



# AIRBASE GEORGIA *Dispatch*



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December 2024

Education through living history.

Keep 'em flying.

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## MERRY CHRISTMAS AND HAPPY HOLIDAYS FROM THE AIRBASE GEORGIA DISPATCH



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# From the Left Seat

Col Joel Perkins, Airbase Georgia Leader



Dear Airbase Georgia Members,

As 2024 comes to a close, we are proud to say that we are finishing the year stronger than ever. This year, thanks to your unwavering dedication and passion, we accomplished remarkable milestones:

- **840 flight hours logged**
- **\$438,000 in aircraft ride sales**
- **\$62,000 in facility sales**
- **\$1.2 million in revenue**—all generated by our volunteers' tireless efforts.

These numbers are more than just statistics; they are a testament to the heart, spirit, and commitment of our incredible volunteer community.

Our mission at Airbase Georgia is deeply rooted in three principles:

- **Educate:** Teaching younger generations about the critical role military aviation has played in safeguarding our freedom.
- **Inspire:** Sharing the thrill of flying and bringing history to life for countless visitors.
- **Honor:** Remembering the sacrifices of the men and women who built, flew, and maintained these aircraft during World War II.

Without each of you, this hangar would be just another building—empty, silent, and devoid of purpose. These magnificent planes, once grounded, would never again roar to life, and thousands would miss the chance to experience the magic of a Merlin engine or the thunder of a radial. Your work ensures the sights, sounds, and even

the smells of history are kept alive for generations to come.

While we educate and inspire, I believe the most vital aspect of our mission is to **honor**. We are blessed to have this facility and these historic aircraft, tools that allow us to pay tribute to those who gave everything to liberate the world from tyranny. It is our sacred duty to ensure their stories are never forgotten.

Together, we will continue to use this hangar, these aircraft, and our unique talents to share their legacy. We will make certain the world never forgets their sacrifice, courage, and triumph.

From all of us at Airbase Georgia, **Merry Christmas** and may God bless you and your families. Thank you for making 2024 a year to remember and for ensuring our mission lives on.

With heartfelt gratitude,

Joel Perkins

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## Call for Volunteers: Articles and Media Releases

Members are invited to showcase your passion and expertise while contributing to the promotion of CAF Airbase Georgia. As part of our ongoing efforts to engage and inform the public, our goal in 2025 is to increase the number of articles and media releases highlighting the incredible stories, events, and significance of CAF Airbase Georgia.

### What We're Looking For:

- **Articles:** Share compelling narratives about programs, projects, events, artifacts, and personal stories connected to your site or the broader WWII era. These articles may be featured in newsletters, blogs, or partner publications.
- **Media Releases:** Help craft press-ready announcements about upcoming events, special exhibits, or notable milestones at Airbase Georgia.

### How Your Contribution Helps:

#### Your written pieces will:

- Elevate awareness of CAF Airbase Georgia and its unique role in Fayette County and Georgia.
- Attract visitors and partners interested in preserving our shared history.
- Showcase the mission of the CAF in Georgia

### Submission Details:

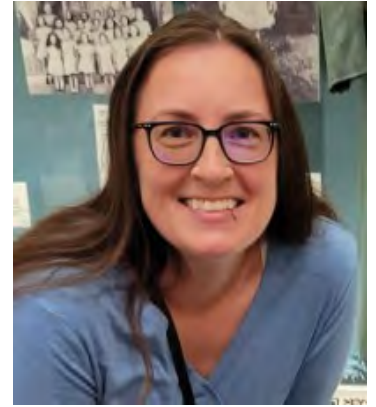
- **Deadline:** [Insert Deadline Date]
- **Length:** Articles should be 500-1,000 words, and media releases should follow the ABG press release format.
- **Format:** Submit your work as a Word document or PDF to Chris Madrid, [chris.madrid@airbasegeorgia.org](mailto:chris.madrid@airbasegeorgia.org) and PIO Steve Forsyth, [sforsyth106@gmail.com](mailto:sforsyth106@gmail.com)
- **Focus:** Topics should connect to the mission of the Georgia WWII Heritage Trail and highlight themes of education, preservation, or community engagement.
- **Approval:** Articles and media releases are approved by the Airbase Leader and Staff prior to distribution.
- **Distribution:** Articles and media releases will be distributed under the direction of Development Officer Chris Madrid and PIO Steve Forsyth.

