

PROP NOISE

Volume 1, Issue 1

The Membership Newsletter for The Military Aviation Museum

Fall 2008

Military Aviation Museum

www.MilitaryAviationMuseum.org

Virginia Beach Airport

www.VBairport.com

Fighter Factory

www.FighterFactory.com

Inside this Issue:

<i>Memorial Day Celebration</i>	2
<i>30 Seconds Over Pungo</i>	2
<i>Charlie Daniels Band</i>	2
<i>How Does a Museum Get Started</i>	3
<i>MAM Appoints Director and Event Coordinator</i>	4

Visit to the Military Aviation Museum

Upon entering the Military Aviation Museum (MAM), visitors will spot a new addition to the collection, a replica of the 1911 "Vin Fizz" Wright Ex Flyer which was built right here in the United States. The original plane was piloted by 32 year-old Cal Rodgers on its 49 day, historic, first transcontinental flight from New York City to Pasadena, California.

Nearby, a P-51 flight simulator has recently been added and will soon offer realistic action as seen from the cockpit.

The second level of the museum brings the visitors into the aerial world of combat warfare as depicted on canvas. The Gallery of Military Aviation features numerous paintings and prints of different warbirds in action. It also contains the largest privately owned collection of paintings by Henri Farre (1871-1934), a French artist and aerial combat observer. Farre was the first to bring WWI era military planes to life in his stunning portrayals of aerial combat. What makes his artwork unique is his views shown from inside the cockpit of open aircraft, a technique he termed "aerial vision" mastered from studying different views in actual flights. Most of his works were painted immediately following actual flights and highlight his attentiveness to detail and accuracy in color.

This floor features a multimedia room used for docent training, special presentations and viewing of avia-

tion videos. Adjacent is the museum's growing library which features military aircraft books, magazines, videos and other items related to the aircraft featured at MAM. Donations to this collection will be gratefully accepted based upon need. This library will be available in the future on an appointment only basis.

A trip to the museum would not be complete without a stop at the gift shop. Veteran aviators, as well as children, will find aviation souvenirs and books to their liking. Items included are golf shirts, ball caps, scarves and E-Z build airplane models.

Bring your family, friends and guests often as new planes, exhibits and other features are continually being added to the collection. For information regarding scheduled flight demonstrations and visiting aircraft, please call us at (757) 721-PROP. □



Mustang at Virginia Beach Airport

Volunteer Docents Prove To Be Top Flight

The success of Military Aviation Museum to-date has been largely due to the effort and pride that the entire volunteer crew has taken in introducing new visitors to the collection. At the museum's recent Volunteer Appreciation Party held on Monday, September 1st (Labor Day), MAM took the opportunity to recognize those volunteers that gave their time to make the opening season a huge success. Honored were Art O'Toole (322 volunteer hours), Ed Dillingham, Steve Chalker and a host of others that are responsible for the success. As part of the program a scrumptious buffet dinner from the Pungo Grill was held, flight demos by the P-40, P-51 Mustang & Spitfire filled the Pungo sky, and rides in the Stearman were given. The B-25J "Wild Cargo" provided a stunning backdrop for all of the attendees at the

party. Topping off the program was the introduction of David Hunt as MAM's new Director. David shared his experiences in the museum field. During the evening, everyone had the opportunity to meet with fellow docents and the staff in this great setting as they capped off the Labor Day weekend. □



Volunteer Appreciation Party

3rd Annual Memorial Day Celebration - A Flight to Remember

A Military Aviation Museum docent, Ed, recently shared this story about a WWII veteran who participated in the day's activities.

"The Stearman and the Tiger Moth started flying about 2:00 p.m. and some Fighter Factory associates and I were helping the veterans, who average around 84 years old, into and out of the aircraft. We got the first two vets in and out and then went into the hangar to get Jim, whose name was next on the list. Jim standing next to his daughter and he was using a walker. My first thought was, "How were we going to get him in and out of the aircraft?" I looked at Jim's daughter for guidance. She mentioned that he recently had a stroke and had trouble speaking, but was looking forward to the party for months and determined to go on the ride. "OK, Jim," I said "Are you ready to go flying?" Jim nodded, and we trundled towards the flight line at a surprisingly rapid pace, considering that Jim was using a walker.

