TOPEKA REGIONAL AIRPORT THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE FORBES FIELD, TOPEKA, KS

COMBAT AIR MUSEUM

PLANE TALK

January-March 2026
Vol. 42, No. 1

# PT Boat Skipper, Navigator, POW, Civil Engineer

*By Kevin Drewelow*

Elizabeth Syverson contacted the Combat Air Museum in late October and said she had some items from her father's military career to donate. Museum Director Kevin Drewelow met Elizabeth at her home to collect the artifacts. He returned with the objects and an amazing story about a life of service intertwined with the Navy, Army Air Force, Air Force, Topeka Army Air Field and Forbes Air Force Base. We asked Elizabeth to speak about her father's career, and she did so at our Christmas membership meeting.

Lawrence Syverson was born in Detroit in 1919. A bright student, he graduated high school at age 16 and began attending college while working. The attack on Pearl Harbor created a huge demand for naval officers, and the United States Naval Academy accepted Lawrence. Upon graduation, he became the commander of a Patrol Torpedo (PT) boat, but that was short-lived. Lawrence, in the wrong company, stated the United States would soon be fighting the Russians; the Navy immediately dismissed him from their service!

**Lawrence Syverson** ***(E. Syverson photo)***

Lawrence joined the Army and reported to Hondo Army Air Field in Texas for aerial navigation training. He graduated in December 1943 and joined a B-24D Liberator replacement crew; Lieutenant Thomas Stilbert was the aircraft commander and pilot. They arrived at Topeka Army Air Field to prepare their aircraft for the long flight to Great Britain and to war. One evening, the crew visited a bowling alley where, Elizabeth said, her father saw "the world's worst bowler!" That 20-year-old woman was Betty Curry and Lawrence was smitten! At the end of a three-week courtship, Lawrence gave Betty his Naval Academy graduation ring and promised to come back for her.

Lawrence and the rest of Lt. Stilbert's crew departed Topeka on March 5, 1944 for Great Britain via Ireland. Their orders assigned them to the 453rd Bombardment Group (Heavy) at Old Buckenham in the county of Norwich. They flew several training flights to learn procedures for combat formation assembly; on one of these flights, Lawrence's crew was flying

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THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE COMBAT AIR MUSEUM

**Topeka Regional Airport**
Hangars 602 & 604
7016 SE Forbes Avenue
Topeka, KS 66619-1444
Telephone (785) 862-3303
www.combatairmuseum.org

**Website** Hosted by
Rossini Management Systems, Inc

**Email:** office@combatairmuseum.com
https://www.facebook.com/CombatAirMuseum



**PLANE TALK**, the official newsletter of the Combat Air Museum of Topeka, Kansas, is published quarterly.
***We welcome your comments!***
**Newsletter Layout** by Megan Garner

## MUSEUM HOURS

**January 2 - February 28/29**
Mon.-Sun. Noon - 4:30
Last Entry Every Day is 3:30 P.M.

**March 1 - December 31**
Mon.-Sat. 9 A.M. - 4:30 P.M.
Sun. Noon - 4:30 P.M.
Last Entry Every Day is 3:30 P.M.

**Closed**
New Year's Day, Easter,
Thanksgiving, Christmas Day

**Your membership is important to us! Join the COMBAT AIR MUSEUM**

# From the Chairman's Desk

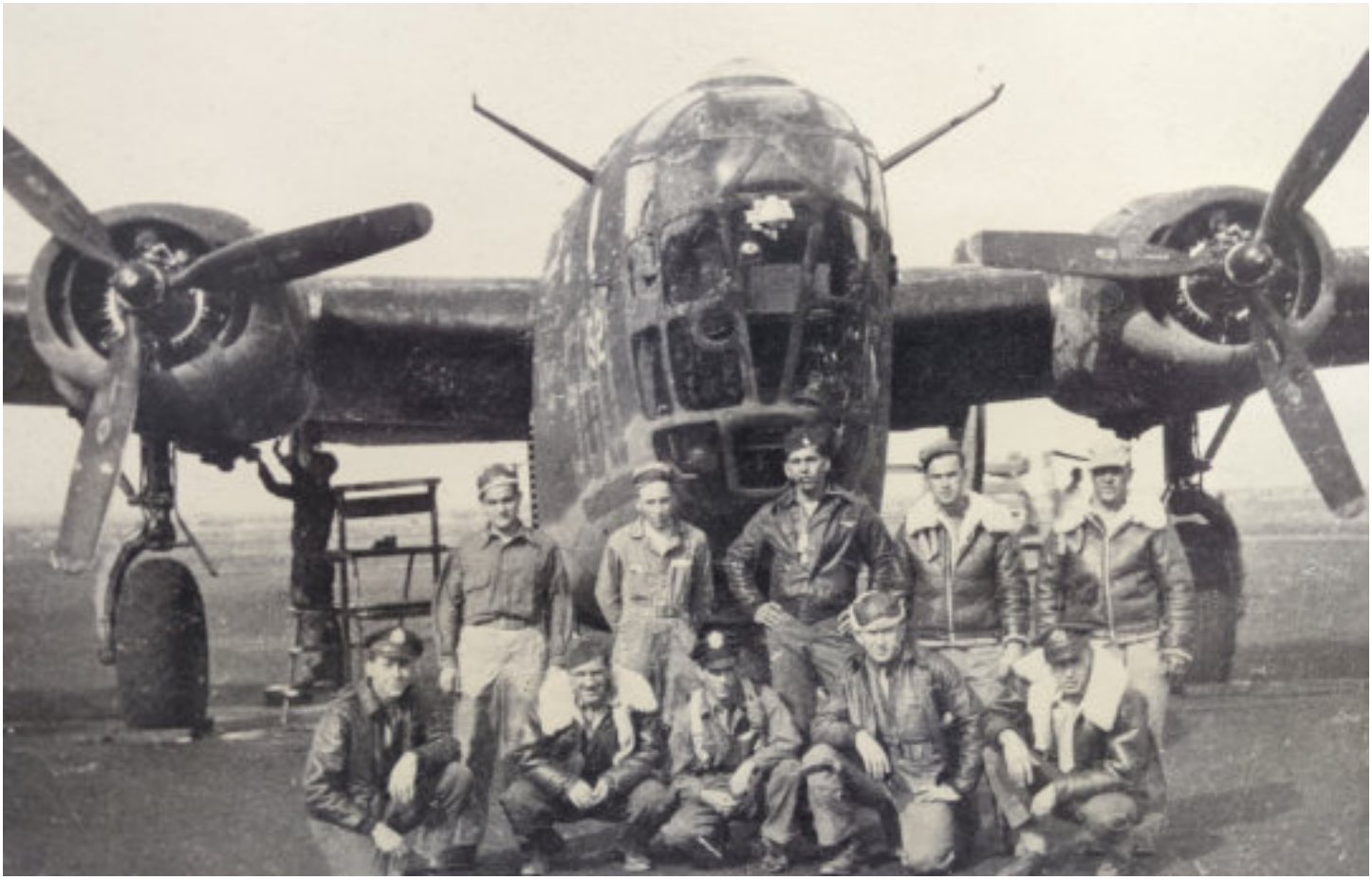
**By Gene Howerter, Chairman, Board of Directors**