For more information, contact Development Officer Chris Madrid, [chris.madrid@airbasegeorgia.org](mailto:chris.madrid@airbasegeorgia.org) and PIO Steve Forsyth, [sforsyth106@gmail.com](mailto:sforsyth106@gmail.com)

# Member Engagement

## Col Marybeth Britton

### Volunteer Coordinator



### HAPPY HOLIDAYS TO OUR VOLUNTEERS!

We wish all our volunteer members the happiest of holidays this season. We had a wonderful holiday party this month and it was so great to see everyone. I tried my best to get around and meet new-to-me faces, but if I missed you, please know I am here to support you. We want everyone to find new opportunities to serve this upcoming year. If you are unsure where to fit in, please reach out to me – [volunteers@airbasegeorgia.org](mailto:volunteers@airbasegeorgia.org).

### CURRENT AREAS OF SERVICE AVAILABLE

We have many opportunities regularly available to our volunteers of which you may be unaware. If you're interested in any of the following service positions, please let me know. If you see other needs and want to assist, please contact me.

- \*Property maintenance/landscaping
- \*General cleaning/tidying
- \*Shop maintenance and organization
- \*Educational research/tour planning
- \*Special topic/interest article writing
- \*Community outreach/marketing

- \*Data entry/records/clerical
- \*Event support and planning
- \*Welcome center support
- \*Docent tours
- \*Artifact Research/museum curation
- \*Media production/photography

### TRAINING FOR VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

There are some of our volunteer teams and positions which require training before you can join. We will be offering training soon for those teams and positions. Please watch the operations calendar on our website under the Cols menu to see when those training sessions will be held. As a reminder, training is required for **Rides Team** and **Marshalling Team**. We also require online training and a background check for **Docent Teams** as well as any other position where you work with the public. This training can be done at any time online. Please let me know if you need assistance getting signed up.

### \*\* UPCOMING EVENT OPPORTUNITIES \*\*

All our events are kept on our operations calendar on the Airbase Georgia website. Please login with your colonel ID and then look under the "Colonels" menu. Please check this calendar regularly for opportunities to serve. Special announcements and calls for action will also be sent via hotline emails.

#### On-Site Opportunities:

We have the following private events with which members needed to help with parking, event setup/breakdown, and event service.

**March 21, Friday – March 22, Saturday – Private event – Whitewater Baseball**

**March 23, Sunday – Private event – Young Life banquet**

**March 27, Thursday – March 28, Friday – Private event – Fayette County Education**

Cont.

Member Engagement (Cont.)

**\*\*April 12, Saturday – Airbase Georgia Spring Open House\*\***

Planning for this even will start very soon! Please let us know if you would like to be involved. There are a lot of areas to assist with this: welcoming the public, providing direction, parking assistance, golf cart shuttles, presentations, general event setup/breakdown, serving the public, helping with merchandise tables, assisting vendors with setup needs, and much more. Please contact [volunteers@airbasegeorgia.org](mailto:volunteers@airbasegeorgia.org) or [facilityrentals@airbasegeorgia.org](mailto:facilityrentals@airbasegeorgia.org) to sign up!

**April 25, Friday – April 26, Saturday – Private event – PTC CVB Hops & Props**

This is a large event that brings a lot of business and publicity to Airbase Georgia. We need everyone available to assist with this event.

## LET'S LEARN MORE ABOUT OUR MEMBERS

It is my goal to learn more about each of our member volunteers. I want to know about your personal interests and what made you join Airbase Georgia. I want to encourage you in your personal life and help celebrate your achievements. Please send me an email if you have any stories or experiences connected to our mission. Do you know of a new or long-term member who has contributed abundantly to our organization? I want to know their story also. I am hoping to make our volunteer spotlight articles a regular piece of 2025. If you want to join me in researching and writing these pieces, I welcome that assistance also. [volunteers@airbasegeorgia.org](mailto:volunteers@airbasegeorgia.org)



Col Schamel talks to a group of school children about the Airbase's collection.

