



AIRBASE GEORGIA *Dispatch*



AIRBASE GEORGIA, COMMEMORATIVE AIR FORCE, PEACHTREE CITY, GA
www.airbasegeorgia.org www.facebook.com/CAFAirbaseGeorgia
Col Frank Kalinowski, Editor - fsk47@yahoo.com

January 2024

Education through living history.

Keep 'em flying.

Airbase Leader

Col Joel Perkins
joel.perkins@airbasegeorgia.com

Executive Officer

Col Gerhard Frenz
xo@airbasegeorgia.org

Adjutant

Col Clint Contrell
adjutant@airbasegeorgia.org

Finance Officer

Col Peter Dalieri
finance@airbasegeorgia.org

Maintenance Officer

Col Randy Hawkins
maintenance@airbasegeorgia.org

Operations Officer

Col John Currenti
operations@airbasegeorgia.org

Safety Officer

Col Steve Hoofnagle
safety@airbasegeorgia.org

Development Officer

Col Chris Madrid
development@airbasegeorgia.org

Education Officer

Col Jim Dalton
LawDalton@aol.com

Recruiting Officer

Col Jim Dalton
LawDalton@aol.com

Public Information Officer

Col Steve Forsyth
sforsyth106@gmail.com

Marketing Officer

jmarketing@airbasegeorgia.org

Aircraft Rides Officer

Col Yvonne Haley
rides@airbasegeorgia.org

Air Show Scheduling

Col Heather Johnson
Heather.johnson@airbasegeorgia.org

Facility Rentals

Col Mark Richards
facilityrentals@airbasegeorgia.org



Executive Officer Gerhard Frenz presents the Col Ray Niehouse Memorial Award for 2023 to Col Andy Cash. Andy received the award for excellence in his mechanical abilities in regards to the SBD. He is the crew chief to the SBD. Ray was one of the Dixie Wing's founding members.

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From the Left Seat

Col Joel Perkins, Airbase Georgia Leader



2023 was a strong year for us both in rides and airshow operations with 490 incident and accident-free flight hours. That is a testament to our incredible maintenance team, our pilots, our rides team, and our ground crew. Our rides revenue is up significantly from 2022 thanks to rides teams and the introduction of online booking. Thank you, Jeff. Our *Stearman* and P-47 restoration teams have made incredible progress on those projects. The *Stearman* team is very rapidly reaching a point *where* they are going to need an engine. Let's not forget the PT-19 team and the beautiful restoration they have just completed. If you haven't looked at these projects lately, please take go take a look. Dave Reisselemann and our facilities volunteers had a successful year renting the hangar. Mark Richards, our new facilities manager has some great ideas to build on the foundation that Dave created. These are our visible successes for the year and there are more. I also want to recognize the small successes we have every day. There are people here almost every day of the week giving their time and talent silently moving us forward. I want those people to know that they are appreciated.

This year we will face many of the same challenges that we faced last year. We are expecting economic conditions to continue to deteriorate as prices increase for consumables, parts, insurance, etc. and funding for military airshows and contracts continues to decrease. At this moment we are waiting on the Air Force to renew our Test Pilot School contract. While I don't have official word yet, I am hearing from a reliable source that it is unlikely to be renewed. If that happens, what does that mean to us? Financially, it's an immediate reduction in our yearly income of about \$250,000. Operationally, we may have to make some difficult choices. Here's what we

are not going to do. We are not going to worry. Worry is wasted energy. It stifles creativity and robs you of the ability to make clear decisions. Something else we are not going to do is hope. Hope is not a plan. Hope is the decision to be inactive and wait idly for fate to favor you. For the last year, we have been planning for this possibility. We will continue to thrive and grow because we have an incredibly creative and competent staff. We have the most talented and dedicated volunteers. But success this year can't rest solely on them. Our continued success will take all of us.

If you attended the January membership meeting then you are aware of the feasibility study that the staff approved. The cost is \$35,000 and so far through generous donations ABG has raised \$16,800 specifically for this study. After months of meetings and vetting we have chosen to partner with Convergent Nonprofit Solutions. This study is a strategic move to communicate with and identify qualified investors in our community and raise awareness with these investors about who we are and our mission. If we are going to expand our facility for our operations and just as importantly continue evolve in the services and programs we offer our community, then we must seek other forms of financial support. I am certain that this is a necessary next step for ABG's growth. We are seeing rapid negative changes in funding for our traditional streams of revenue, and we must act now to develop new forms of financial support. I am asking for you to get involved and donate to this study.

Col Joel Perkins

Airbase Georgia Leader

Safety Update

By Col Steve Hoofnagle, Safety Officer

safety@airbasegeorgia.org

770-309-5584 cell



I hope everyone who attended January's Monthly Meeting appreciated the Ladder Safety video created by Col. Keith Cox!

We all use ladders, whether at the Airbase, home, or work. They are great tools, but can be great dangers if used improperly.

We are planning to hold annual recurrent training in Active Shooter, First Aid/CPR, and Fire Extinguishers starting in March. Watch for details here and on the Airbase Facebook page and website.

Please send any Safety related questions, comments, or suggestions to "safety@airbasegeorgia.org".

SAFE USE of LADDERS

SIX SAFETY RULES

Use a Ladder of the CORRECT LENGTH

The higher you need to climb, the longer the ladder should be. While you may be tempted to just stretch the last couple of feet, ideally you should be able to stand several rungs below the top to complete your work.



Transport the Ladder CAREFULLY

Shorter ladders may be easily carried by one person. Longer ladders will need to be carried by two, as well as when you're needing to navigate tight areas without worrying about the ladder damaging property.

Inspect the Ladder BEFORE USE

Check the ladder for any damage or unusual wear and tear before use. Things like rusted parts, broken or missing rungs, or damaged feet should be properly repaired or the ladder replaced.



Install the Ladder CORRECTLY

Ladders should be placed so that they are at a 75-degree angle. One foot out for every four feet up should provide the correct angle. Also be sure that you aren't using a closed-step ladder to lean against a wall—they can easily slip since the feet won't sit flat.

Set on the Right SURFACE

The ladder should sit directly on the ground and ideally as flat as possible. You should never set the ladder on top of any other object including a throw rug, a table or chair, a stair tread, or other areas where it won't be stable.



Secure the Ladder AT THE TOP

Make sure the top is on a level surface and can't slide easily back and forth. You can also attach the top of the ladder to a stable surface, or install a 2x4 with some eye bolts and rope to provide a secure anchor point.

CHECK ALSO

Pay Attention to Your Health

There are a lot of things that you shouldn't be doing when you're sick, or may otherwise be impaired, and climbing a ladder is one of them. Even if you think you may be okay, a lot of things can impact your inner ear and therefore your balance even when you otherwise don't feel too bad, which makes it a bad time to climb.

Use a Tool Belt

You need both hands free to climb. This means that you should not be trying to climb a ladder while you're holding a hammer and nails, screwdriver, or other hand tools. Strap on a tool belt and allow it to be another set of hands to hold your tools and keeps your own free for maneuvering.