When Jim's turn came, he, his walker and I went up to the airplane. Where he began to try and climb up on the wing, unassisted! Jim's daughter was right, he wanted to go flying! A couple of the Fighter Factory guys and I each took a shoulder and a leg and we lifted Jim into the cockpit of the Stearman. I don't think he weighed over 125 lbs. I

helped him put his helmet and goggles on while another guy strapped him in. After he was all strapped in, I yelled in his ear if he was ready to go. Jim nodded. I then jumped down from the wing and off Jim went.

The pilot flew Jim around the pattern a couple of times, and then landed and taxied over to the tarmac. We got Jim out of the cockpit and down off the wing. He then looked at me and with the biggest smile on his face, said in a loud clear voice, "Thanks. That was fun." He then thanked the pilot, and shook both our hands. As I escorted Jim back to the hangar and his daughter, I noticed that there were tears rolling down her face. "He's fine", I said. He said he had a great time! She smiled through the tears and said as she hugged her dad, "I'm sure he did. That's the first time I've seen him smile since the stroke." I sort of "harrumphed" in that way men do when they're a little choked up." □



Memorial Day Flightline

Charlie Daniels Lands at Pungo

Mercy Medical Airlift, held their 2nd Annual Benefit Concert at the museum on October 4th. Air Compassion for Veterans, administered by Mercy Medical Airlift, is a non-profit organization dedicated to arranging flights for wounded soldiers who are unable to reach medical facilities for specialized treatment. The event brought awareness and appreciation for those fighting for our country and freedom. Nine wounded warriors from the Iraq War were flown in as the 'special guest heroes'. Before the benefit concert all guests enjoyed dinner under the tents, music by The Metro Band, and an air show featuring the museum's own B-25 and P-51, along with a special flight from a Corsair and 3 SNJ's.



Surprise Flight Revealed

Young, 8-year-old John Valentine had been collecting donations for this benefit in honor of his father, who had attended last year's Halos and Heroes event at the airport. Unfortunately, his father was tragically killed in an accident preparing to deploy to Iraq. As a reward for John's efforts, he was surprised with a ride over the crowd in the backseat of the P-51 Mustang, his favorite airplane.

Over 2000 people attended on that Saturday recognizing our current war heroes. Several WWII veterans that were in attendance, spoke of their war experiences. Tuskegee Airman, Ezra M. Hill Sr. was on hand to sign his book produced by Mercy Medical Airlift called "Sacred Glances", featuring local WWII heroes stories in their own words. There was a palpable feeling of reverence amongst the audience listening to actual accounts from that war. The evening was topped off with a concert by the Charlie Daniels Band that left the audience wanting more. It was a great evening for a great cause. □

30 Seconds Over Pungo

On April 18, 1942, five months after the attack on Pearl Harbor, 16 bombers took off from the deck of the USS Hornet. The successful mission led by Lt. Colonel Jimmy Doolittle was an aerial raid on four strategic cities on Japanese homeland to illustrate its vulnerability to future attacks. This operation forced the Japanese to reassign squadrons of front line fighters in the defense of Japan. The plane utilized for this raid was the North American B-25J Mitchell.

Fifty-six years later, after sitting for nearly 40 years on Walter Soplato's property in Newbury, Ohio, "Wild Cargo" another B-25J was ready for another mission, the flight from the Fighter Factory in Suffolk to the Military Aviation Museum in Virginia Beach.

The plane was built in 1944 in Fairfax, Kansas and delivered to the USAAF. Most recently it underwent an eight year restoration, completed at the Fighter Factory and was fitted with the classic "greenhouse" bombardier's nose. Two 1850 h.p. engines Wright Cyclone serve as the aircraft's powerplants. Originally B-25J's could hold 13 0.50-inch guns and a two ton payload of bombs. These medium bombers faithfully served with every Allied Air Force during World War II. Many found civilian careers as mapping and photo recon aircraft. When acquired, it still had radar and surveillance equipment installed onboard.

