, sales tax must be paid, which amounts to a considerable sum in this case, and the aircraft will therefore be taken out of state to complete the sale. The law requires the aircraft to remain outside California for 12 months, and cannot return during that time. So, the A6M3 will leave Camarillo at the end of February and will not return for 13 months.

There was an additional complication. With the purchase taking place in February 2006, CAF Headquarters considered the A6M3 to be a "new" aircraft, putting it up for assignment, with the Southern California Wing needing to bid for the aircraft along with any other wing that wanted the aircraft. The matter went before the CAF General Staff in January, and they voted to assign the aircraft permanently to the Southern California Wing. But they added the proviso that the Wing repay the aircraft acquisition account \$114,271, which is the deficit resulting from the purchase price of the A6M3 *Zero* from David Price, minus the budgeted aircraft acquisition funds and the proceeds from the sale of the A6M2 *Zero*. We have been given until March 31, 2007 to pay the \$114,271. This bill came as a surprise to us. If the payment is not

made in full by the due date, the *Zero* will be put up for reassignment.

Second, the C-131. I believe all of you are aware that the Wing borrowed \$150,000 in 2004 to pay for an engine overhaul and the repair of two propellers on the aircraft. The failure of the enrichment valve on the carburetor on the #2 engine during a takeoff resulted in detonation, which resulted in the failure of a piston. Because the piston burned through and considerable metal particles circulated through the crankcase, it was necessary to overhaul the engine. We also discovered that all three blades on both propellers were corroded under the electric deicer heaters and required replacement.

We had initially thought that the note could be repaid from aircraft earnings, but a major money-earning opportunity did not materialize. We retired \$15,000 of the note last year, leaving a balance of \$135,000, and were planning to pay down an additional \$20,000 this year. This note is short-term, interest-only, and must be renewed annually. However, the bank is unwilling to renew the note after December 31, 2006 and is requiring a full payout in eight quarterly payments of \$18,500 starting March 31, 2007. This was also unexpected.

Add \$114,271 to \$135,000 and you get \$249,271, a cool quarter-million to be retired in the next 16-34 months! The Wing Staff has met in several executive sessions to consider ways to manage this formidable debt and retain our aircraft, if at all possible.

The *Zero* is one of the prized aircraft in the CAF and we have earned considerable money with it last year, almost \$40,000. We want very much to keep it.

We looked at the earnings potential of the C-131 and concluded the aircraft can make money, perhaps as much as \$15-\$20,000 per year, but that is not sufficient to retire the \$135,000 note and it must be retired another way. The Wing staff is looking at various options in managing this debt, including selling the C-131 and using the proceeds to reimburse the Wing for the approximately \$250,000 it spent in restoring the aircraft.

Because there were no CAF aircraft acquisition funds used in acquiring the C-131, the American Airpower Heritage Museum (who owns the C-131) and the CAF Headquarters General Staff have given their approval to sell the aircraft and use the proceeds to reimburse the Wing for the C-131's restoration expenses, should we decide that becomes necessary. There could be a considerable lag between placing the aircraft on the market and realizing any proceeds from the sale, however. The Staff is mindful of the considerable investments made by the C-131 sponsors and we wish to protect their interests as much as possible, so a sale is not the preferred solution.

This debt is a very serious matter and the preferred solution is to raise the money. We may ultimately need to ask our Wing members, to help out in doing this. The Wing Staff will be making some tough decisions soon.

Until next month. . . .

IT WAS A GREAT SUCCESS!!!!

By Bill O'Neill-- Photos by Gordon Twa & Dan Newcomb

The Valentine's Day Raffle prize was awarded on February 11&12th. The winners arrived at the museum by 3:30 PM. where they were greeted by yours truly and Walt Metcalf who gave each of the ladies a bouquet of flowers. They were given a short welcome and Thank You for Your Support speech by me. Captain Terry Cedar then proceeded to brief them about the C-131 and the flight path they would take in a few minutes.

After the briefing they were escorted to the plane where they were served a feast fit for a Valentine. Gloria Troy out did her self again!!!!

She created a wonderful variety of foods that she served to them along with some very tasty Champagne. The food, the Champagne, plus the dress and commentary of the 3 stooges (Terry, Chuck & Dick) and the effervescence and service of Gloria made this a flight they would long remember.