Check Your Shoes

Non-slip soles on your shoes are a must. The rungs of a ladder can be slick, even when they appear to be well textured. Make sure you aren't wearing slippery shoes, and ideally you will want to wear a pair of work boots that have a heel versus a sole that is completely flat, to provide your foot an extra spot for gripping.



EDUCATION OFFICER

Col Jim Dalton



As your new Education Officer, I wish to thank each member of Airbase Georgia for your support and consideration. I applaud Col Jane Simpson's effort on behalf of Airbase Georgia over the last two years. It is my intention to continue and expand the DOCENT PROGRAM, and anyone wishing to volunteer can get in touch with Jane or me. Further, I plan to initiate a "CADET/MENTOR" program designed and tailored to our unique Airbase. There are two other projects I want to pursue on behalf of ABG: #1. A Speakers' Bureau to address outside groups, and; #2. A program designed to allow our members to adopt a local airport near their homes.

Our next regular member meeting is Saturday, February 3, 2024, I would very much like to see a standing room only (SRO) crowd of members, and bring your spouse, an offspring, a friend or a neighbor.

We plan to interact with the Fayette County Board of Education & the Coweta County Board of Education. Additionally, if you know of a STEM program that would like to tour our facilities, please get in touch with me. If you have idea that can enhance our outreach efforts, please send them to me in writing ... don't tug me on the sleeve during a day at the hangar and whisper in my ear! PUT IT IN WRITING!!

Regards,

Jim Dalton, CAF Airbase Georgia
Education Officer

PLANE CRAZY



Recently declassified documents capture a rare photo of the Sukoi Su-77 (NATO designation "Longfellow"). Preliminary flight tests only indicate one deficiency ... you guessed it ... turning radius.

Facility Rentals

**Col Mark Richards,
Facility Rental Officer**



Happy New Year and welcome to what is shaping up to be a big year in facility rentals for Airbase Georgia. Our event rentals for 2024 remain strong with numerous inquiries weekly. This is important because each rental at Airbase Georgia represents an opportunity to not only fulfill someone's dream of a special venue for a special occasion, but it also represents an opportunity for us to showcase our airbase. Each event opens the door to potential new members, potential outreach to numerous communities through the event guests, potential ride and PX customers, potential new event rental opportunities and donations from potential donors. And as we discussed in the January Members Meeting, the revenue generated from a rental event is all "non prop turning revenue" which represents around a 98% profit for our airbase.

Hop's & Prop's and Wine & Warbirds have been missing from our rental events since COVID. Both of these events are back in 2024 and they not only equal huge exposure for Airbase Georgia, but they allow us to feature every aspect of our airbase and our mission. I will continue to update you on these events as we complete each stage of the event planning.

In closing this month's article, I want to thank all those who met with me and Mike Roberts after the January member meeting and volunteered to join the Facility Event Team. Without each of you, we cannot perform all of the necessary tasks that make these events successful and also showcase Airbase Georgia. I invite anyone interested in joining our team to contact me or Mike Roberts for more information.

February 2024 2/18, Meeting Room – McGowan Card Game

March 2024 3/23, Hanger & Meeting Room – Whitewater Baseball Event

April 2024 4/06, Hanger, Meeting Room & Ramp – Hops & Props

As always, you may direct potential rental clients to facilityrentals@airbasegeorgia.org →





Col Richard “Rich” Thomas

Richard Sidney Thomas, 71, passed away on December 17, 2023, in Fayetteville, Georgia with his wife at his side. Rich had been battling a multitude of medical issues including complications from surgeries for a short while.



Rich was born on February 28, 1952 at Great Lakes, Illinois.

After graduating from high school and briefly attending Old Dominion University, he enlisted and proudly served his country in the United States Navy. He was an aircraft mechanic specializing in jet engines and became a P-3 Orion Flight Engineer racking up more than 5,000 hours in flight. During his Naval career, Rich earned two associate degrees. He retired as a Chief Aviation Machinist Mate. He absolutely loved the Navy.

Upon retirement from the Navy, Rich joined the Technical Operations Center team at Delta Air Lines in Atlanta as an aircraft mechanic. He and his wife and daughters relocated from Maine to Fayetteville, Georgia in 1991.

During his time at Delta, Rich earned a Bachelor of Science and a Master of Science degree from Embry Riddle Aeronautical University. He also taught as adjunct faculty for Embry Riddle in their Airframes and Powerplants certification program for upcoming aircraft mechanics, both on the college and graduate school level.

Rich retired from Delta in 2006 and went to work for Lockheed Martin in Engineering Support for the C-130J aircraft. He retired from Lockheed Martin in 2018.

He was a member of the Airbase Georgia, Commemorative Air Force in Peachtree City, Georgia, the Fayette Fliers Club, and the Flint River Astronomy Club. He also taught a course on astronomy to high school students at the Foundry School and most recently presented on space to fourth graders at the Liberty Charter School.

Family was of the utmost importance to Rich and he treasured being with them and with friends. He was fiercely patriotic and a staunch constitutionalist. He was passionate about teaching, aviation, sailing, and all things science, particularly astronomy, and history.

A Celebration of Rich’s Life will be held at 11:00 AM on Friday, January 26, 2024 at the Chapel of Mowell Funeral Home, Fayetteville. The family will receive friends from 10:00-11:00 AM prior to the service at the funeral home.

Stearman Update

Col Jeff Clark



The *Stearman* team achieved a big milestone since last month's update. As you can see from the photo to the left, the fuselage has been removed from the rotisserie and is now sitting on the landing gear.

The team is now preparing to begin the initial assembly and pre-rigging of the wings. Once everything fits together properly, the plane will be disassembled once again for final covering and painting.

I should also mention that the formal airworthiness inspection of the wings prior to covering has been completed. The inspector had high praise for the team on the quality of the work they have completed so far.

Right: Col Malcolm Lelliott inspecting flying wires in preparation for pre-rigging.



Left: Col Geoff Lelliott installing a landing gear leg fairing after mounting the gear.



Now that the PT-19 has returned to flight, I am excited that several colonels from the PT team have volunteered to help with the *Stearman*. The amazing fabric and painting skills they developed finishing the PT (which, by the way, looks fantastic) should really help accelerate the progress. If you want to help out too, please contact me at jeff.clark@airbasegeorgia.org or visit the project team in the shop on just about any Tuesday, Thursday, or Saturday.

Photos by Col Charles Burcher.

Stearman Update (cont.)



Mike Lamble completing fabric work on the upper wing center section.

Standing on its own.



Development Officer Update

Col Chris Madrid

This month's report highlights World War II 80th Anniversaries, changing demographics, 12 Planes of Christmas, 2024 ABG business outlook, and a project to fund a feasibility study (market research) to determine if there is support in our local community for a major fundraising campaign benefitting Airbase Georgia.