In the 1960's, "Wild Cargo" served as a transport for exotic animals from an animal show, such as alligators and snakes. When the aircraft was recently repainted in Canada, it was decided to add some appropriate nose art as was common during the Second World War. It now has the 1940's comic book character "Sheena, Queen of the Jungle" added to the design. In 1963, the plane was forced to make a wheels up landing at Lunken airport with one engine seized and the other one cutting out. At the time, all of its cargo of 2000 plus reptiles was en route to the Cincinnati Zoo. Luckily, the pilot, co-pilot and most of its odd cargo made it out okay.

On August 30th, 2008 "Wild Cargo" was enthusiastically welcomed at its new home in Virginia Beach as the highlight of anyone's visit to MAM. Lt. Colonel Jimmy Doolittle would have surely been proud watching the incoming B-25J's maiden flight as he had once remarked "...you can't lose...if you have command of the air." "Wild Cargo" will surely command the air



"Wild Cargo" over Pungo Bridge

over Virginia for many years to come. □

How Does a Museum Get Started?

Visitors to the Military Aviation Museum often wonder where these marvelous airplanes came from. The heart of the collection was formed and created by Gerald and Elaine Yagen, long time residents of Virginia Beach and founder of Tidewater Tech, now Centura College, and the Aviation Institute of Maintenance schools. Yagen had long been a general aviation pilot, but never had the opportunity to serve in the military. All of his flight experience had been in civilian, general aviation flying and most often in his corporate, twin engine Piper Aerostar aircraft.

It was in the fall of 1994, when he was attending an annual convention for fellow Aerostar aircraft owners being held in Canada. One evening, at the CWH Museum in Hamilton, Ontario, they attended a dinner dance among all the many historic airplanes of the museum. The convention participants had been asked to dress up for the party in attire from the 1940's. He located a former B-17 bomber uniform and they came as a wartime couple. It was here that evening, that he decided that it might be exciting to obtain just one of these historic aircraft for himself to fly on weekends over Virginia Beach.



Gerald & Elaine Yagen at the CWH Museum

He soon was searching for a World War II era aircraft to acquire, but quickly learned that such airplanes were quite difficult to locate and buy. There were occasional unfinished projects available, but not many airworthy. Eventually, he settled on the wrecked remains of a Curtiss P-40E Warhawk recovered from north of the Arctic Circle in Russia. During World War II, the Roosevelt administration provided arms and ammunitions to the Soviet Union under the Lend-Lease program.

The Curtiss P-40 fighter planes were built in Buffalo, New York, and transported by ship to the Middle East. They were reassembled in Persia, modern day Iran, and Russian pilots flew them to the eastern front, where they fought against German Messerschmitts. This particular airplane had been shot down while protecting the far northern seaport of Murmansk. With the recent fall of Soviet Communism, a Swiss watch manufacturer had recovered several such planes and sold them to a restorer in a small town in Kansas. A deal was quickly struck, and it was moved to Norfolk to begin restoration.

About the same time, a second aircraft was located right here in Yagen's hometown. He had heard about a rare Chance Vought Corsair fighter plane being stored in an owner's backyard in the Bay Island neighborhood of northern Virginia Beach. The aircraft was disassembled, but mostly there. It had been originally on display at the War Memorial Museum in Newport News, who had obtained it from a local VFW Post. This rare and historic aircraft had flown off the Intrepid aircraft carrier during the Battle of Okinawa during the Second World War.

It was decided to commence first with the restoration of the Curtiss P-40. A small team of technicians were employed to do the work in an office warehouse near the Norfolk airport. They built jigs and began work on the disassembly and reconstruction of the fuselage, while Yagen searched all over the world for the endless parts and components necessary to rebuild such a 50-year-old aircraft. Many of the needed pieces could no longer be ordered from the original manufactures, as most of the firms had long ago ceased operations.

On one of these trips to New Zealand, in search of numerous small parts and pieces, he learned of a local team that were successfully completing their own P-40 restoration. They had already built the needed assembly jigs and fabricated some of the unobtainable parts necessary to complete such an aircraft. It was decided to transport the partial Curtiss P-40 to Auckland, New Zealand, and have them complete its restorations, which could be finished at a much faster pace. Within two years, the airplane had its first test flight and was displayed at the Easter air show of Omaka on the South Island. When completed, it had been painted in the markings of Tex Hill, who flew such a plane for the AVG Flying Tigers. It was then disassembled and sent by ocean container back to Virginia.