To add to the excitement of the flight, Jason Somes and Mark Russell flew air cover for the 131 and took the opportunity to take pictures of it in flight. The passengers just loved seeing the planes that close. (It wasn't close but it was a lot closer than you see while flying commercial).



Jason Somes in his T-6 escorting the C-131.

At the conclusion of the flight, the limousine arrived and parked next to the plane to allow the passengers to enter the limo immediately after exiting the C-131. When the passengers disembarked, it became a photo op for many of the members who had gathered to see the landing (which Captain Terry greased much to the chagrin of Captain Chuck).

The passengers climbed into the limo and were whisked away to the Pierpont Inn, where they enjoyed a fine dinner, a cozy room with fire place, and an all you can eat brunch the next day. They were picked up by the limo at 1 PM on Sunday and returned to the museum.



Russell and Kimberly Jurco enjoy Champagne and Strawberries.



Dr. Paul Gilbert and his wife Cindy loving the flight.



A happy Chistafore and Tony Rollings after the flight.

We asked them about the prize package; the pros and cons of it. They all said they enjoyed themselves immensely; that

everything was perfect; they wouldn't change a thing, it was a fabulous.

So it was a very successful weekend. The raffle winners were as happy as a pilot in the wild blue yonder. It was successful due to the efforts of the flight crew; Gloria (who also was our aerial photographer), Terry, Chuck and Dick.

And many thanks go to the photographers, Gordon Twa, Larry Kates, Larry Simmer and Dan Newcomb. All so a special thanks to Jason and Mark for flying air cover for the 131 which thrilled the passengers.

OH WHAT A DAY IT WAS!

By Dick Troy

Feb 11th dawned clear and windless. I looked out my bedroom window and knew, just knew we were going to have a great day for the Valentines Day flight. I got out the door about seven AM and began the drive to CMA. Just a hint of fog over the grade but the sun was shining in Simi. I thought just a couple hours and its going to be severe clear. Got to the airplane around 8 A.M and towed her out on the ramp. Did the pre-flight and made sure all was in order, cabin cleaned, windows clean and all systems were go.

About 1 P.M my wife shows up with the food and drinks. I mean to tell you this is going to make the airlines green with envy. We have more food than Carter has little liver pills. Drinks, Champagne (Schamberg the good stuff) red and white wines that the airlines don't even know about. This is going to be Imperial Class Service which is six steps above First Class.



The "Imperial Class" cabin,

Photo by Gordon Twa

Now comes the really good part. Chuck Kelly's wife suggested that all of the flight crew should be dressed in black pants and white shirts. Chucks sister Barbara went to a Tuxedo store and bought three red bow ties at considerable expense for our use.



Photo by Gordon Twa

Terry Cedar, Gloria Troy (dressed in RED), Chuck Kelly and Dick Troy show off their red bow ties.

Now all the crew members are present all decked out looking like a bunch of hotel waiters with our red bow ties black pants etc. We even had shiny shoes.

About three P.M the winners show up and we greet them at the door with Bill O'Neill leading the way. We get them all together in the hangar and our Captain Mr. Cedar gives them a briefing befitting astronauts. I learned more about the airplane in 15 minutes than in the past 5 years. He did a marvelous job. Meanwhile Chuck is whispering in my ear that it was time to get the hook out as Terry was having way too much fun. Give this guy an audience and he is good for a couple of hours. Anyway we get all of them on board and we decided we would wine and dine them before we left the ground as an hour flight doesn't give enough time to let everyone enjoy themselves, plus visit the cockpit and get the cabin cleared for landing and have everyone seated with seat belts on.

We decided to serve dessert in flight and drinks. This worked out perfectly. We get off the ramp and out to the run-up area where all the preflight checks are completed with no snags. Ok time to roll. Out we go. Water on, Prop feather system armed mixtures rich then the surge of power as the big P&W R-2800 let you know they are now in charge. Take off smooth as a baby's butt. Terry and Chuck just know what pleases people. We want to be at an altitude that is safe but allows our guests to get a birds eye view of this most beautiful area, we lucky ones call home. Head North up as far as Gaviota and them down the coast. Weather beautiful, winds calm and the coast beautiful with a special California sunset that only the Man Upstairs can provide. I figure he must really want us to keep this airplane. He sure did His part, as the guests could not stop talking about this flight.

When we asked their opinion of how things were going to a person they told us that if the flight was all they would receive it was more than enough. Throw in a limo ride, a night at the Historic Pierpont., plus meals and drinks and you have a Blue Ribbon sure fire winner. This was a day all of them will remember for the rest of their lives.