CAF Roots, D-Day 80th Anniversary, Masters of the Air Premier, and a Look Ahead

The CAF was founded by men and women who wanted to preserve America's World War II military aviation heritage to honor the Greatest Generation. Today, there are only 119,550 World War II veterans remaining of the 16.1 million Americans who fought in the war, according to 2023 Department of Veteran Affairs statistics. Over the next two years we will mark the 80th Anniversary of D-Day and the end of World War II. Given the recent decline in U.S. History and Civics scores among 8th graders, we should be deeply concerned that the memory and legacy of the Greatest Generation will be lost with the passing of the last World War II veteran.

For many of us Baby Boomers, World War II history enthusiasts and warbird fans there are high hopes that Apple TV's upcoming miniseries "Masters of the Air", scheduled to premier Jan. 26, will spark an interest in Warbird preservation among Gen X, Millennials and Gen Z. Combined the three groups represent 70% of the population. *More importantly, over 50% of the US population is now under the age of 40.* The oldest Baby Boomers, the children, and grandchildren of World War II veterans, will turn 80 in 2025, the 80th anniversary of the end of World War II. Connecting with young men and women who we can inspire by our mission will be key to keeping WWII aircraft flying and the survival of the CAF in Georgia and across the country.

2023: Scores in U.S. history and civics for eighth-graders are down across the U.S., according to recent results from the assessment administered by National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). According to the report, known as the "Nation's Report Card", U.S. History scores are the lowest recorded since the assessment began in 1994. The data also marked the first-ever drop in civics. To read the full report, go to <https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/ushistory/>

Estimated US Population by Generation (millions)

- *The Silent/Greatest Generation (Born before 1945) 32.0*
- *Baby Boom Generation (1946–1964) 71.6 million*
- *Generation X (1965–1980) 65.2*
- *Millennial Generation or Generation Y (1981–1996) 72.2*
- *Generation Z or iGen (Born 1997–2010) 86.4*

Continued on the next page. 

Development Officer Update (cont.)

12 Planes of Christmas

The core mission of the CAF is to restore and fly World War II aircraft. 2024 has started on a high note. In addition to completing the restoration of the PT-19, work on the Stearman and P-47N Thunderbolt continues. The CAF 12 Planes of Christmas is a vital source of funds for both projects.

The annual campaign raised \$15,185 from 67 donations for the Stearman. We also raised \$109,127 from 82 donations for the P-47. Total funds raised for Airbase Georgia's restoration projects through 12 Planes of Christmas was \$124,312. Over the last two years we have raised \$263,931 for Airbase Georgia restoration projects through 12 Planes of Christmas. The funds are earmarked for the restoration projects and cannot be used for other purposes.

The campaign was a team effort, but I would like to first recognize Mike McGowan's for his generous \$2,800 matching grant that was instrumental in the Stearman exceeding its \$10,000 goal. Also, Philip Beegle for his energy in driving the P-47N project and working closely with the Ray Foundation and Karl Allen. The Ray Foundation has so far donated \$150,000 to the P-47N Thunderbolt Restoration Project. I would also like to thank Randy Hawkins for his participation and flexibility. The campaign was promoted via PIO Steve Forsyth media release and social media. During the campaign we created several videos and provided members with Hotline updates.

Our next steps are to thank donors and distribute a media release announcing the results.

A Look Back

We have created great financial success over the last few years thanks to the hard work of volunteers leading and participating in the airshow, rides, movie contracts, TPS and facility rentals programs. Red Nose is our airshow and rides workhorse, generating most of our rides volume and revenue. The retirement of the hangar mortgage and previous investments in hangar renovations will support ongoing aircraft restoration projects, maintenance, operations, fundraising and community service such as

hosting JROTC cadets and students exploring careers in aviation. Airbase Georgia members have worked hard over the last 37 years to earn the reputation as a consistently strong performing unit in the CAF.

Challenges Surface in 2024

Renewal of the important and lucrative TPS contract is pending. There were rumblings at ICAS that airshows may dial back warbird performances because of accidents over the last several years. We also learned that DoD airshow budget limitations may put pressure on our pricing models. Regarding rides, the warbird community anticipates that the FAA regulation permitting rides in warbirds such as Red Nose and the SBD will be approved, however there is underlying concern that all warbird rides programs will face ongoing scrutiny. An overarching concern is an economy where inflation could impact discretionary purchases and our costs of doing business. 2024 could be a perfect storm for aviation organizations that rely on airshows and rides to fund operations and restoration projects. The business outlook and financial forecast was discussed during the Jan 6 staff and member meetings.

The challenges should not come as a surprise to anyone who has been associated with the CAF or warbird movement for any length of time.

Last year we began developing contingency plans if we failed to win the TPS contract. Proposed and discussed in the staff meeting was a project to raise funds to conduct a feasibility study or market research to determine if there is support in our local community for major fundraising campaign benefitting Airbase Georgia. A motion to approve fundraising for the feasibility was unanimously approved by the staff. The motion is on the following page.

Continued on the next page. 

Development Officer Update (cont.)

Airbase Georgia is a high performing all volunteer flying operation. We operate seven warbirds and have over 570 members in KASTRAK. No other CAF has ever had three aircraft restorations underway at one time. Three of the aircraft are original to the CAF. When all the aircraft are home the hangar is packed.

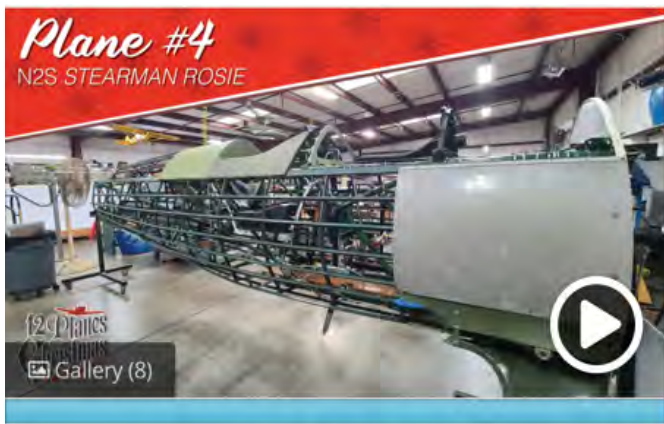
This week I emailed all staff members information about the most common concerns all nonprofits are facing. The concerns are money, the economy and staffing. Adapting to change is also a challenge for nonprofits. We are in the same position. We have reached the point where we must explore new funding sources and reduce our reliance on airshows and rides operations and maintenance. The hangar rental program is highly profitable and has upside potential, but at the end of the day we are limited by the number of sales days, prospects, and airshows. More importantly we are also limited by the number of volunteers willing to consistently commit to a demanding business model.