Meanwhile, Yagen had begun looking for a training aircraft in order for him to learn how to fly and land one of these tail wheel airplanes. He had thousands of hours experience flying conventional corporate aircraft, but no flight experience with tail wheel airplanes. He heard about a bright yellow, Stearman biplane in Texas that was being sold. It was purchased over the phone and a pilot was engaged to fly it to Virginia in the winter of 1997. Thousands were built by Boeing during the Second World War to perform primary flight training for America's young pilots rushing off to war. Many of these aircraft survived into later years as crop dusters and this particular aircraft had recently been restored to its original condition.

The Stearman was a good training aircraft to learn the basics of tail wheel landings, but not heavy enough to prepare a pilot for the speeds of a World War II fighter plane. It was decided to acquire a faster and heavier aircraft.

South Africa had recently chosen Nelson Mandela as its new leader and the worldwide arms embargo had been lifted against their military. Prior to this, they had been training their pilots in surplus World War II military training aircraft such as the North American Texans. All their AT-6's came on the market at the same time, so the price for such a flying aircraft was relatively inexpensive in the beginning. It was decided to select one particular low time airplane designated as the Navy SNJ-4 version. It had a recent engine overhaul, but even more important was that it never served as a trainer with the American Navy. Instead it had a unique history as a utility aircraft that served with American forces in the Aleutian Islands of Alaska, while the Japanese had invaded and were fighting there. Subsequently, this airplane was repainted back to its original dark blue Pacific colors, based upon a photograph found in an Alaska museum of its operations at Dutch Harbor during the war. It had been used to carry mail and military personnel from one field to another.

No one imagined that these two training aircraft and a 50-year-old propeller airplane undergoing reconstruction in New Zealand would grow into one of America's largest collection of historic airplanes from the last century. Today, these rare airplanes are on display and fly from the Virginia Beach airport. They have been saved and preserved for future generations to enjoy and marvel. □

Museum Appoints Director and Event Coordinator

First, David Hunt has accepted the position as the Director of the museum. David was born and educated in England. His hometown is only four miles from the town of Castle Bromwich, the location of the factory which manufactured our Spitfire. David graduated with degrees in fine art and design, business economics and management. David's business experience includes the directorship of three leather/sportswear manufacturing companies, Chairman and President of numerous Rotary Clubs and various business consultancies, as well as being one of the founding members of a nationally recognized leathersgoods museum.

David relocated to the U.S. in 1994, as the VP of Production/R&D for Ralph Lauren Polo Leathersgoods, with responsibilities that included overseeing factory and production development in Asia, South America and Europe. In 2005, David officially became a U.S. citizen.

David also has interest in SCUBA diving and for the last 10 years, he has been an instructor and dive team organizer with the Virginia Beach Aquarium and Marine Science Center. Some of David's other interests are art and design, photography, antique British cars, bonsai and travel. David and his wife, Debra, reside in Virginia Beach. David has a son, Simon; a daughter, Sarah, and a granddaughter, Paige, who live in England.

The second new edition to MAM is Debi Ernest, Event and Marketing Coordinator. She will be producing all the events for the museum. She will also be marketing the museum as a venue for groups to hold their corporate and personal functions. The website is in the process of being revamped to include a list of all upcoming events.

Debi has previously worked for the Foodbank of Southeastern Virginia, working on events and food donations. She has experience in marketing with The Virginian-Pilot and has been the owner a small office café. Her husband, Shawn is a retired Navy submariner, now working with a Navy contractor. She has a daughter, Sasha, currently a Peace Corps volunteer in Bulgaria and a son, Nick, a college student at George Mason University. Look for exciting happenings in the near future! ☐



Gerald Yagen Introduces David Hunt to Volunteers



MEMBERSHIP NEWSLETTER FOR
THE MILITARY AVIATION MUSEUM

1341 PRINCESS ANNE ROAD
VIRGINIA BEACH, VA 23457

(757) 721-PROP

OPEN DAILY
9:00 AM - 5:00 PM