# Safety Update

By Col Steve Hoofnagle, Safety Officer

[safety@airbasegeorgia.org](mailto:safety@airbasegeorgia.org)

770-309-5584 cell



The "New Year" is on the horizon and as we look back on the very successful year that Airbase Georgia experienced in 2024, we are planning for an even bigger and better 2025.

Please take a moment to consider at least one practical way to make our Airbase a safer place for our volunteers and visitors and forward those ideas to me for review and implementation. Remember that all Airbase Georgia members are on the "Safety Team" and you are the eyes and ears for the Safety Officer.

The next General Meeting will be on Saturday, 4 January 2025. We will present our annual "Ladder Safety" training.

Please send any Safety related questions, comments, or suggestions to "[safety@airbasegeorgia.org](mailto:safety@airbasegeorgia.org)".

*"Your safety gears are between your ears."*



## ABG's Annual Pilot Ground School

ABG's Annual Pilot Ground School will be held at the hangar January 9-12, 2025.

Any current Airbase Georgia Colonel who would like to audit a class is welcome to attend. There is no need to RSVP for class, however there is an RSVP process for some optional meals during the training. Please look for flyers or check with Staff for specifics. Col John Currenti, Ops Officer at [operations@airbasegeorgia.org](mailto:operations@airbasegeorgia.org)

# Facility Rentals And Events

## Col Mark Richards, Facility Rental Officer



The final facilities rental event for 2024 at Airbase Georgia is completed and in the books. We finished 2024 with total rental sales of \$62,200.00 which represents an increase of 57.7% over 2023. None of this would have been possible without the talented and dedicated Facility Rentals Team. I cannot thank each of you enough for your creativity, passion and dedication in making each of these events something very special for our clients. We learned so much together this year, and with that knowledge, we can make 2025 an even better experience for our clients. THANK YOU, TEAM!!

And as you know, good news travels fast when our clients are happy. We are already booked at \$32,100.00 for 2025, and several of these big events are repeat clients from 2024.

Get ready for Hops & Props in April and Wine & Warbirds in October. Our friends and partners at the Peachtree City CVB are deep into planning for both events in 2025. These two events are perfect opportunities to showcase our airbase and what Airbase Georgia is all about. We'll need a big Events Team during these two events along with our docents, who played a huge role during Hops & Props this past April.

While we begin to prepare for the 2025 rental season, maintenance will be in full swing for the next 2 ½ months getting our aircraft ready for next year's rides program and airshows.

There will be plenty of opportunities to volunteer your assistance during the maintenance process, all volunteer help will be greatly appreciated. Please show up when you can and ask the Crew Chiefs how you can help.

The ABGA Operations Ground Training classes will be held on January 9, 10, 11 and 12. Once completed, we will look to book additional meeting room events until the hangar is available once again in mid-March.

**UPCOMING EVENTS:**

<u>Date</u>	<u>Event</u>	<u>Event Time / Location</u>
01-09	ABGA Operations Ground Training	All Day / Meeting Room
01-10	ABGA Operations Ground Training	All Day / Meeting Room
01-11	ABGA Operations Ground Training	All Day / Meeting Room
01-12	ABGA Operations Ground Training	All Day / Meeting Room
02-16	FCDBA Duplicate Bridge Game	11a - 5p / Meeting Room
03-22	Whitewater Baseball Hangar Event	5p - 119 / Hangar
03-23	Young Life Banquet	4p - 9p / Hangar
03-28	FCEF - Fayette Fling	6p - 10p / Hangar

Anyone wishing to volunteer for any of these events can contact me by email, text or cell. →

# Stearman Update

## Col Jeff Clark

Some big news for the Stearman this month... the engine and propeller have been ordered! This is a huge milestone for the team and a very tangible symbol of the progress they have made. The shop has already started building the engine. They anticipate shipping it to us at the end of March. Meanwhile, covering the fuselage continues.