I would like to make a motion that the staff approve me raising money to commission a feasibility study to determine if local employers, foundations, and individuals will contribute to a major fundraising and capital campaign to benefit Airbase Georgia. A feasibility study is market research that will also tell how much money can be raised and who will be willing to donate. Most importantly it will tell us if we have earned the right to ask for financial support. In other words, can we demonstrate and quantify the value we bring to the community we are asking to support us financially? A feasibility study is a tool used by successful nonprofits to achieve a major fundraising goal. My goal is to learn if we can raise \$3M-\$5M that would be used to help offset our annual operating expenses and expand our hangar facility so that we can accommodate our new aircraft and continue to rent the facility. The feasibility study is necessary as a first step in securing Airbase Georgia's future for the next 25 years.

The budget for the study is \$35,000. I propose that Airbase Georgia will need to cover a negotiated HQ fee. I will collaborate with Peter and Joel to coordinate with HQ and will socialize the project with the membership. I strongly believe this is the

key to our future and personally pledge \$500 to the project.

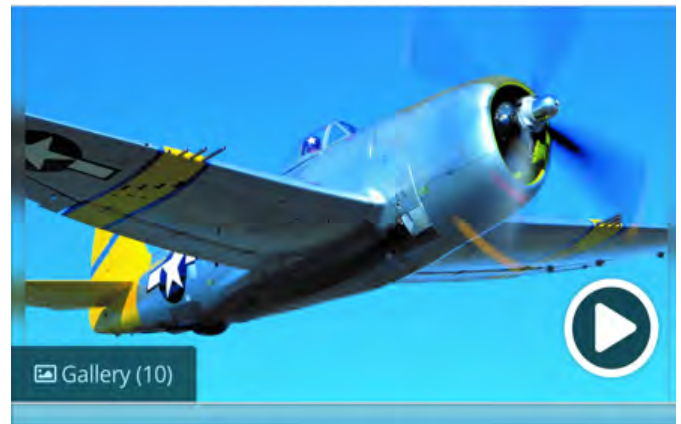




N2S “Rosie Stearman” N50329

Goal \$10,000
Raised \$15,185
Contributors 67

William Granger; Lawrence Foster; Judith Taylor; Becky Beasley; Robert Thornton; Mike Gaynor; Matthew Kenner; Michael Oppeau; Mike Brown; Stan Musick; Edgar Anglin; James Shepherd; Richard Henton; Jay Linden; James Kent; Glenn Carroll; Rozella Beck; David Mason; Joseph Basilone; Francis Kalinowski; Phil Webb; Emma Hibbs; W. R. Beaver; Paul Postell, Jr; Elliot Levy; Anonymous; John Flynn; Rollie Dorsett; Ken Holston; Dave Gutierrez; Martha O’Lone; Heather Johnson; Malcolm Lelliott; Scott Elmore; Jane Simpson; Elizabeth McCloskey; Harold Taylor; Wes Stowers; Nelson Willis; Joanne Trefethen; Barry Cohen; Marjolijn Hameetman; Lee Eltzroth; Jim van den Heuvel; Peter Baxter; Robert Roseberry; Ninette McDonald; Dirk Rochette; Norman Parker; Ian Black; William Miller; Vince Garland; Laurie Linden; Gerhard Frenz; Jeff Clark; Bob Grove; Clint Cottrell; Steve Hoofnagle; Tom Thompson; Christopher Schamel; Chris Madrid; William Barnes; Charles King; Bridget Forsyth



P-47N Thunderbolt N844WA

Goal \$50,000
Raised \$109,127
Contributors 82

Donald Miller; Carlos Castellanos Howell; Charles Cook; Cheryl Colmery; David Mull; Matthew Kenner; Tom Deaver; Scott Elmore; Roland A. Herriges; Richard J Burbine; William Drummond; Scott Linville; George Areson; Tim Savage; Mark Streit; Moreno Aguiari; Robert Harris; Stan Musick; Ray Foundation; David Alan Industries, Inc; Select Aerospace Industries, Inc; Michael Ganschow-Green; Greg Reddick; Joseph Basilone; Walt Beachell; Ivey Williamson; Donald Miller; David Richardson; Steve Drager; Darrell Abby; Roger Hughes; Gary Foote; Randy Coaker; Ken Holston; Daniel O’Lone; Harold McDonald III; Justin Zgoda; Heather Johnson; Rob and Yvonne Haley; Gregg Scott; John Bixby; Arthur Southwick; Dale Hiltner; Jim Price; Bruce Thomas; Clay Neubauer; Mark Todd; James van den Heuvel; Chris Madrid; Dennis Beach; Edward Gibbons; Bridget Forsyth; Marlin Hankey; Austin Herr; Paul Hawkins; Richard Pokladnik; Jeff Muhlenkamp; Gerhard Frenz; Bob Grove; Alan Smith; James Carlin; John cork; Jeffrey Clark; Barry Hancock; Taylor Stevenson; John Currenti; Joel Perkins; Steve Hoofnagle; Mutha Hubbard; Dave Dettmann; Blake Stevenson; Rev. D. E. Clark Jr.; Tom Nichols; Dave Riesselmann; Tom Thompson; Christopher Schamel; Philip Beegle; Chris Madrid; Charles King; Mike Dinger; Gene Henriksen; Dan Fordice



Rides Update

Col Yvonne Haley - Rides Officer

2023 was a very productive year for Airbase Georgia's Rides Program. We sold 317 rides which provided a 75% increase in gross rides revenue. Our airplanes flew 318 paid rides. A huge thank you goes out to our mechanics, pilots, ground crew, rides team, and many others that were integral as all of this success could not have been possible without them.



Looking ahead to 2024, Airbase Georgia will be promoting rides at facility rental, Open House, and offsite events. Several of these events are already planned such as Hops & Props, Wine & Warbirds, Senoia Car Show, and Delta Veterans Celebration.

The Rides team is actively planning for Airbase Georgia's confirmed Ride events for 2024. We will be at Sun 'n Fun in April, Reading WWII Weekend in June, Thunder Over Michigan and Oshkosh in July, and Cullman in November. Many more potential Ride events are being explored.

Anyone interested in learning more about the Rides program is invited to attend the Rides Training class on January 27th at 1:00. If you have any questions or are interested but unable to attend that date, please email Rides@airbasegeorgia.org.

Per Airbase Georgia policy, members must attend a training class and pass a checkout *annually* to be qualified/eligible for the Rides team. It is the responsibility of members to schedule their individual checkout that will be completed at Airbase Georgia.

Airbase Georgia Calendar:

All events (onsite, offsite, rides, non-rides) are added to the Airbase Georgia calendar once they are confirmed. Members have access to this calendar on the Airbasegeorgia.org website. I encourage all members to become aware of what is scheduled as these are great opportunities for getting involved.