It is safe to say that 2025 was a good year for the Combat Air Museum. I won't go into detail on all the accomplishments achieved here at the Museum this past year, but they were substantial. If you have not been out to see our new building addition, constructed on the south side of Hangar #602 for artifact storage and a new display room for part of our engine collection, I think you will be impressed. It is amazing to see what volunteers can do to upgrade a 1943-vintage hangar! This addition is creating space for a variety of new displays to brighten the south side of Hangar 602's interior. In the next few months, we will launch a new over-the-top display highlighting the Doolittle Raid, designed to deepen your understanding of the event and the local connection. The Museum has been fortunate to have all these projects underwritten through fundraising and donations. I want to thank everyone who has been generous in their giving when we need it. Please continue supporting CAM financially as you are able.

Many accomplishments from a few good volunteers helped to make the Combat Air Museum a better place, not only for public viewing, but for volunteers as a workplace. They recently repaired both of our aircraft tow tractors and forklift and have also been busy with tire and wheel work, fabricating and installing new jack stands for aircraft, and replacing the sidewalk entrance to the Lockheed EC-121. Two of them recently restored one of two airport rotating beacon lights and mounted it on top of the workshop in hangar #604, where you can see it in action when the Museum is open to visitors. We plan to paint the F-86H Sabre and MiG-17 as early as possible in 2026. We now own a new stencil machine, which we will use to mark the F-15 and EC-121. We also plan to install the rotors on the Chinook once we have support from the relevant parties. This is only a small snapshot of what our volunteers completed in 2025 and what we plan to do in 2026.

One significant change that took effect on January 2 was that, for the first time in 50 years, we hired a Monday-through-Friday gift shop employee to admit visitors and make sales transactions. Filip Garner-Lonsky, who had previously been a multi-day volunteer for the role, agreed to take on the job. It had reached the point where it was no longer possible to staff the gift shop with volunteers consistently. This move will reduce stress on the Museum's management staff. The key to accomplishing things, as always, will be having great volunteers who are genuine and want to help. Due to budget constraints, the Museum will continue to operate on weekends with volunteers staffing the gift shop and providing museum tours. If you are ready, willing, and able, and have the time, let us discuss the expertise you may have for various volunteer opportunities at the Combat Air Museum, as it becomes increasingly vital. See you at the Museum! ◆

## PT Boat Skipper Continued from page 1



**Syverson's crew. He is front row, center *(E. Syverson photo)***

on the flight leader's left wing. The leader kept asking Lt. Stilbert to tighten up, or fly closer, to the leader's wing. That flight leader was none other than Jimmy Stewart, the famous actor who was then the 453rd Bomb Group's operations officer!

Lawrence and his crew began flying combat missions. On the morning of May 8, 1944, the crew prepared to fly their eighth mission. Their target was Brunswick (now Braunschweig) in north central Germany, and they would be flying B-24H 42-52169, built by Ford in Lawrence's home state of Michigan and bearing the name "Lucky Penny" on the nose. The crew were flying on the right wing of the aircraft leading the entire formation.


**Lucky Penny**
***(www.b24bestweb.com photo)***

The group released their bombs and began to turn for home when Lawrence felt and heard something loud at the back of the aircraft. At the same time, a German fighter passed so close to their left side that Lawrence could see the pilot's face! The German rolled away and the top turret gunner could not miss at that distance; Lawrence saw bullets striking the fighter. At that moment fire erupted in the bomber's rear fuselage and quickly spread forward, even under the flight deck! Lt. Stilbert directed the crew to bail out.

Eight of the eleven crew members were able to bail out with great difficulties; the two waist gunners and the ball turret gunner did not. Lawrence pulled his ripcord, but the parachute did not deploy - the pack had gotten wet and was frozen! Lawrence clawed at the pack until the parachute finally emerged at 4,000 feet above a field. Waiting for Lawrence to alight was a German soldier. Lawrence wrote, "He affixed his bayonet to his rifle and welcomed me to Germany with a salute. Afterwards, we both smoked from my supply of cigarettes."

The surviving crew members were eventually reunited, interrogated by the Luftwaffe, and then sent to a prisoner of war camp. Nearly a year later, General Patton's troops liberated them.

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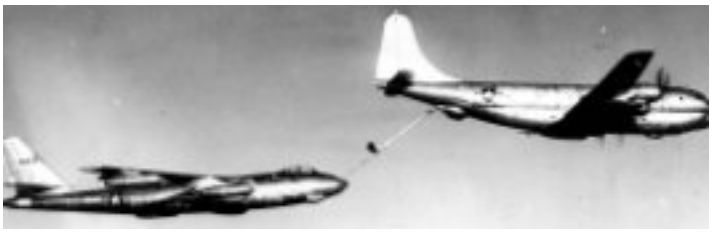
# Donation to CAM from Forbes AFB Veterans

*By Kevin Drewelow*



90th SRW KC-97 refueling a 90th SRW B-47 Stratojet in 1955 *(USAF photo)*

Chuck Hale and 90 SRW members present a check to Kevin Drewelow *(C. Hale photo)*

Former members of the 90th Strategic Reconnaissance Wing Association gathered on Tuesday, December 9 at Aldersgate Village in Topeka to make a substantial donation to the Combat Air Museum

The 90th Strategic Reconnaissance Wing was based at Forbes Air Force Base from 1951 to 1960. During that time, the unit's mission evolved to include bombardment, training replacement reconnaissance crews, aerial mapping, strategic reconnaissance and finally, a return to training reconnaissance crews before the Air Force inactivated the 90th in 1960. The 90th transitioned from propellor-driven aircraft to the Air Force's first swept-wing jet-powered bomber and operated refueling aircraft as well. The 90th reactivated in 1963 as a missile wing based in Wyoming and is now preparing to gain and support the new LGM 35A Sentinel intercontinental ballistic missile in 2029.