The left side and the bottom have been covered and taped, and the team is waiting to finish some last-minute cockpit wiring before covering the right side. After the fuselage is completely covered, it will be towed down to Gardner-Lowe to finalize the avionics installation. Hopefully by that point the temperatures will be in the proper range to finalize the painting. If the stars align perfectly (and it's unlikely that they will), we will be ready to start reassembling the plane right around the time the engine arrives. If you would like to support the team's continued progress, please consider making a donation to the Stearman through the CAF's Twelve Planes of Christmas

campaign.

Please congratulate our Pilot of the Year and World's Newest SBD Pilot Rob Haley! Rob is pictured here celebrating the successful completion of his SBD checkout with daughter Ann and son William.





# Heroes of Aviation

## Submitted By Col Casey Roszell

### Sam Folsom

Sam Folsom, born July 24, 1920 in Quincy, Massachusetts, was one of the first echelon of 17 Marine fighter pilots with Marine Fighter Squadron 121 tasked with defending Guadalcanal.

Sam Folsom became interested in aviation after hearing of the exploits of Charles Lindbergh. Folsom never intended to join the Marines. He was commissioned a Navy ensign upon graduation from the Massachusetts Maritime Academy in 1940, but was denied a request to enter flight training – the entire reason he had wanted to join the military.

“I always wanted to fly,” he said. “I don’t know why. It was just something I always wanted to do since I was a kid.

He elected to vacate his commission, choosing to join the Marines, who agreed to send him into aviation training. He was sent to Jacksonville Naval Air Station, where as a cadet he learned to fly the Grumman F3F-2 biplane.

He would spend the next 17 years on active duty.

Folsom completed training at the end of 1942. Promoted to the rank of second lieutenant in the Marine Corps Aviation Reserve. He received orders to Miramar, California, where he checked into his new unit, VMF-122. Later, the squadron was combined with another to form VMF-121. Folsom’s assigned fighter plane was a Grumman F4F Wildcat which he trained in for months before his unit was sent overseas to New Caledonia briefly, before being sent to Guadalcanal in early September, 1942. The conditions of training were very difficult, mainly due to the lack of aircraft: the entire group of pilots, totalling 80, had only 20 F4F-3/4 Wildcats between them. Before setting off to war, Folsom managed to gain no more than 25 hours flight time on the fighter (in all, he had some

250 hours flying experience). Many of his colleagues had even less luck, however, having trained for only a dozen so hours on the Wildcat.

Sam Folsom had never flown an airplane above 10,000 feet and only once fired the weapons on the F4F Wildcat fighter he would soon pilot into combat when he arrived on Guadalcanal in September 1942.

The battle for the strategic, jungle-covered South Pacific island was raging, as Folsom and the bulk of his inexperienced fighter squadron VMF-121 joined the operation. They were tasked with finding and destroying Japanese G4M medium bombers – known as “Betty Bombers” – that had been wreaking havoc on American troops on their first major offensive in the Pacific theater during World War II. Just days after reaching



#### “Popeye”

Grumman F4F-4 Wildcat as flown by  
Sam Folsom, VMF-121/VMF-111

Guadalcanal, Fols found himself piloting his Wildcat upward of 25,000 feet when a formation of Japanese A6M Zero fighters and Betty Bombers approached. When they dived down to attack Folsom lost control. After recovering and regaining control, he maneuvered his fighter into position, moving onto the tail of an enemy plane to line up the sights for the six M2 .50-caliber machine guns mounted on his Wildcat’s wings. He pulled the trigger. “Nothing happened,” Folsom’s

Cont.

## Heroes (Cont.)

squadron had covered its guns in lubricant before he took off, but at altitude the coating froze, rendering the machine guns useless. It would happen twice more to Folsom and dozens of additional times to his squadron mates before the unit realized the cause. Due to the lack of flying experience at this altitude the unit didn't realize that lubricating the weapons before flying would freeze the lubricant at this high of an altitude. "I never remember being frightened," he said. "Just mad as hell going through this with your life on the line and having my guns not firing."