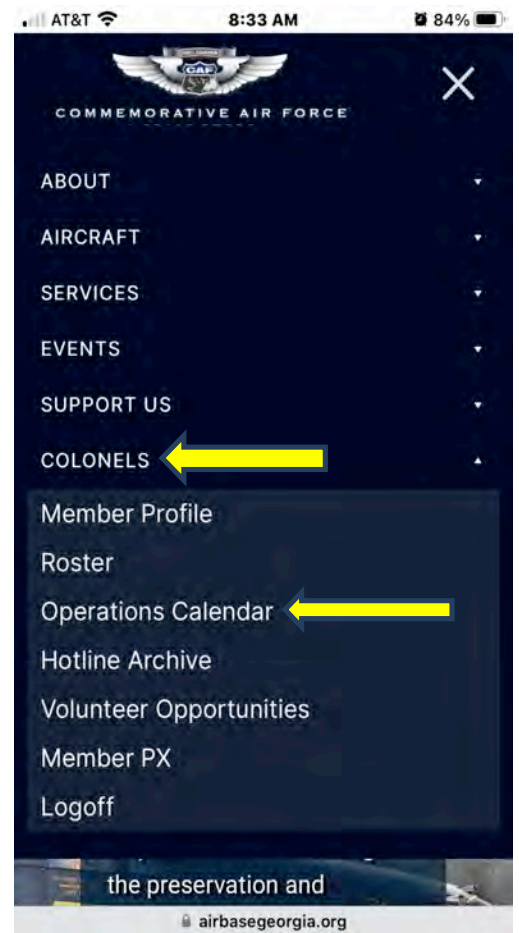
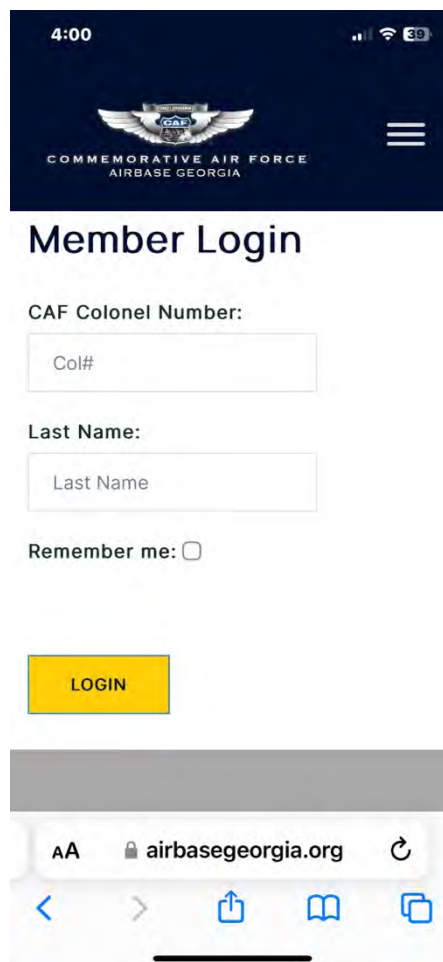
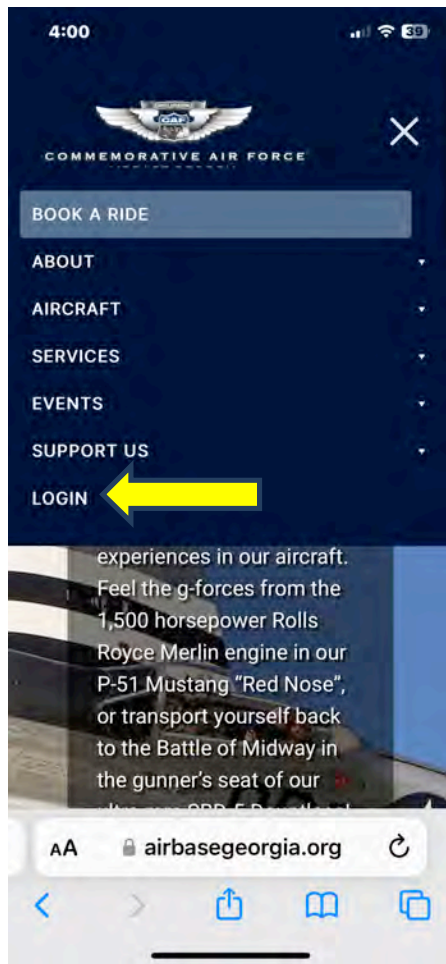
Members can access this calendar on the Airbasegeorgia.org website using the following steps (illustrations on the next page).

1. Click on "LOGIN"
2. Sign in with your member number and last name
3. Click on "COLONELS"
4. Click on "Operations Calendar"

Rides Update (cont.)

Members can access this calendar on the Airbasegeorgia.org website using the following steps.

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2. Sign in with your member number and last name
3. Click on "COLONELS"
4. Click on "Operations Calendar"



PT-19 Corner

Col Tom Thompson

After a long restoration the PT-19 took to the air for the first time in over two years. This flight took place following some last-minute actions to get her ready.



Left: Cols Joe Broker and Steve Barnshaw steady the tail of the airplane as it gets weighed.

Photos by Col Charles Burcher.

Right: Col Tom Thompson uses a level to find the balance point.



PT-19 Corner (cont.)

Right: Cols Roy Handler and Tom Thompson make some last-minute checks.



Below: Out of the hangar for the first flight.



Col Tom Thompson watches as the PT-19 revs the engine.

PT-19 Corner (cont.)



Piloted by Col George Harrison, the PT-19 returns to the air.

A screenshot of a flight tracking application. The left panel displays aircraft details for N5215Z, a Fairchild M-62A, including its registration, age, and current status. The right panel shows a map of the Atlanta area with a green flight path starting from Atlanta Regional Airport and looping through Peachtree City, Sharpsburg, Turin, and Senoia. The flight path is marked with a green line and a yellow line.

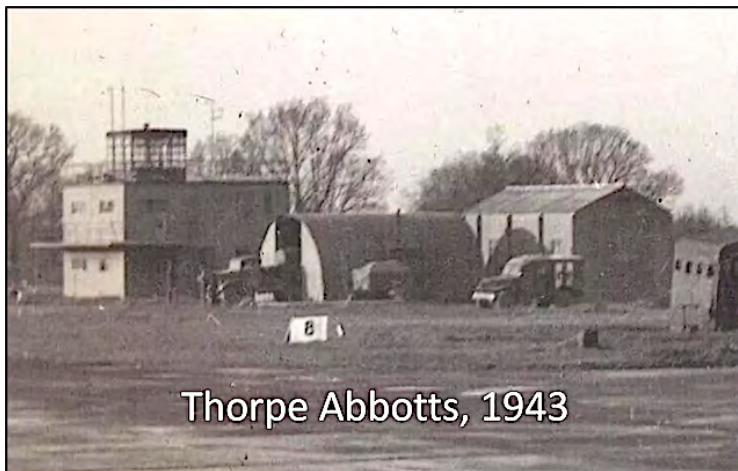
The PT-19's first flight, courtesy of Col Finton Thompson.