A lot of people put in a lot of hours to make this happen. We did not achieve as much return on our investment as we had hoped but we were able to provide some badly needed cash to the wing.

Terry and company brought all of us back safe and sound. After arrival the limo met us at planeside, picked up the winners and away they went to the Pierpont. I can just imagine the conversation that went on in that limo between CMA and the Inn.

It was a great, great day. I am extremely proud of this organization this event and the CV340.

I want to thank Bill O'Neill for his tireless efforts, superb leadership and willingness to put in whatever it took to get this event going and to see it through. Walt Metcalf without whose help we would not have been able to enlist the help of the Kiwanis Clubs of Division 42, EAA and the Southwest Section 99s in selling tickets.

Thanks to Walt's daughter Vicki Linares who was responsible for the advertising necessary to make this event a success and also for her help in designing the poster for this event. And a special thanks to the Ventura County Star and the Pierpont Inn who were sponsors of this event.

To Terry Cedar and Chuck Kelly for their expertise in the cockpit and their skills as airmen. Chucks wonderful wife Vicky and Chuck's sister Barbara for the bow ties and help they provided loading and unloading the aircraft. Lastly but by no means least my beautiful wife Gloria for her culinary skills in the food and drink she worked days on to make certain that everything was just right and her skills at making the folks feel like they were in their own living room. To one and to all thank you from the bottom of my heart and I can't wait to do this again.



Photo by Dan Newcomb

Is it over already?

Till next month fly safe and be safe.

P.S In case you wonder where the CV 340 is, it's over at the Rialto airport having the A.D done on the number two prop. It will be there for about 5 weeks.

Maintenance Officer, Dick Troy

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Photo Courtesy of Ceci Stratford
Pilot of the Year Ceci Stratford leads a Young Eagles class at an Experimental Aircraft Association air show in Oshkosh, Wisconsin.

ON CLOUD 99 COL. CECI STRATFORD

Submitted by Dave Flood
From Ventura County Star, January 26, 2006

A Simi Valley woman's head is in the clouds after being named pilot of the year by the Southwest Section 99s, a women pilots' organization.

In addition to her piloting skills, Ceci Stratford was recognized for her contributions to children and young adults in the way of education and mentoring.

She is active in the Experimental Aircraft Association's *Young Eagle Program*, which offers rides to minors as an introduction to aviation, and Stratford has given more than 300 children their first flights.

Stratford is an advisor with the San Fernando Valley 99s' Aviation Explorer group, made up of teenagers learning to fly, and she has worked with Girl Scouts seeking their aviation merit badges.

Last year, a young man she mentored received his pilot's license on his 17th birthday. Currently, she is mentoring a 17-year-old high school senior, who just accomplished her first solo flight.

Stratford also is active with the Commemorative Air Force, based at Camarillo Airport, where she helps conserve and archive World War II memorabilia.

The veteran pilot, with more than 30 years of flying, owns a Piper Cherokee based at Whiteman Airport in Pacoima.

In addition to her pilot's license, she has instrument, commercial and certified flight instructor ratings.

Note: We of the So CA Wing of CAF are very proud to have Ceci as a fellow member! Congratulations Ceci.



Photo
to Courtesy of Ceci Stratford
Ceci prepares to take some Young Eagles fliers aloft.



APRIL AIR SHOWS

By Bill O'Neill

As of this writing we have 3 air shows to attend with some fighters and both transports.

We are looking for members to volunteer to help with the PX and the tours at these shows. Please email scwairshow@aol.com if you are interested in any or all of the following shows:

Riverside, April 1st. Leave on the 31st return on the 1st after the show ends.

Gillespie April 21-23. Leave on the 21st return on the 23rd. after the show ends

March AFB April 28-30. Leave on the 28th., return on the 30th.

Hope to hear from you



RECENT HANGAR FUND DONORS

Colonels: Charles Valentine,
Russell Drosendahl
Ceci Stratford

Friends: Robert & Dorothy Relyea
Janice Kuzemko
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Bell Charitable Foundation
Wells Fargo Community Support Fund
The "Phil Most Memorial Fund."

Thanks to all for your generous contributions.

Please send Hangar Fund Donations to:

Commemorative Air Force, Attn: Col. Russ Drosendahl,
455 Aviation Drive, Camarillo, CA 93010

Aloha FUGU



Photo by Dave Flood
Lifting the prop off the A6M2 Zero in preparation for shipment to a new museum in Honolulu, Hawaii..