Former unit members created the 90th Strategic Reconnaissance Wing Association years ago to maintain contact with one another through annual reunions and newsletters. Like similar organizations, their numbers are dwindling and so they are closing their association. The members decided to donate their fund to the Combat Air Museum, where it will be used to highlight the 90th's time and service in Topeka and to help tell the history of Forbes Air Force Base and its contribution to the nation's defense during World War II, Korea, Vietnam and the Cold War. Chuck Hale, president of the 90th Strategic Reconnaissance Wing Association, secretary/treasurer Colleen Myers, board members Ted Cambron and Bud Redding and John Plumb, were present at the donation ceremony to witness Chuck present a check to Kevin Drewelow, director of the Combat Air Museum. Hale, Plumb and Redding are CAM members. The Combat Air Museum appreciates the 90th Strategic Reconnaissance Wing Association and is grateful for their donation. ◆

## *PT Boat Skipper* *Continued from page 3*

With the war over, Lawrence separated from the Army and, true to his word, returned to Topeka and married Betty on November 22, 1945. Lawrence attended the University of Kansas and graduated with an engineering degree, but his flying days were not over yet. When the Korean War broke out, Lawrence was one of many former service members recalled to active duty in 1950, this time with the newly formed US Air Force. He returned to navigational duties, but the Air Force learned about his degree and switched him to civil engineering work; he was the Assistant Civil Engineer in the Philippines before he returned to Topeka in 1953. He transferred to the Air Force Reserve and took a civil service engineer job at Forbes Air Force Base, where he remained until retirement in 1975. During that time, the Air Force closed Forbes as an active-duty base in 1973, but Lawrence continued for two years with the 190th Defense Systems Evaluation Group, Kansas Air National Guard as their chief civil engineer. He kept his hand in the engineering business with some civilian firms before he moved to Idaho in 2014 to live with one of his daughters and her family. He passed away in 2015.

During its three decades as a military base, thousands of young people passed through Topeka, meeting local people and starting families; Lawrence Syverson was in good company! ◆

Elizabeth and Gene *(K. Hobbs photo)*

# The Doolittle Raider *from Kansas*

*By Keith Fulton*

*Kevin Drewelow, the director of the Combat Air Museum, asked me several months ago if I was interested in assisting with the development of a new display in the museum for a fellow Kansan. This individual participated in the famed "Doolittle Raid" on Japan in April 1942. Sergeant Harold A. Spatz, a native of Lebo, Kansas, was a member of the unit participating in this raid, a retaliation to the bombing of Pearl Harbor, Hawaii five months prior. Planners did not design the raid to satisfy a strategic goal, but it sure provided a morale boost for the American forces that were preparing to go to war in the Pacific and let the world know that this island nation was susceptible to attack. My recent visit to the United States Air Force Museum in Dayton, Ohio, inspired me to author this article as a forerunner of the future display at the Combat Air Museum for Sgt. Spatz.*

**Part Three**

After deck crews loaded some of the bombs in the forward positioned aircraft, they moved each one into a launch position and again secured them to the flight deck as the actual launch would not occur until the afternoon of the next day. This allowed time to complete the additional bomb loading of the remaining aircraft during the morning of April 18th and to top off fuel for each aircraft.

During one of the group meetings Doolittle informed the flyers he planned to depart first, then three hours later the remaining B-25s would depart the carrier in the late afternoon hours so they arrived at the target areas in Japan by dusk allowing just enough daylight to identify their specific targets. Doolittle would drop his incendiary bombs where the resulting fires, visible from a distance, could direct the others who followed to the general area of their targets in Tokyo. However, the timing of their launch changed after a Japanese patrol vessel discovered the task force early on April 18th and radioed their position.

Fearing the United States would retaliate after their Pearl Harbor attack, the Japanese Navy posted several vessels, mostly converted fishing boats, to patrol their coast at a range of 400 to 600 miles distance. They believed the U.S. carriers, which were not present during the Pearl Harbor attack, could get within striking distance. During the morning of April 18, 1942, at 7:38 a.m. the naval task force sighted the Japanese patrol vessel Nitto Maru (#23) and ordered it sunk. The light cruiser USS Nashville was the closest ship and fired a total of 938 six-inch shells in the direction of the smaller vessel. The rough seas and the distance to the smaller vessel made it difficult to hit. The task force sighted another Japanese vessel and F4F Wildcat fighters from the carrier Enterprise completed strafing runs on the Nanshin Maru (#21). Both vessels sank. The Nitto Maru's captain, a senior enlisted member of the Japanese Navy, committed suicide to avoid capture but the Nashville recovered 5 of the 11 crew members. Radio operators on board many of the U.S. ships heard the Nitti Maru's Morse code message. The Japanese either did not receive the message, or they did not heed it in a timely fashion. Doolittle and the task force commanders did not know this.

**A B-25 prepares to depart the U.S.S. Hornet *(af.mil photo)***

All the B-25 crews awakened early on April 18th, most had breakfast, and all received a final briefing as to the weather, the ship's current position, and other last minute mission details. After the morning briefings each member had the opportunity to settle their expenses at the ship's commissary, pack a bag, and/or find some privacy for final mental preparation, until they heard the gun fire.

After receiving word that a Japanese patrol vessel sent a message, Halsey could not wait any longer and flashed the following message to the Hornet, "Launch planes, to Col Doolittle and gallant command, good luck and God bless you." Moments later the Hornet's general quarters alarm sounded, and a call went out for the B-25 crews: "Army pilots, man your planes."