MASTERS OF THE AIR – A Behind The Scenes Look

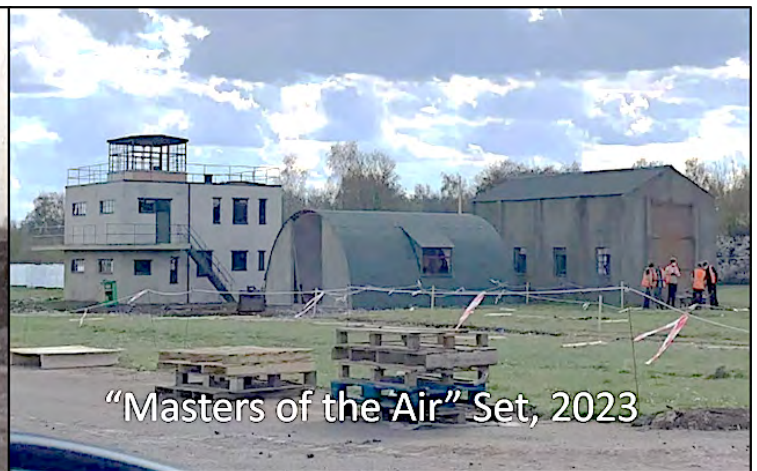
Col Matt Ziemann

After a 10 year wait the release of *Masters of the Air* is finally upon us. A work trip to England with a visit to Thorpe Abbots, home of the “Bloody Hundredth,” led to getting connected with author Don Miller, producer and Playtone

accounts of Harry Crosby’s “A Wing and a Prayer,” Atlanta native Frank Murphy’s “Luck of the Draw,” and Kenneth Lemmons “The Forgotten Man: The Mechanic,” on top of countless other B-17 crewmember accounts and reference books.



Thorpe Abbots, 1943



“Masters of the Air” Set, 2023

senior executive Kirk Saduski, and screenwriter John Orloff. In October, Saduski and Orloff visited Maxwell Air Force Base to give an inside look at the making of the Apple TV series “Masters of the Air” (Miller was supposed to join but fell ill) to include the first look at any of the final footage seen outside of the production team. If I had to sum up my impressions from Saduski and Orloff’s visit and conversations with Don Miller it would be a commitment to excellence.

Miller’s father flew in the 8th Air Force. When he passed away Miller felt some guilt for not capturing his story so he started on “Masters of the Air” as a way to atone for that. Although the series carries the same title as Don Miller’s book, it is impossible to encompass the totality of Miller’s book in nine episodes, focusing instead on the 100th Bomb Group (the “Bloody Hundredth” as a representative unit, much like Easy Company in *Band of Brothers*. Those who have read Miller’s book know that of the nearly 700 pages, less than 10% focuses on the 100th Bomb Group. To build out the stories of the men and life in the 100th Bomb Group, Orloff relied heavily on the personal

Orloff said that this project consumed his life for 10 years and he read everything he could. Don Miller says that Orloff knows more about the 100th Bomb Group than he does, and that Orloff has now become one of the top 100th Bomb Group historians.

Reports surfaced in 2013 that HBO had signed up to do another series in the same vein as *Band of Brothers* and *The Pacific*, again produced by the proven team of Steven Spielberg’s Amblin Entertainment and Tom Hanks/Gary Goetzman’s Playtone Productions, led by Playtone’s senior executive for non-fiction productions Kirk Saduski. Saduski served as Executive-in-Charge of *Band of Brothers* and co-producer of *The Pacific* on top of producing a number of other quality productions like *John Adams*, *David McCullough: Painting with Words*, and CNN’s “*The Decades*” series. This project was more personal for Spielberg. Even though he may not have been as hands-on on this set, his father served as a radio operator on B-25s in the Pacific. Upon the release of both *Band of Brothers* and *The Pacific*, Spielberg’s dad kept asking “when are you going to tell OUR

MASTERS OF THE AIR (cont.)

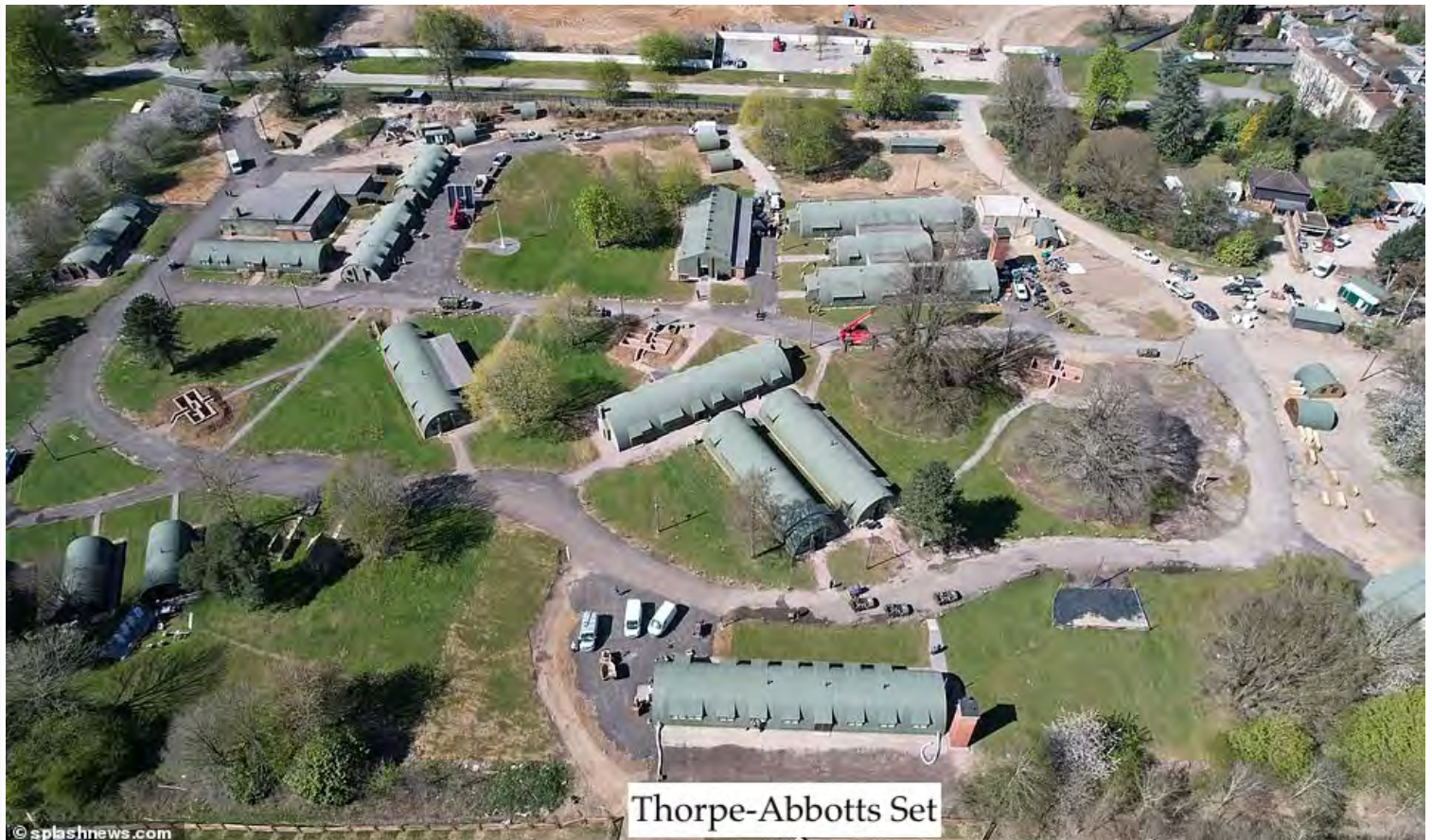
story—the story of the Army Air Corps.”