Photo by Dave Flood
Syd Jones, Restoration Director of air museum and Carl Scholl of Aero Trader removing the tail section.



Photo by Dave Flood
Ever so gently! Lifting off the engine from the Zero for shipment to Chino, where the plane will be renovated.



Photo by Dan Newcomb

Preparing the front part of Zero for transport via flatbed truck to Chino. Note landing gear still down.



Photo by Dan Newcomb

Gear is now retracted and cockpit section and wings are ready for loading on the truck.



Photo by Dave Flood

Carl Scholl in special trailer with engine, propeller, cowlings and tail section of Zero ready to go. Carl will put the Zero back together & renovate for eventual placement in the new air museum in Honolulu.

P-51: An America Ambassador Remembered

by FEMA, ATS Weekly, Edition 024, December 27, 2005

It was noon on a Sunday, as I recall, the day a Mustang P-51 was to take to the air. They said it had flown in during the night from some US airport. The pilot had been tired.

I marveled at the size of the plane dwarfing the Pipers and Canucks tied down by her, it was much larger than in the movies. She glistened in the sun like a bulwark of security from days gone by.

The pilot arrived by cab, paid the driver then stepped into the flight lounge. He was an older man, his wavy hair grey and tossed looked like it might have been combed, say, around the turn of the century. His bomber jacket was checked, creased and worn. It smelled old and genuine. Old Glory was prominently sewn to its shoulders. He projected a quiet air of proficiency and pride, devoid of arrogance. He filed a quick flight plan to Montreal (Expo-67, Air Show) then walked across the tarmac.

After taking several minutes to perform his walk-around check, the pilot returned to the flight lounge to ask if anyone would be available to stand by with fire extinguishers while he "flashed the old bird up . . . just to be safe." Though only 12 at the time, I was allowed to stand by with an extinguisher after brief instruction on its use -- "If you see a fire point then pull this lever!" I later became a firefighter, but that's another story.

The air around the exhaust manifolds shimmered like a mirror from fuel fumes as the huge prop started to rotate. One manifold, then another, and yet another barked -- I stepped back with the others. In moments the Packard-built Merlin engine came to life with a thunderous roar, blue flames knifed from her manifolds. I looked at the others' faces and there was no concern. I lowered the bell of my extinguisher. One of the guys signaled to walk back to the lounge, and we did.

Several minutes later we could hear the pilot doing his pre-flight run-up. He'd taxied to the end of runway 19, out of sight. All went quiet for several seconds. We raced from the lounge to the second story deck to see if we could catch a glimpse of the P-51 as she started down the runway, but could not. There we stood, eyes fixed to a spot half way down 19. Then a roar ripped across the field, much louder than before, like a furious hell-spawn set loose---something mighty this way was coming.

"Listen to that thing!" said the controller. In seconds the Mustang burst into our line of sight. Its tail was already off and it was moving faster than anything I'd ever seen by that point on runway 19. Two-thirds the way down 19, the Mustang was airborne with her gear going up. The prop tips were supersonic. We clasped our ears as the Mustang climbed hellish-fast into the circuit to be eaten up by the dog-day haze.

We stood for a few moments in stunned silence, trying to digest what we'd just seen. The radio controller rushed by me to the radio. "Kingston radio calling Mustang?" He looked back to us as he waited for an acknowledgment. The radio crackled, "Kingston radio, go ahead." "Roger, Mustang. Kingston radio would like to advise the circuit is clear for a low level pass." I stood in shock, because the controller had, more or less, just asked the pilot to return for an impromptu air show!

The controller looked at us. "What?" he asked. "I can't let that guy go without asking . . . I couldn't forgive myself!" The radio crackled once again. "Kingston radio, do I have permission for a low level pass, east to west, across the field?" "Roger Mustang, the circuit is clear for an east to west pass." "Roger. Kingston radio, we're coming out of 3000 feet, stand by." We rushed back onto the second-story deck, eyes fixed toward the eastern haze.

The sound was subtle at first, a high-pitched whine, a muffled screech, a distant scream. Moments later the P-51 burst through the haze her airframe straining against positive Gs and gravity, wing tips spilling contrails of condensed air, prop-tips again supersonic as the burnished bird blasted across the eastern margin of the field, shredding and tearing the air.