Organized chaos erupted on the Hornet's flight deck; the Navy deck crews and the extra USAAF personnel started the task of untying the B-25s from the deck as the Hornet turned into the wind at an increased speed. With the ship's speed and the wind gusts, this allowed the aircraft additional lift capability, shortening their takeoff roll. As the aircrews prepared their belongings, deck handlers brought the final bombs up from the ship's magazine and loaded them into the remaining bombers. Since they were further out than planned, each bomber received five additional five-gallon fuel cans and placed them inside their aircraft along with the ten containers already secured. This left each aircraft just under its maximum gross weight of over 35,000 pounds.

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## The Doolittle Raider Continued from page 5

The weather was not cooperating; on this morning, the seas were very rough caused by winds gusting up to 45 miles per hour. Light rain was falling and the ocean swells splashing over the deck caused very wet conditions on the deck. The Navy deck crew members had to swing ropes over several aircraft and hold on to make sure the wind gusts did not blow the plane off the ship as they were moving into position. Each B-25, one or two at a time, started engines and waited for their turn to take off. This left Doolittle and his crew, in the first aircraft to depart, just 467 feet of the ship's deck surface to the end of the bow. Doolittle was only an observer two months earlier during the flight tests when two B-25s lifted off from the Hornet in February 1942, so this was his first attempt at a carrier takeoff, just like all those who followed.

As the B-25s prepared for their takeoff, Navy officers Lt Miller and Lt Commander Jurika visited each crew to wish them well and ask if they needed any last-minute items. The Navy mess personnel also visited each crew, providing sandwiches and other snacks for the flight crews to supplement the K-ration meals stored on the aircraft.

The Navy had painted a white line on the flight deck directing the pilots of the B-25s to the proper location and providing a visual reference for the takeoff roll. Sailors had painted this line along the port (left) side of the ship's deck giving the large Army aircraft six feet of clearance off the right wing, so they did not strike the island structure, where the ship's bridge and control tower are located. This positioned the aircraft where the left wing extended out over the port side of the flight deck. As each aircraft prepared for takeoff the pilot set the parking brakes, ran engines to full throttle, and waited for a signal from the launch officer with a flag positioned to the left side of the aircraft, waving it in a circular motion indicating full engine throttle setting. The launch officer himself waited for a signal from another officer positioned closer to the bow of the ship observing the waves as they approached. The moment the ship's bow started to rise as the next wave approached, this officer signaled to the launch officer to point his flag forward signaling each B-25 to release brakes and proceed down the flight deck. The rising deck allowed the aircraft enough room to clear the water as they left the carrier.

**B-25 taking off as seen from the Hornet *(af.mil photo)***

Doolittle was in the first aircraft to depart the carrier at 8:21 a.m. As he started his takeoff roll, some Navy personnel placed bets with fellow sailors - will he make it? He departed the deck with yards to spare as the wind helped lift him and gained speed to climb out with no problems. After raising the gear lever Doolittle then circled the carrier rocking his wings as he passed by the other B-25s, still on the deck, proving to the crews that they could do it!

Each crew experienced their own issues during the taxi to the takeoff point and lifting off the carrier deck. The winds offered challenges as well as the waves hitting the ship. Lt Ted Lawson (Crew #7 pilot), in the B-25 named "The Ruptured Duck," attempted to start his left (#1) engine; it failed to start after several attempts. Navy deck personnel soon approached "The Ruptured Duck" to start the process of pushing it off the side of the ship, moving it out of the way for the following aircraft to launch. As a last resort Lawson attempted another start, the engine came to life, and he waved off the deck crew. Lawson and his copilot then completed the checklist step to set takeoff flaps; however, he feared a gust of wind might send them over the side due to the larger wing area the flaps provided, so he raised the flaps during his short taxi to the takeoff position intending to reset them prior to his takeoff roll. During the excitement of the event, when it was his turn to go, both Lawson and his copilot forgot to reset the flap lever. The retracted flaps did affect their takeoff as they dropped below the bow and headed toward the water until they gained enough speed to fly out of it. The crew discovered the mistake on climb-out as they completed their "After Takeoff" checklist.

One of the Hornet's crew, Seaman First Class Robert W. "Bob" Wall, received a ghastly injury during the B-25 launches. It is not certain if a gust of wind, the rough sea, a wet flight deck, or the prop wash from the B-25 in front caused him to fall into the rotating propeller of an aircraft engine, nearly severing his left arm and striking his back side.

During the unexpected movements of the aircraft on the carrier deck the tail section of #15 ("TNT") punched a hole in the plexiglass nose of "The Bat". The crew was unaware of the damage until DeShazer entered his position in the aircraft nose, and he elected not to inform his pilot before takeoff. He did, however, make sure the bombsight and .30 caliber machine were not damaged as they taxied forward.

"The Bat" was the last to takeoff from the carrier Hornet at 9:20 a.m., 59 minutes after Doolittle's departure. One would think that after an hour of aircraft launches the Hornet was closer to Japan but because the carrier was heading into the wind at 310 to 300 degrees (in a northwesterly direction) it took "The Bat" further away from their target in Nagoya, Japan.

After departing the carrier, most of the B-25s circled around the task force ships 1) because that is what Doolittle did, 2) to rock their wings as a gesture of thanks to the Navy personnel on board who were out in droves waving at the departing aircraft, and/or, 3) for the navigator to gain his compass bearings to advise the pilot the proper heading for their assigned target. After each aircraft departed, the Hornet's own navigator sent a runner outside with a large sign indicating the ship's current heading so the navigator in each aircraft could adjust his compass, if needed, to the proper heading as they flew past in a parallel bearing. Departing from a moving platform is not like a takeoff from a known airfield on land, knowing the exact heading throughout the takeoff roll and climb out. DeShazer stated after departing the carrier he witnessed the ship's elevator bringing up the carrier's own aircraft to launch for defense if needed.

Each crew discussed a plan in case their aircraft sustained damage during the mission and could not make it to China. Some crew members requested to bail out, even if they were over Japan itself. Others elected to stay with the aircraft, find another target, and fly directly into another military or industrial facility, giving their lives. Most of the pilots elected to find another target option and if available allowed their crew to bail out if they wanted. The research material does not mention what the crew of "The Bat" decided.