Tom Hanks’ interest in World War Two has been well known ever since *Saving Private Ryan*, but even Don Miller was impressed when Hanks came to visit, bringing three suitcases full of books on WWII. John Orloff, who wrote the screenplay, was also a known entity, having written two of the most impactful episodes of *Band of Brothers*—episode 2 “Day of Days” (the D-Day episode) and episode 9 “Why We Fight” (the concentration camp episodes).

Unfortunately, any updates fell into a black hole for the next number of years as HBO’s enthusiasm waned when faced with the required production budget along with a change in HBO’s leadership and strategic business model, and skepticism mounted that the series would never get produced. Hope was revived in 2019 when Apple bought the rights from HBO and greenlit production...until the world shut down in 2020 for COVID. Production finally began in 2021, filming at a few principal locations in England to include the creation of nearly a whole air base and POW

camp. For those who question why it took ten years to bring this project to fruition, it really took less than 5 from green light to release, with most of the heavy production work being conducted during the pandemic, and the scale of production far exceeded anything comparable with *Band of Brothers* and *The Pacific*. The \$250 million budget makes it the largest television production in history and, to quote Saduski “we’re over budget.”

For the set of “Thorpe Abbots” a base of Nissen huts were built (photo below) In typical productions a building’s role changes based on the days shoot and the phase of production. With *Masters* the buildings kept their purpose for the duration of production—headquarters was always headquarters, the infirmary was always the infirmary, the officer’s club was always the officer’s club, etc. There were no open sets with basically three walls and an open side for the cameras and lighting—all filming took place inside the Nissen huts and used only the organic lighting from overhead light bulbs instead of usual stage lighting in order to preserve a natural feel.



MASTERS OF THE AIR (cont.)

As was done with *Band of Brothers*, the attention to detail within the sets was down to the micro level. The paperwork on a desk in Operations would be the frag order for that day—and not just A frag order from WWII, but THE frag order for the specific mission being shot on that day. Even if you dug down to the bottom paper in a stack it would still accurately reflect that moment in time, like individual mission reports from the previous mission.



Operations Desk.

The bulletin boards in the infirmary would have the correct list of patients for that specific day, and would be updated to reflect the correct day depicted in the shooting. The sets were so convincing that when members from the 100th Bomb Group Museum at Thorpe Abbots set foot

inside they wept. One of the museum volunteers was a boy around Thorpe Abbots during the war and said it was like a time machine taking him back 80 years. The museum curator, Debra Hubbard, told us “I never thought I’d set foot on wartime Thorpe Abbots.” A second principal set was the recreation of the Stalag Luft III POW camp where so many allied POWs ended up and which becomes a major part of the series. More fake snow was used on the Stalag set than ever before in film in history and, to quote Saduski “we’re over budget.”

This attention to detail carried into the “air.” I put air in quotes because no actual B-17s flew in the production. That fact is disappointing to many, but there are a number of realities at play. As we know, there is only one operational B-17 in Europe, and the costs to fly additional ones over from the US - both in terms of operational cost as well as insurance costs - was untenable, even with a quarter billion dollar budget. CAF’s “Sentimental Journey” was, however, used by sound engineers to record the sounds inside and out of a B-17 in operation. While *Memphis Belle* is often the go-to example for what could be done with real B-17s, one must realize that upon watching the movie, you can *tell* there were only five (and one was destroyed in production). There is simply no way to portray the scale of maximum effort large-scale raids without CGI—it has never been done even back in the *Twelve O’Clock High* days when B-17s were more plentiful. Even then, most of the actual B-17s shown in *Twelve O’Clock High* were shown from the ground in close up shots or takeoff and landing. Most of the action took place inside the aircraft or on the ground. Yes, we would have loved to see some real B-17s for close-up work and CGI for distant aircraft as done in *Devotion*, but it just wasn’t practical.



Thorpe Abbots control tower and replica B-17s

MASTERS OF THE AIR (cont.)

With that said, the tradeoff is in being able to accurately depict the carnage during 8th Air Force missions. Saduski and Orloff were adamant to not repeat the overdone and unrealistic CGI scenes as depicted most recently in *Midway* and *Red Tails*. Continuing the same attention to detail as with the sets and paperwork on the ground, each formation is recreated accurately down to the individual aircraft and crews, where they flew on any given mission, and what happened to them, even if in the background.

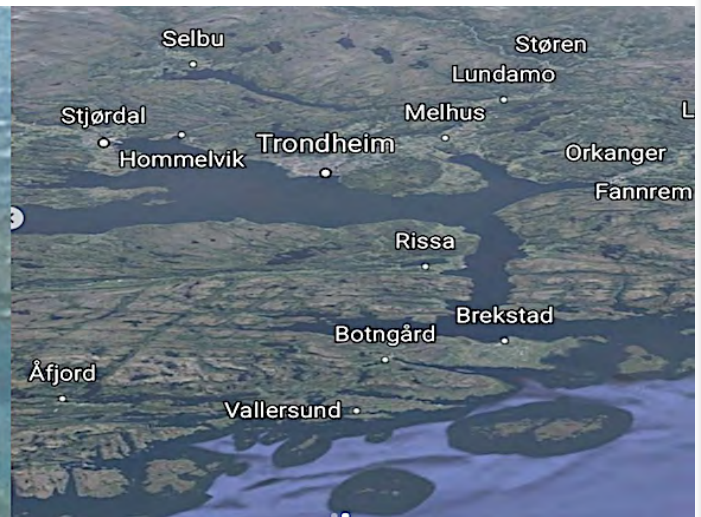
For example, if the #2 aircraft in the low squadron was hit by an FW-190 and took out the #3 engine, you will see that. If the lead aircraft in the high squadron took a direct hit from flak and only three crew-members got out, you would see that, even if those aircraft didn't have any visible characters in the show. This was a challenge for the visual effects personnel to keep track of the whole formations, but again showed the production's attention to detail and commitment to accuracy. The same holds true for terrain mapping. As you can see, if the mission depicted was approaching the coast near Trondheim, the ground you see is the actual coastline near Trondheim (photo below) unlike in *Midway* where the Marshall Islands are depicted with mountainous terrain. Although the visual effects aren't perfect, the technology has come a long way even in just the past four years of production. Orloff says the visual effects

team considered this project much more difficult than *Game of Thrones*. Why? In *Game of Thrones* nobody really knows what a dragon looks or sounds like, but we do know what a B-17 looks and sounds like, and how combat formations were composed, so to get that right was a daunting challenge.