Folsom and the other pilots had to return to base considering the conditions of their weapons. Towards the end of the squadron's tour, the pilots received more experience flying in support of combat operations than they ever did through their training.



Above: Fols with "Popeye."

Later, Folsom and his squadron had found themselves above another bomber formation. The bombers had already attacked and were returning home when Folsom dove from some 20,000 feet to near the ocean's surface and shot down two Betty Bombers within minutes of each other. "I closed in on two Japanese bombers, one of which was directly in my sights and I shot him down," Folsom said. "I pulled over to the side and I shot

down the other one. It was just like a training exercise." he does not recall any fanfare. "It's nothing, you just do it," he said.

Eventually, Folsom was completely out of ammunition and flew back to base. The Japanese fighter planes escorting the bombers closed in on Folsom. Folsom found himself in a dogfight without any means of defense. His plane was shot multiple times, but he still managed to escape and make it back to base. Folsom said that wasn't the only time he found himself in a dogfight without ammunition.

He recalled at least three incidents in which his Wildcat was shot up badly by Japanese Zeros, enemy fighters that were faster and more agile than his F4F.

In one such incident, Folsom was chased by three or four of the enemy fighters. He maneuvered in and out of cloud cover hoping unsuccessfully to lose his Japanese pursuers. Then the bullets started to fly. Dozens of them pierced the metal shell of his Wildcat. One struck him in the leg, another hit the plane's throttle level, separating it from the panel connecting it to the flight deck.

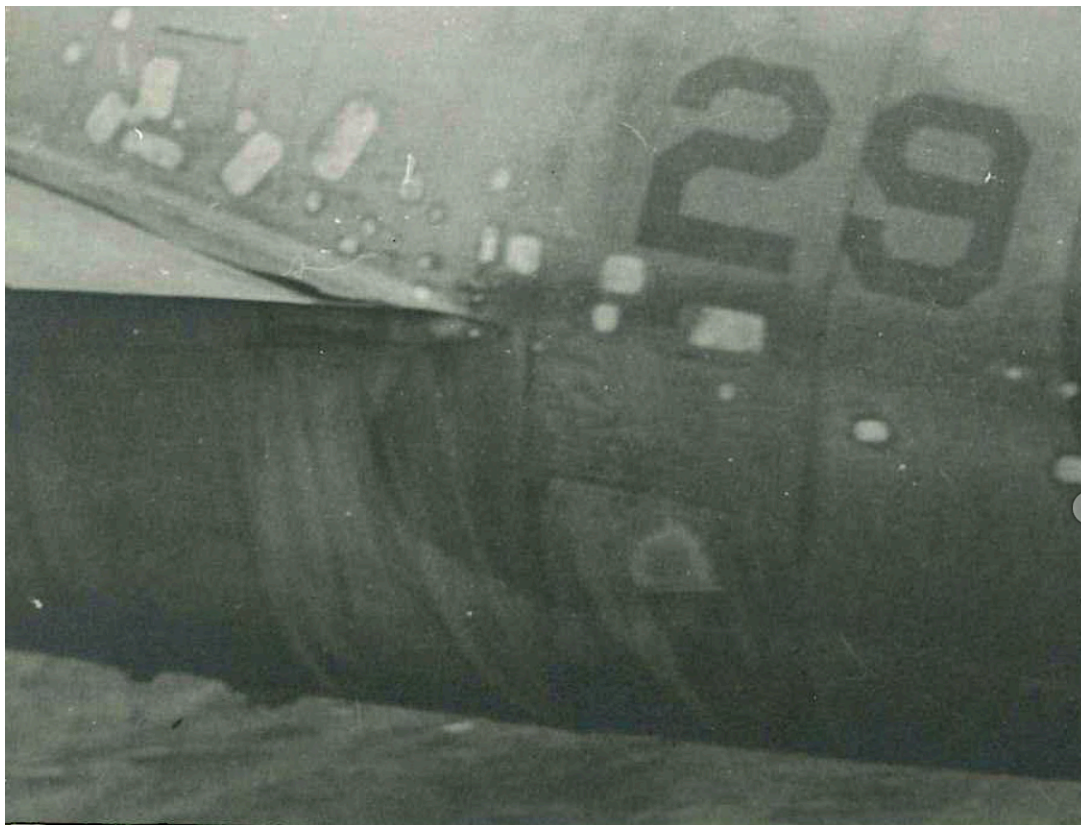
"They shot the hell out of me," Folsom said. Somehow he managed to land his fighter, leaving him shaken. "I was lucky. Don't misunderstand me – it's not a question of bravery, of anything like that. You just automatically say, 'I've got to land the damn airplane. I'm going to do it.' And then you do it. That's all." Cont.