"The Bat" proceeded to their assigned target in Nagoya, Japan, 300 miles south of Tokyo to bomb an oil storage facility and an aircraft plant with their load of four cluster incendiary bombs. They flew low level, just a few feet above the water to avoid detection, and at an airspeed just above stall speed to conserve fuel. It took over five hours of flying time from the carrier to the coast of Japan. At low level and with the gusty winds encountered, I am sure it was not a comfortable ride for the crew. Also, there was a large hole in the nose of "The Bat" that provided a rush of fresh air into the aircraft but extra drag consuming more fuel. After the crew established a heading toward Japan and adjusted the speed for maximum fuel efficiency Hite left his copilot position to assist DeShazer in attempting to cover the hole with a coat, without success; the exact hole location was not mentioned but was possibly at the upper section of the plexiglass nose preventing it from being covered by any materials found inside the aircraft. DeShazer just had to endure the over 150 miles per hour winds.

Many of the aircraft had interior fuel leaks related to the additional fuel bladders. Crew members detected leaks at connection points with the aircraft's own fuel tanks and seams

**A Doolittle raider over the Hornet *(history.navy.mil photo)***

along the fuel bladders themselves. There was nothing the crew could do but tolerate the smell of fuel. The pilot could open a cockpit window to provide fresh air until the engines consumed the fuel in the bladders. Spatz, as well as all the other B-25 flight engineers, could not leave the rear of the B-25 due to the full fuel bladder blocking his access forward where the other four crew members were. He was unable to come forward until the engines consumed several gallons of fuel, flattening the bladder. He did have communication with the other crew positions with the aircraft interphone system.

It was Spatz's responsibility to pour the fuel from the cans into the bladder during this time as the fuel level decreased during the flight. As each of the containers emptied, he cut holes into the metal, allowing them to sink faster after he tossed them out of the hatch. The procedure was to drop all the empty containers at the same time into the ocean below so if they did not sink right away, they did not form a trail of their route leading back to the carrier group.

The entire crew was vigilant of their surroundings, believing the Japanese patrol vessels had sent out a message warning of their approach. During most of the trip, Spatz manned the upper turret located in the center section of the fuselage and scanned the skies ahead of them. This turret operated electrically and contained two .50 caliber Browning machine guns. The turrets in several aircraft malfunctioned, leaving them defenseless against enemy fighters if encountered. Since they departed the carrier about 170 miles further than planned, they figured they could not make it to the airfields in China, but they had to try.

As the B-25s approached the coast of Japan the weather gradually improved, the overcast cleared, and visibility seemed perfect for the bomb runs. After crossing over the coast, some aircraft with targets further inland, remained at low level flying

*Continued on page 14*

# Museum Notes

*By Kevin Drewelow*

Heritage students look after the Sabre *(K. Drewelow photo)*

**Heritage Christian School helps at CAM...**Students and staff from Topeka's Heritage Christian School visited the Combat Air Museum on Veterans Day to spend some service hours with us. They dusted aircraft and swept our hangars while learning about the service and sacrifices made by veterans over the decades. They also assisted our friends at the nearby Museum of the Kansas National Guard. Heritage Christian School has been doing this for several years and we appreciate their time and assistance!

Our Bf-109 replica also received some attention *(K. Drewelow photo)*

Students ask Guy about his Air-Cam *(K. Drewelow photo)*

**Special treat for students...**A local pilot visited the Combat Air Museum on November 14 to share his aircraft with some visiting students. Guy Giroux completed building his unique open cockpit, twin-engine pusher taildragger Leza-Lockwood Air-Cam in 2011. When he learned his daughter and granddaughter would be part of a group from Legacy Homeschool Enrichment Center in Olathe visiting our Museum, he flew his Air-Cam to CAM to show it to the students. We parked him on the ramp in front of hangar 602 where students, parents and other Museum visitors could get up close to the aircraft. The Air-Cam was designed for low speed, low altitude aerial photography work for the National Geographic Society and a flight in the aircraft makes one feel like you're in a World War One observation aircraft!

**Tire covers for our Eagle and Warning Star...**Gary Naylor worked with American Vinyl in Topeka to produce tire covers for the nose tires on our McDonnell Douglas F-15A and Lockheed EC-121T Warning Star. Over time, the sun's ultraviolet radiation destroys tires, so covers will protect the tires from further damage. We will have some more made soon for the other uncovered tires on our outdoor aircraft.

John Plumb in his old 'office' *(J. Plumb photo)*

**John Plumb meets an old friend...**John Plumb volunteers nearly every day at the Combat Air Museum as our flight simulator instructor, helping our visitors fly a range of aircraft types. He is certainly the right person for the job as he flew for the US Air Force, Illinois Air National Guard and American Airlines during his career. John flew several types of aircraft at American, finishing his career flying Boeing 757s. He calls the 757 the "hot rod of American's fleet" due to its impressive performance. The Honeywell Corporation uses a Boeing 757 to conduct in-flight testing of new and upcoming electronic systems. Their 757 was operating from Topeka Regional Airport in December, testing a system that can detect aircraft and vehicles on the runway while an aircraft is landing, helping to avoid accidents. Two of the Honeywell crew members visited CAM on December 10 and there they met John. All three had a wonderful time talking about operating 757s, and the Honeywell crew invited John to visit their aircraft the next morning. John was extremely excited about the opportunity and arrived promptly the next day at Million Air, where they served him some great coffee and then drove him out to the big Boeing. The Honeywell crew members took him aboard and gave him a thorough tour of the jet. Their 757 was the fifth one built and has been highly modified for flight tests. They removed the passenger seats and interior to save weight, and strengthened the fuselage aft of the cockpit to permit the installation of a pylon to test aircraft engines. There is a collection of measuring and test equipment, sensors and other apparatus to collect data during in-flight testing of new equipment and systems. John felt at home when he visited the cockpit and that is apparent when you see the picture they took of him in his old "office." He really appreciated everything that Honeywell and Million Air did to make his visit possible!