At about 400 mph and 150 yards from where we stood, she passed with an old American pilot saluting imagine a salute. I felt like laughing. I felt like crying. She glistened, she screamed, the building shook, my heart pounded then the old pilot pulled her up and rolled, and rolled, and rolled out of sight into the broken clouds and indelibly into my memory.

I've never wanted to be an American more than on that day. It was a time when many nations in the world looked to America as their big brother, a steady and even-handed beacon of security who navigated difficult political water with grace and style; not unlike the pilot who'd just flown into my memory. He was proud, not arrogant; humble, not a braggart; old and honest; projecting an aura of America at its best. That America will return one day. I know it will.

Until that time, I'll just send off a story; call it a reciprocal salute, to the old American pilot who wove a memory for a young Canadian that has stayed a lifetime.



"..prop-tips again supersonic as the burnished bird blasted across the eastern margin of the field shredding and tearing the air."
Article submitted by Dave Flood



Bearcat Background

"I was stationed for a short time in Wonsan, North Korea, a large seaport. Adjacent to our tents was a landing strip for various aircraft used in the Korean conflict. There were Grumman small jets, Corsairs, Mustangs, and the ever-present Bearcat.

We used to watch the Bearcat tear down the runway and – as if it were on a string – pull up at an extreme angle similar to kite flying. It never dulled to watch this beautiful aircraft take

off in such a small distance. Of course, Wonsan Harbor was at the end of the runway!"

Submitted by: Michael Marcovi, Grumman Retiree – Korea, 1950-51. "When Grumman didn't deliver the last Bearcat (Gulfhawk), it was flown by Roger Kahn, Field Services Manager. He used it to visit various field sites through the 1950s. It was used as the chase plane on the first flight of the Gulfstream I. It was the only plane available that could keep up with the Gulfstream at that time. I believe Bob Smythe flew chase in the Bearcat.

Shortly after Roger's death, the Bearcat was donated to Cornell University Aero Labs. Cornell later sold the Bearcat to an ex-Navy pilot who was buying aircraft for display in a vintage aircraft museum. I last saw this Bearcat in March, 1999 at the Palm Springs aircraft museum, located across the runway from the Palm Springs Airport. I presume it is still there. The museum had quite a collection of vintage Grumman aircraft in addition to the Bearcat: e.g., F7F Tigercat, TBF Avenger, IF Trader, G-23 Goose, F6F Hellcat, and F-14 Tomcat parked out front.

In the late 1990s, a Frenchman contacted the Grumman History Center wanting to authenticate various markings and cockpit information for a Bearcat he had purchased and was having restored at a small wine-country airport outside Sacramento, CA. He had purchased one of a dozen or so remaining Bearcats and was having it restored as a piece of French history, documenting the combat activities of the French. The French flew some 130 or so Bearcats in the French Indo-China War (Vietnam #1), in '51-'54. Most of the Bearcats the French flew were F8F-1s that they acquired as U.S. Navy surplus. They also got their hands on a few F8F-2s as well. I believe this was the only real combat the Bearcat ever saw.

After restoration, he flew it once or twice in California, complete with the French Rondel markings, then had it shipped to France where he again flew it and put it in a museum near his home in the French Alps. He sent the History Center a photo of himself and one of the French pilots from that era in front of the Bearcat in their museum."

Submitted by: George Hendry, Grumman Retiree.

Note: The above was reprinted from the *Grumman Retiree NEWSLETTER*, December, 2005.

Thanks to Norm Swagler for this article.



AFA Group Moves To Oust Titles

By Perry Morison, Columbus (Ohio) Citizen, Sept. 16, 1947

"Former GI airmen moved today to oust the high brass from the Air Force Association in convention here.

A delegation from the Michigan Wing of the AFA introduced a resolution calling for abolition of such military titles as *Squadron Commander* and *Wing Commander*.

It asked that 'such democratic titles as *President*, *Vice President*, etc. be adopted instead.'

The ex-GI move came as the convention entered its second day after hearing a call last night (in a speech) from Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower for an Air Force equal to any test.

Men take heart,' Gen. Eisenhower said, 'when power backs up a social philosophy rooted in respect for human dignity and international peace.

Thomas G. Lanphier, Jr., Boise, Idaho, a fighter pilot in the Pacific Theater, is the lone announced candidate for president of the Air Force Association to succeed James H. (Jimmy) Doolittle.