One of the replica B17s comes in for a landing.

Two and a half replica B-17s were built—2 complete airframes and one fuselage section used for internal shots. The replicas were built off of original B-17 designs. Since they weren't going to be flyable they tried different techniques to build the wings but it turns out the best way to make a wing is to make it the way it was meant to fly! The replicas had electric motors to spin the propellers and one even had electric motors for the wheels to allow it to move under its own power on the ground.



MASTERS OF THE AIR (cont.)

Inside, the attention to detail continued. John Orloff points out a placard located down and nearly out of sight as an adapter for using British equipment to charge the oxygen system. (Right photo) Again, that placard would never be seen on camera, but the production crew wanted to be as authentic as possible and included every detail down to the rivet and all switches and gauges in the correct locations.

The fuselage replica was built slightly larger than scale and built in segments to allow for filming internal shots. (One of the segments in photo to the right) If filming the cockpit, for example, the bomb bay could be slid aft to allow for camera crews to fit, and different sections could be fitted with squibs and other special effects to have battle damage. The whole fuselage assembly could fit inside a circular frame on hydraulics known as the “rotisserie” to rotate the plane through any phase, for example as if the plane was in a spin or rolling over from a wing blowing off, with the background being projected on screens surrounding the mock-up, so the actors could actually see where an enemy fighter was coming from instead of pretending to look where they were supposed to be.



Filming during COVID added significant extra costs to the production. To comply with UK health restrictions filming had to be more staggered than normal to account for exposures, quarantines, outbreaks, cast and crew sickness, etc. The production crew included an entire team focused solely on COVID protocols like testing, cleaning, and contact tracing. That additional manpower and the delays in filming due

to COVID extended the time that production still had to provide food and lodging for all cast and crew, thus incurring significant additional unexpected costs. This contributed to the production cost overruns, which led to the series being shortened from ten episodes to nine. Saduski and Orloff assured that no primary content was cut—they just had to compress some story lines to make the series fit in nine episodes.



Top: Forward segment of flight deck.
Bottom: The “rotisserie.”



Just as with *Band of Brothers* and *The Pacific* (and *Saving Private Ryan*), the actors went through a Boot Camp run by Captain Dale Dye. This one was different, though, for a few reasons. For one, those other productions were all focused on ground combat—Dye’s background. Instead of learning small unit tactics and weapons familiarization the actors had to learn about crew positions, high altitude operations, and airpower

MASTERS OF THE AIR (cont.)

theory — more classroom academics than field training. To quote Orloff, “Elvis knows airpower and the importance of air superiority!” In addition, COVID prevented the typical barracks environment—have the actors immersed together 24/7 even at night. They still had long days with marching, learning how to wear a uniform, customs and courtesies, and rank structures, but the overall process was a little less intensive than Dye’s previous boot camps. Some would say that sounds about right for aircrew!

Some of the trailers and other promotional material have raised some questions. A keen eye might note the silver B-17s—supposed to represent G-model B-17s—don’t have chin turrets. The original plan was to correctly show G-models, but due to the cost overruns it was deemed too expensive to add the chin turrets, which would have required physically modifying the replicas as well as all of the CGI models, and was deemed not significant enough to justify the cost. Unfortunately, visual effects still cost money—the amphibious landing sequence in *The Pacific* cost over \$30,000 just to add some explosions in a 5-second sequence. Instead, the transition to G-models will only be shown via the unpainted bare aluminum aircraft. We may all know the difference, but the majority of viewers won’t.

Another common question has been about the inclusion of Tuskegee Airmen, as the Tuskegee Airmen were in the Mediterranean theater and never escorted the 100th Bomb Group, and were not featured in Miller’s book. Their representation is historically accurate—they are never shown escorting the 100th and their inclusion is focused on the shared experience as POWs with members from the 100th. Orloff’s role as a screenwriter is to tell a compelling story, and the story of the Tuskegee Airmen in a segregated Air Force being integrated in the shared hardship of a POW camp was a compelling and accurate story, one that had Don Miller’s full support and buy-in from the beginning.

Some have also questioned why giving some characters mustaches who never had them. Feedback from *Band of Brothers* indicated that viewers had trouble distinguishing characters because they looked similar enough. The added mustaches were an attempt to provide some distinction to aid in character identification.

No, the series won’t be perfect—we’ve talked about some known inaccuracies. Orloff admits to finding mistakes he wishes he would have caught. Sometimes the directors take things in a different direction. Sometimes the visual effects team got a little carried away. However, I’m confident the story will keep us engaged enough that those details either fall to the background or get completely overlooked. This series will hopefully help to educate the rest of the nation on the sacrifices made by the Army Air Forces—literally fighting a war in an atmosphere where humans cannot survive, in a time when the odds of completing a tour were less than 25%, and losing more men in just the 8th Air Force than the entire Marine Corps in all of WWII. Kirk Saduski said the focus on the story is on the men—what was inside them that allowed them to keep going up again and again, and why this was necessary.

Strategic bombing may not have worked out like the visionaries at the Air Corps Tactical School envisioned, but the war could not have been won without it. Without the air superiority achieved by the 8th Air Force, D-day would not have been successful. As Eisenhower said, “If I didn’t have air superiority, I wouldn’t be here.” The “masters of the air” made that happen. On that note, the Normandy Institute will be unveiling a memorial to the 8th Air Force this summer in recognition of the importance of air superiority to the invasion. The memorial will feature sculptures of four individuals representing the 8th Air Force: Lt Gen Jimmy Doolittle as commander of the 8th Air Force, Rosie Rosenthal from the 100th Bomb Group to represent the bombers, Col Don Blakeslee of the 4th Fighter Group to represent the fighters, and Medal of Honor recipient Sgt Maynard “Snuffy” Smith to represent both the enlisted crewmembers and the courage demonstrated by so many. At the end of the series Apple will air a documentary on the 100th Bomb Group.

As to whether there will be a fourth series focused on the Navy, the answer is “not quite”—at least not by the same Spielberg/Hanks/ Goetzman/ Saduski team. As Saduski said “No. We’re all getting older—and these projects take a lot of time and a lot of work”. He said that *Greyhound* (and the upcoming *Greyhound 2*) were decided to be their homage to the Navy.

MASTERS OF THE AIR (cont.)



Thorpe Abbotts bar: 1945



2023



The POW Camp.



ON THE HORIZON

February 3, 2024

Staff & Members Meetings

March 2, 2024

Staff & Members Meetings

April 6, 2024

Staff & Members Meetings

Trivia of Aviation

By Col Casey Roszell

The Sikorsky H5s gained its fame during the Korean War when it was called upon repeatedly to rescue United Nations pilots shot down behind enemy lines and to evacuate wounded personnel from frontline areas. It was eventually replaced in most roles by the H-19 *Chickasaw*.