Joe's jackstands for the MiG-15 *(K. Drewelow photo)*

**New jackstands for CAM aircraft...**The proper way to display aircraft in a museum is to raise the aircraft just enough for the tires to clear the floor. Museum volunteer Joe Wulfkuhle is using his skills in design, fabrication and welding to build adjustable jackstands for many of the aircraft in hangar 602. He has completed and installed a few sets already and a major museum has even shown interest in his design! We are fortunate to have volunteers like Joe who are willing to share their time and talents to benefit CAM!

**Scot Singers visit CAM...**The Scot Singers from Topeka's Highland Park High School visited CAM on December 18 to serenade visitors and volunteers at CAM with Christmas carols! Chuck Watson provided the crooners with a tour of the Museum and then they sang for us in the Bob Dole Education Center. We appreciated them taking the time to share their talents with us!

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## *Museum Notes* *Continued from page 9*

Ryder and Paul inspecting the beacon *(K. Drewelow photo)*

The beacon inside hangar 604 *(K. Drewelow photo)*

**Rotating beacon in hangar 604...**Have you ever driven by an airport at night and seen a rotating bright green and white light? The rotating beacon can be seen for miles and helps guide pilots to the airport. After decades in service at both Billard and Topeka Regional Airports, the Metropolitan Topeka Airport Authority (MTAA) replaced the old, electro-mechanical rotating beacons with modern lights. They put the old beacons on long-term loan to the Combat Air Museum. Museum volunteer Paul Williams cleaned, lubricated and then modified the beacon to accept a much dimmer light. He and other volunteers installed it atop the workshop in hangar 604, ran power to it and installed a timer. The beacon activates during museum hours. Paul is already planning to do the same with the larger beacon, but it will require a bit more work. ◆

## Visitors

832 people from 40 states, Washington, D.C., Brazil, Canada, Germany, India, Iraq, Italy, Japan and Nicaragua visited the Combat Air Museum in November.

In December 742 visitors from 34 states, the Marshall Islands, Puerto Rico, Australia, El Salvador, France, Germany, Ghana, Italy and Mexico toured your Museum.

# New & Renewing Members

### New Lifetime Members:

Mary Naylor | Ted & Sharon Nolde

### New:

Victoria Carson | Claire Decatur | Sarah Francev & family | Michael & Noelia Haynes | Tricia Starks

### Renewing:

Nathan & Beth Benfield | Ted & Cindy Berard | Col. Jon & Peggy Boursaw | Charie Broughton | Michael B & Candace Bush | Debra Butz | Carl Caldwell | Duane & Alberta Coash | Bruce Couch | Robert Crapser | Stef Cunningham | Kevin & Susan Drewelow | Donald & Rebecca Duncan | Spencer Duncan & family | Robert Eichkorn | Leonard Faulconer | Thomas & Debra Fisher | Eugene Francis | Charles & Dagmar Gorges | John Hamilton | Daria Hart & family | Paul Henson | Nelson Hinman Jr & family | Klio & Mary Jo Hobbs | Frank Holsburg | Donald & Kathy Jensen | Ken & Colleen Kirsop | Rodney Longhofer & family | Terry Love | Samantha Lowell & family | Ron Lutz | Larry Mann & family | Bruce Miller & Barbara Taswell-Miller | William Morgan | Todd Morgenstern & family | Danny Munck | Loren Otis | Tad & Dee Pritchett | Richard Render | J. Arron & Cathy Small | Jonathan & Georgia Small | Gary & Therese Smith | Richard & Sharon Starks | Don Thun | Marlene Urban | Thomas Ward & family | Christopher & Dawn Webber | Paul Williams & family | Steve & Rosie Williams | Robert & Donna Woodhead Jr | Conrad & Sharon Youngblom

# 2026 Calendar of Events

**February**

**1**—Winter hours continue through the end of the month

**9**—Membership Luncheon, brown bag

**March**

**1**—Normal hours resume, Museum open Monday-Saturday 9 a.m.–4:30 p.m., no admissions after 3:30 p.m. Sunday noon–4:30 p.m.; no admissions after 3:30 p.m.

**8**—Daylight Savings Time begins

**April**

**5**—Easter Sunday, Museum closed

**13**—Membership Luncheon, brown bag

**25**—Celebrity Pancake Feed & CAM 50th Anniversary event

**May**

**25**—Taps Across America

**June**

**8**—Membership Luncheon, brown bag

**TBA**—Young Aviators Class

**July**

**TBA**—Young Aviators Class

**August**

**10**—Membership Luncheon, brown bag

**September**

**TBA**—Girls in Aviation Day

**October**

**4**—CAM "Car Show on the Tarmac"

**12**—Membership Luncheon, brown bag

**November**

**1**—Daylight Savings Time ends

**26**—Thanksgiving, Museum closed

**December**

**14**—Membership Luncheon, bring a covered dish

**25**—Christmas, Museum closed

# In The Hangar: The Meyers OTW

*By Kevin Drewelow*

Upon seeing it for the first time, many visitors to the Combat Air Museum often mistake our Meyers OTW (Out To Win) for a Stearman Model 75 (military designation PT-17 Kaydet) and the resemblance is understandable; both aircraft are tandem, open cockpit biplanes of similar size and the blue and yellow color scheme of our OTW completes the impression. While the Stearman and Meyers were contemporaries, the PT-17 was built in much larger numbers, 10,000+, compared to the 102 OTW examples constructed. Nevertheless, the OTW played a part in preparing America's airmen for service during World War II.

Al Meyers was born in 1908 and was fascinated by the early aircraft that flew over his family's farm in New York. He got his first airplane flight in 1925 while serving in the New York National Guard. Meyers began his aviation career working sheet metal at some of the early aircraft manufacturers. Flying lessons followed and he even became a barnstormer, crossing the nation putting on flight displays and selling rides. He began designing his own airplane in 1933 and started making parts for it a year later in Michigan. He moved to Romulus, Michigan and, in 1936, founded Meyers Aircraft Company. On May 11 of that year, Al made the first flight of the biplane.

The Commerce Department regulated aviation at that time, and it took two years of testing and modifications before Commerce approved the OTW under a category that required each aircraft to pass an inspection by a Commerce inspector before it could be sold. As OTWs sold and started flying, operators found them to be sturdy and dependable training aircraft.