Heroes (Cont.)

He recalls the successes just as matter-of-factly.

80 years ago. It's gone. I must have dreamed that. But I didn't.



Above: A patchwork of repairs on the Wildcat.

After his three-month tour in Guadalcanal he was transferred to Samoa, ending his time with VMF-121. During Folsom's time with VMF-121 he was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross and the Purple Heart for his actions in Guadalcanal. In total, he shot down two Japanese Betty Bombers and a D3A Type 99 Val. He finished the war flying F4U Corsairs over Okinawa, and then in Korea, providing cover for the Marines at Chosin Reservoir. He continued his career in the Marine Corps and served nearly 18 years and retired from the service in 1960 as a lieutenant colonel. He was hired in an executive position at Pan American World Airways and eventually settled into a long real estate career in New York City.

Seventy-six years after Guadalcanal, Folsom admits he does not remember his days swooping through the clouds over the South Pacific as well as he once did. Those memories, he said, sometimes feel like dreams. "You no longer have any touch with really something that went on 70,

Folsom was among the last surviving men to have piloted a Marine aircraft in the Battle of Guadalcanal, a decisive victory for the Allied forces in the Pacific and widely considered a turning point in the campaign against the Japanese. To the best of his knowledge, Folsom said, he is the last living member of his fighter squadron, a team of 40 pilots that lost 17 in the three months it spent on the island. Overall, Allied forces lost 7,100 men; Japan casualties were 31,000.

The fight was difficult. His squadron lived in tents near Henderson Field, the key airstrip

that was built by the Japanese and completed by U.S. Navy Seabees after Marines stormed the island in the offensive that caught the enemy by surprise. Though Folsom insists the conditions could have been much worse, he acknowledged that aviators often went without hot food and basic supplies were in heavy demand. Uniforms and clothing, he said, were so scarce that Marines would raid the quarters of their comrades who were shot down or went missing.

"We had a shortage," he said. "It wasn't heartless. Don't misunderstand me - it's just that it happened. People didn't make it. A lot of people didn't make it. It was war."

Sam Folsom passed away on November 13, 2022, one day after the 80th anniversary of his victory over Japanese bombers over Guadalcanal. ➔



## 12 Planes of Christmas Update, Col Chris Madrid, Development Officer

**GREAT NEWS: Airbase Georgia's P-47N *Thunderbolt* reached its Goal Thanks to Ray Foundation Grant. Members Encouraged to Support Stretch Goal and Stearman Project**

For the third consecutive year, Commemorative Air Force (CAF) Airbase Georgia has met its goals for the annual 'Twelve Planes of Christmas' fundraising program to help restore its Republic P-47N *Thunderbolt* fighter. The online campaign has raised \$11,200 to date for the P-47N. The addition of a \$50,000 grant from the Ray Foundation pushed donations over the original \$50,000 goal, helping ensure the purchase of rims and new leading edges for the wings for the rare and historic aircraft.

"This fundraising campaign is essential in helping us restore the *Thunderbolt*," said Airbase Leader Joel Perkins. "We sincerely thank all of the individual donors this year, and especially the Ray Foundation for its continued generous support of what will be a beautiful example of an iconic World War II fighter. We have now set a stretch goal of \$70,000 with 11 days left in the 2024 campaign."

The Ray Foundation, Inc. was co-founded by James C. Ray, a distinguished World War II pilot who believed that American youth could benefit from the lessons learned in aviation.

When completed, the P-47N will be one of 13 *Thunderbolts* flying in the world. The P-47N is one of the original aircraft acquired by CAF founder Lloyd P. Nolen in 1963.