The 32-year-old Lanphier is managing editor of the *Boise Statesman*. He gained wide acclaim in World War II when the guns of his P-38 fighter downed a Jap air transport carrying Adm. Yamamoto in the Pacific area. Lanphier was in the air forces five years and was discharged a lieutenant colonel."

Note: Other speakers at the AFA convention in Columbus, Ohio included Gen. Carl Spaatz, Gen. George C. Kenney, and Gen. Jimmy Doolittle. Noted Air Force personnel present included: actor Jimmy Stewart, running for first vice president; Gen. Nathan Twining; Gen. Joseph McNarney; Eddie Rickenbacker; and W. Stuart Symington, Asst. Secretary of War for Air.

The famous comedian, Joe E. Brown, was presented with a commemorative bracelet by Jimmy Doolittle with the comment," No individual did more to keep up morale than Joe E. Brown."

A very special attendee of the AFA convention in 1947 was none other than our own Charlie Valentine, who we can thank for providing this interesting article.

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"From Great Pumpkin to Blue Bear"

By Michael O'Leary, from *Warbirds International*, Jan/Feb 2006

"In 2004, well-known Warbird restorer and pilot Ray Dieckman (CAF, SoCAWing member) saw that Mark Clark's Courtesy Aircraft had ...Bearcat (BuNo 121748)up for sale. 'I had flown several Bearcats, and liked the plane,' said Ray. 'Also, I spoke with military pilots that had flown the F8F, including Neil Armstrong, who had nothing but praise for the Bear.' Ray had been regularly flying his Corsair and was looking for a change. 'I had spent five years restoring the Corsair and then five years flying the plane,' stated Ray. 'I started looking at the Bearcat and saw that it had less than 800-hrs. flight time. Dennis and Brian Sanders had done a great job rebuilding the Bearcat, which was also being offered with a good spares package. I flew over to France and examined the plane, and I was impressed. I was able to work a three-way trade for the Bearcat, and *Marine's Dream* (Corsair) went to a new owner.

Once back in the States, the Bearcat was licensed by Frank Strickler and the registration NX224RD was assigned. Ray quickly started to get familiar with his new fighter. As of this writing, he has over 30-hrs. on the F8F. 'The Bearcat has an easily manageable cockpit ; you don't have to dial in trim as with the Corsair, since both the engine and vertical tail are slightly off-set to help reduce torque. It is highly maneuverable and I can do an entire airshow in the confines of an airfield. In climb...the Bearcat just wants to go up forever. Components are much easier to access than on the Corsair, and the Bearcat's gear is completely accessible, while all the lubrication points are very easy to service. With the design of the Bearcat, you can really tell the Navy was getting ready for jets. Landing the Bearcat is quite firm, whereas with the Corsair it was like a butterfly landing with sore feet. On landing, the F8F doesn't wander, and tracks very straight. The brakes are effective, but, historically, Navy aircraft do not have a lot of braking power. They were either landing on a

carrier (with arresting gear) or on long runways. Also, the cockpit is pretty snug, but everything is easily reachable without moving around.'

Once back in the States, Ray began considering the *Armee de l'Air* (French) paint scheme. His bad experience with the French (many bureaucratic hang-ups before the Bearcat could be shipped out of France) and their lack of help in the war against terrorism caused a quick change, and the Bearcat soon proudly emerged from the paint shop in U.S. Marine Corps colors. 'I felt if I left it in French colors, then I would have to paint a yellow stripe down the back of my flight suit,' said the pilot.

Currently, the Bearcat is being prepared for the 2006 airshow season, and Ray will be doing a number of USN Legacy Flights, as well as doing his own acrobatic routine. The aircraft will be based at several locations in the mid-west during the airshow season.

One final note: Ray's purchase price was a bit higher than the 1958 (original purchase from the Navy of BuNo 121748) figure of \$658.91!"



Photo by Michael O'Leary, *Warbirds International*, Jan/Feb 2006
Col. Ray Dieckman's new #224 Grumman Bearcat "Blue Bear" with U.S. Marine Corps markings.



Photo by Michael O'Leary, *Warbirds International*, Jan/Feb, 2006
Here's Ray's new bird, shown with previous French markings.



Photo by Justin Lean
At the 2005 Chino air show Ray Dieckman; Carrine Cassady, USAF; Steve Barber. Ray and Steve flew a Legacy Flight in their Bearcats. Carrine flew a F/A Hornet