At the same time, war clouds began to form over Europe. Boeing had bought Stearman Aircraft and they were mass-producing Kaydets for the Army and Navy. The United States began the Civilian Pilot Training Program (CPTP) and began buying OTWs, Ryan STs, and Waco UPF-7s, among others, to establish flight training programs at colleges across the country. Meyers Aircraft Company was a small operation that could not produce airplanes on the scale of the larger manufacturers. They delivered 102 OTWs until production ceased in 1942. The company switched to producing a range of aluminum products for the government until the end of the war, when they returned to aircraft construction with a new design by Al Meyers.

During World War II, the OTW proved itself to be a great training aircraft, safe and durable. Reportedly, no flight students were ever killed while flying OTWs, unlike for other trainers.

The OTW is a mix of materials and construction methods.


**CAM's Meyers OTW** ***(CAM photo)***

The fuselage and vertical fin are constructed of aluminum. The horizontal stabilizers are constructed of welded steel tubing covered with fabric. The wing ribs and spars are made of wood reinforced with steel compression members, the wing leading edges were covered with either plywood or aluminum (depending upon the date of production) and the wings are covered with fabric. The ailerons, mounted on the lower wings, are covered with aluminum, as is the rudder. The elevators are fabric covered. The prototype, our aircraft, first flew with a Warner Scarab 125 horsepower radial engine, but it quickly became apparent that the aircraft required more power and subsequent OTWs were fitted with Warner Super Scarabs of 145 horsepower or the Kinner R-5 which produced 160 horsepower.

Aviation writer Budd Davisson wrote an article about flying the OTW for Air Progress in 1989. He said, "What you have here is an airplane with huge wings that will never, ever, no matter how hard it tries, be a Pitts Special [aerobatic biplane]. As a trainer, the controls are well harmonized and absolutely demand the student coordinate, if he wants to get where he wants to go without slithering through the sky in all manner of awkward moves."

The Combat Air Museum's OTW is the prototype, serial number 1, built by Al Meyers himself in Michigan in 1933 and is

**Meyers OTW during construction** ***(CAM photo)***

**Our Meyers in 1938** ***(CAM photo)***

the oldest complete aircraft in our collection. A hand-stamped placard in the front cockpit says "MEYERS Model OTW, MFD 5/11/36, Serial No. 1, Power Warner 125 H.P., Meyers Aircraft Co., Romulus, Michigan, U.S.A." Meyers flew this aircraft until May of 1939, including trips to Canada and Cuba. Along the way it acquired the nickname "The Old Gray Mare." Records are unclear, but the CPTP bought our aircraft and by late 1942, it was operating in the CPTP at John Brown University in Siloam Springs, Arkansas. After the war, the aircraft had a succession of owners, one of whom modified it into an aerial applicator or crop duster. As described on the CAM website, "In 1965 Mr. Delbert L. Denly of Osceola, Iowa purchased N15784 and restored the aircraft back to its original configuration but with a 165 hp Warner Super Scarab engine. In 1980, Mr. Ralph Knehans, a Museum member and volunteer, met Mr. Denly with his plane and from there began a lasting friendship until Mr. Denly's death in December 1985. Prior to his death, Mr. Denly told Ralph he was putting the OTW up for sale, and after approval from CAM's Board of Directors, Ralph became project manager to raise funds to purchase the Meyers. In fact, Ralph launched a virtual one-man campaign to successfully raise funds from Museum members and citizens and businesses of the Topeka community so CAM could purchase N15784. The transfer of ownership took place in August 1986, and the OTW flew into Forbes Field on September 14, 1986." The Combat Air Museum flew the OTW along with other aircraft in our collection until the Museum ceased flying operations in 1997. Meyers Aircraft built 102 OTWs and 52 of them remain on the Federal Aviation Administration aircraft registration list, including "The Old Gray Mare" which you can visit at the Combat Air Museum. ◆

## The Doolittle Raider Continued from page 7

just over the treetops. Japanese civilians on the ground waved at these aircraft as they passed by, believing they were Japanese Army aircraft on a training mission.

Most of the navigators were uncertain of their positions as they crossed over the coast until they could obtain a ground reference and provide the pilot with a heading to their planned target. Thus, each of the ten B-25s, with targets in Tokyo, arrived at the city from different directions. This in fact proved beneficial to the raiders, catching the Japanese defenses, both airborne fighters and ground anti-aircraft weapons, off guard having to adjust their targeting.

A lot of the damage and casualties occurred in neighboring communities due to friendly fire. The anti-aircraft fire toward the American bombers was intense and the Japanese fighters firing at the B-25s from above caused about as much damage as did the American bombs.

As each B-25 approached their target, they needed to climb to 1,500 feet altitude, open the bomb bay doors, and let the bombardier provide the compass heading the pilots needed to fly over their target. At that altitude this allowed the bombardier to locate the target and, once the bomb was released, the aircraft was high enough to avoid the concussion of the bomb blast striking the target. Normally the bombardier would take control of the aircraft at this time with the aid of the Norden bomb sight and the automatic pilot. Since the Norden bomb sights had been removed the bombardier had to provide directional corrections to the pilots as they approached their targets. However, some of the pilots found their targets defended by fighters overhead and selected other targets of opportunity or if there was not enough time to climb to the planned altitude before bomb release; some crews were knocked around by the concussion of their own bombs exploding on the target.

Lt Robert Farrow (Crew #16 pilot) flew his aircraft at low level until he reached the coast of Japan. After Doolittle and a few of the first aircraft to depart the carrier bombed their targets, more Japanese fighter units were alerted of the incoming enemy bombers and launched fighter aircraft all along the eastern coast of the island nation. After making landfall "The Bat" first had to cross over mountainous terrain; in his position in the nose, below and forward of the cockpit, Cpl. Jake DeShazer (Crew #16 bombardier) observed an older man, frightened by the approaching B-25, jump into a ditch alongside of a road as they flew overhead. Passing over the mountain range they approached the city of Nagoya where they sighted enemy fighters. To avoid an attack, Farrow applied more power and climbed to 7,000 feet altitude where a cloud bank was available to hide in to avoid the fighters. "The Bat" continued to the city where they identified their targets. Farrow then descended to 1,500 feet altitude for the bomb run.