The "Twelve Planes of Christmas" online fundraising campaign also is raising funds for a Boeing N2S Stearman *Kaydet* trainer dedicated to "Rosie the Riveter," the women who worked in factories and shipyards during World War II. The Stearman is nearing completion of fabric work, awaiting an engine. Last year the campaign raised \$15,185 for the Stearman; this year's goal is \$10,000.

The 12 Planes of Christmas campaign to date has raised more than \$300,000 for Airbase Georgia projects over the past three years, with funds earmarked solely for the restoration of specific aircraft.

To support the two projects, please click [HERE](#) for the N2S Stearman and [HERE](#) for the P-47N *Thunderbolt*.

For more information, contact Development Officer Chris Madrid, [chris.madrid@airbasegeorgia.org](mailto:chris.madrid@airbasegeorgia.org). ➔

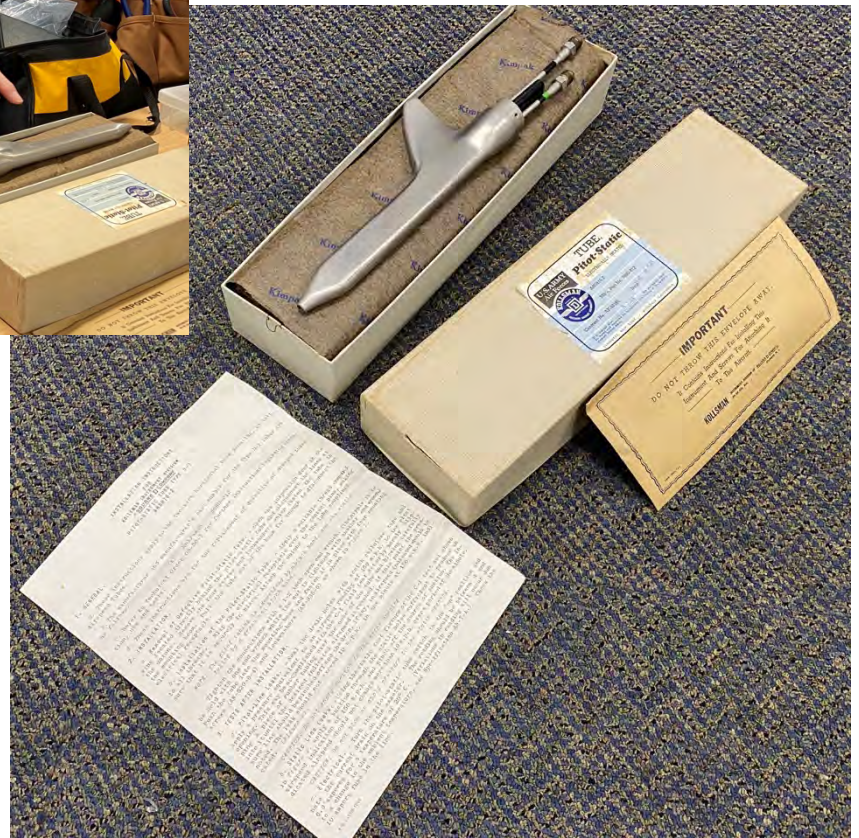
# Scenes From The Hangar

Photos by Col Charles Burcher

Kaiden Vorgity wipes down P-51 Red Nose.



Cols Tom Thompson & Tony Stein work on restoring the P-47 pitot/static system using original component from 1945.



# Scenes From Above The Hangar

Back in October, Col Matt Kenner had a chance to sit in the back of the SBD with P-51s Red Nose and Ain't Misbehavin' on our wing. With his camera ready, Matt was able to take a number of photos to add to his collection.





# ON THE HORIZON .....

January 4, 2025	Staff & Members Meetings
January 9 – 12	Ground School (see page 2)
February 1, 2025	Staff & Members Meetings
March 1, 2025	Staff & Members Meetings
April 12, 2025	Airbase Georgia Spring Open House
April 25-26, 2025	PTC CVB Hops & Props