DeShazer obtained their current airspeed and altitude from the pilots. With this data, he set the special bomb sight to the proper degree angle and looked for their first assigned target, a fuel storage tank farm. Once in sight, DeShazer advised the pilots of a direct heading to the target. At approximately 2:20 p.m. local Japan time, as "The Bat" approached their first selected target, DeShazer looked down the length of the bombsight until the target was centered and then pressed the button to release two of the four incendiary bombs, one at a time. They hit the number three tank of the Toho Gas Company. Farrow circled around to observe the fires on the large fuel tank as anti-aircraft shells burst around them. Farrow then lined up on the second and final target of the Nagoya Aeronautical Manufacturing factory, where they manufactured Mitsubishi A6M Zero fighter aircraft, and released the last two bombs. After the bomb bay doors closed, Spatz, positioned in the gun turret, noticed a flight of eight enemy fighters approaching from the rear of their B-25. They were close enough for Spatz to see the flashes from their machine guns firing at him! As he prepared to fire back "The Bat", now lighter without the 2,000 pounds of bombs, gained speed to outrun the fighters. Farrow descended to treetop level and proceeded to depart the city. Spatz remained in the gun turret, vigilant of enemy fighters as they continued southwest toward China. DeShazer stated he observed a fishing boat as they flew low over the water. After experiencing the bomb run, where someone shot at him, he was ready now to shoot back at someone - at anyone. He observed a man standing on the boat and waving at their aircraft, DeShazer shot a few rounds at the boat, missing his intended target, "I was not a very good shot." For some reason the man in the boat stopped waving.

Some of the other Raiders also encountered anti-aircraft fire but only a couple B-25s sustained slight damage. Two of the "Raider" crews stated later that Japanese fighters attacked them; one shot down a single fighter, the other claimed to shot down two enemy fighters. During their egress from the bomb runs a few of the B-25 gunners selected ground targets to fire on as they passed. Lt Holstrom (Crew #4 pilot) jettisoned his bombs in Tokyo Harbor after they were attacked by fighters and found their gun turret had malfunctioned, as so many of the other B-25 turrets had as well, so they performed evasive maneuvers to prevent the attacking fighters from obtaining a good firing position. The other 15 aircraft successfully dropped bombs on their selected targets or other targets of opportunity.

*(To be continued. Abridged from the original article by Keith Fulton, a retired KC-135 Stratotanker inflight refueling specialist with the 190th Air Refueling Wing, Kansas Air National Guard, Topeka, Kansas).* ◆

# Ways You Can Support the Combat Air Museum


## Dillon's Community Rewards Program

If you shop at Dillon's and have a Plus Shopper's Card, you can help support the Combat Air Museum with just a phone call or a few keystrokes. Dillon's Stores donates millions to non-profit organizations. Our Museum benefits from CAM members who have registered with Dillon's Community Rewards Program. **Enrolling in this program will not increase your grocery bill and will not affect your fuel points.**

Enrolling in the Community Rewards program is a one-time event. Go to https://www.dillons.com/i/community/community-rewards to create a Dillon's account before enrolling in the Community Rewards program. You can also call 800.576.4377 and the Dillon's customer service representative will register you. You will need to provide them with the Combat Air Museum's five-character Non-Profit Organization (NPO) account number, GA302. Thanks to your generosity, each quarter the Museum receives a check from Dillon's that really helps us maintain the collection and facilities and provide the classes and service our visitors enjoy. **Last year, Dillon's donated $593 to CAM; that amount is over $200 less than the previous year because we have fewer donors than before.** If you would like to join, why not take a moment now to do so: Dillon's and CAM will do the rest!

## Volunteer

The Combat Air Museum exists solely upon the money we raise from admissions, donations, fundraising events, grants, and gift shop sales. We rely on volunteers to run our gift shop on weekends and the need for these volunteers has become even more urgent. We will train you for this crucial and enjoyable task. Our volunteers also lead tours, assist with aircraft restoration, building maintenance and groundskeeping, among other opportunities. If you are interested in learning more about volunteering, please call the Museum Monday through Friday between 9 a.m. and noon at **785.862.3303** and ask for Nelson, our office manager and volunteer coordinator.

# CAM's 50th Anniversary!

A group of enthusiasts gathered on a cold February night at Washburn University in 1976 to form an aviation museum that grew into today's Combat Air Museum. CAM will commemorate our past fifty years and look forward to our next half-century on Saturday, April 25 with unique events throughout the day.

Visitors will enjoy free admission and can start with our annual Celebrity Pancake Feed, where for a $7 donation local civic leaders, television personalities and other notable people will cook and serve pancakes under the watchful eyes of Perkins Restaurant and Bakery's own Domingo Gallardo and Bob Carmichael. A hamburger feed will follow breakfast. An excellent selection of gently used items will be available at our Fly-In Market.

A wide range of aircraft will be on display and open for tours. Military, law enforcement, and civilian aircraft will be available on our ramp while many of the Museum's own aircraft, normally closed, will be open for visitors to enter and enjoy. Visitors will be able to sit in the Museum's former Blue Angel Grumman F11F Tiger and have their picture taken for a small fee. The flight simulator and gift shop will also be open for visitors. Other activities are in the planning stage now and we will announce them soon.

This event will depend upon members volunteering to support these activities. Please contact the Combat Air Museum at **785.862.3303** or at office@combatairmuseum.com to lend your support for our 50th anniversary celebration! ◆

COMBAT AIR MUSEUM
7016 SE Forbes Avenue
Topeka, KS 66619



PLANE TALK

*Visit the Combat Air Museum for fun, information and an educational experience.*

# Flying at Dusk

*By Paul Bewsher*

There is no sun:
But in the West there glows
A sea of rose.
The day is done;
And slowly fades in robes of flaming light
Before the night,

Below me lies
A mist of deepest blue
Which stains the view
With sapphire dyes,
And all the countryside below is kissed
With dim blue mist.

Here in the sky,
I see the day is gone
And dusk creeps on;
And as I fly
I know that, for the first time, from the air,
The world looks fair.

Never before
Has beauty filled my eyes
From towering skies.
I never saw
Earth look romantic from the heights above,
But Dusk brings Love.

*Paul Bewsher was a pilot in the Royal Naval Air Service from 1915 to 1918 and then in the Royal Air Force from 1918 to 1919.*