



Hangar Talk

A publication of the Lake Superior Squadron, Commemorative Air Force

WINTER 2020

STORIES OF ENDURANCE

AND HOW MAN AND MACHINE WORK TOGETHER TO SURVIVE



As German fighter ace Franz Stigler maneuvered his Messerschmitt alongside Charlie Brown's B17 "Ye Ol' Pub" he was amazed how the bomber could still fly. The left horizontal stabilizer was gone, the rudder had many holes as did the fuselage with some very big holes and one engine out. With one squeeze of the trigger he could put it out of its misery. He chose not to, sparing the lives of the crew and their wounded bomber. Charlie made a dead-stick landing at an emergency strip in England as the flying fortress sucked up the last few drops of fuel. Forty years later each searched diligently to find their former enemy and once found became fast friends recalling their days in the sky during WWII and having some hangar talk.

And then there is the story of the B-17 that was almost cut in two by the propeller of a German fighter plane as it collided with the bomber. It was held together with the aid of parachute cords, the tail waving back and forth like a fish tail. It fell off as the aircraft came to a stop at an emergency airfield in England. Could these aircraft be infused with an other-world desire to get their crews home, saving the lives of its care-takers? And stories of former pilots on either side of the sky war who would later become friends. All stories about heroism, bravery and chivalry, all with a military background.

But what about such heroism and bravery in the world of civilian aircraft and their crews?

Consider Boeing's Pacific Clipper and its plight and flight. It was on its regular route and schedule from

California to New Zealand and return when Pearl Harbor happened, changing its route and flight time dramatically. No bullet holes or heroics, but a riveting story nonetheless as man and machine work with and depend on each other to deliver their crew mates safely home.

Boeing of Seattle built twelve "Clippers" – 1938-1941 – nine going to Pan Am for their ocean-crossing fleet of flying boats and three going to British Overseas Airways. The name "Clipper" taken from the fast sailing vessels of yesteryear.

The wingspan of the leviathan of the air was 152 feet, the length 106. The massive wing held four Whitney R-2600 Twin Cyclones. The wing was thick enough at the chord to have a cat walk enabling mechanics to service the engines from inside. The fuselage was 106 feet in length. The upper deck contained the bridge, navigator's desk, radio room, flight engineer's station and storage compartment. The lower level contained the galley, lounge, dining area, seven passenger compartments stair-stepping up toward the tail with a bridal suite in the rear.

The dining area was restaurant style with a capacity of 14. Tables were covered with fine linen, silverware and china. Four- and five-course meals were served by white-coated waiters. The Clippers were not fast, going just under 200 MPH. What they lacked in speed they made up in luxury catering to the rich and famous. The fare from New York to South Hampton, England was

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2020 officers

Kevin Parks	Unit leader
DeWayne Tomasek	XO
Gary Smith	Finance
Tom Wilk	Adjutant
Peter Prudden	Operations
Bruce Hosking	Safety
Bob Wolfe	Aircraft

Meetings are first Thursday of each month, 6:30 at the Amorde terminal building, Bong Airport, Superior, WI

A NOTE FROM KEVIN

It has been a year since I moved out of the area. The progress the unit has made since that time has been nothing short of amazing! First I need to thank DeWayne for taking over the duties of CO, it is very much a thankless position, not to the unit though.

A lot has been accomplished in the past year: from the mounting of the wing to the black PBV, to the cleaning out the hangar to be able to store aircraft for winter storage to building a work room (complete with doors) to resuming work on the blue PBV, to reassembling the engine for the OY-2. Plus the time spent at the Bong Museum. I know that I am forgetting a lot of things that occurred in the past year but those come to my head first.

It is to bad that HQs can not see what the LSS has accomplished. But I see it every time someone posts something on Facebook or writes something on Messenger. I really wish that I could be there more often to help but seeing all of this sure helps me know what is happening.

THE END OF AN ERA

In the days of hot lead and linotype machines a newspaper reporter would put a ---30--- at the end of his story or article to indicate the end. Obvious, no? At the end of a shift, old-time printers would hang up their aprons. Hanging up the apron can also indicate the end of a era."

Tom Wilk is taking over as adjutant beginning in November.

I recall the monthly meetings were in a room at the east end of the hangar that was later part of the museum. Unit leader DeWayne Tomasek called the meeting to order starting with the pledge of allegiance and facing the flag followed by an invocation given by Frank Layne.

The detachment became a squadron with the arrival of the two PBVs and work began on the restoration of 7179Y

Then it was all taken apart as the nature and the elements began taking a toll on the building and the need to move the two PBVs to the unit's new quarters in Superior.

Now with two years of occupancy and two public events this past year, a sense of normalcy slowly is coming back as a flyable airplane is restored, the Black Cat takes up it's residency and work continues on restoring PBV 7179Y

So this is a ---30--- to end the eleven years of taking notes, doing the minutes and other duties of being the adjutant. - J. Fuhr

All I can say is that everyone that is a part of the unit, no matter what they do, have been truly awesome and it makes me proud to be a part of it! Keep up the tremendous work and I will see you when I see you. Great job!

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A trivia question: What is a sesquiplane?

A: The 12-engine Dornier Do X flying boat was a sesquiplane with a broad, wide top wing and a stubby half wing, a sponson or sea wing, attached to the hull. The Boeing Clipper Ships had the same feature.

Reg Cleworth confided in his brother Robert: "I don't think I will be coming back." Reg was a navigator on a PBV Catalina operating out of Darwin, Australia in a covert mine-laying operation to disrupt Japanese supply routes. Reg went missing-in-action with no details and no reason why his plane went down.

This extraordinary event during WWII is detailed in a new book written by his brother and published by Australian publishers Allen & Unwin: RAAF Black Cats to be out on the shelves June 1, 2020.

SUMMER USHERED OUT WITH LEFT-OVERS, A PROGRESS REPORT AND A COLD HANGAR

The left-over pulled pork from the August 17th BBQ cars and planes event was thawed, heated and served with potato salad, chips and a beverage for the members and invited guests only End of Summer event October 12th. The weather was cool and rainy making a bit uncomfortable for eating in the hangar. Tables and chairs were set up in the museum.



Bill McMahan brought the group up to date on current projects and what has been happening.

The wing has been mounted on 324FA – aka the Black Cat – making it look more like an airplane. The trailing edge of a PBYS wing is fabric covered. The trailing edge on the wing of 324 will be left uncovered to allow visitors to see the framework and get an idea of the engineering that goes into the construction of an aircraft.

Bill and Bob Wolfe orchestrated the operation, Jerry Pybas operated the truck crane and with the help of

squadron members the operation went smoothly.

The wing is in five sections: The middle section contains the engine nacelles. The two outboard sections are each in two sections and are in three sections front to back: the leading edge, center or spar section and trailing edge.

The tail flight control surfaces will be added making the display Catalina complete. The engines are being reserved as spares for 7179Y. The rudder is fabric-covered. The elevators will be left uncovered -- again allowing visitors to see how the framework of an aircraft is constructed,

The cylinder bolts for the OY-2 engine have arrived allowing the engine to be assembled. It will not be installed on the aircraft until work on the firewall has been done to take care of some corrosion.

The shop has been insulated and doors have been ordered. A P&W 1830 from the Catalina is in the shop and undergoing some minor work. A complete overhaul is not needed since there is still plenty of time left on it, Round engines are due for a complete overhaul at 1500 hours. Another engine has about 1000 hours, eliminating the huge expense of engine overhauls for the time being.

Work on the apron in front of the hangar is yet to be done. LSS members will cut and take up the asphalt 13 feet out from the hangar, The city will relay the asphalt with a slight depression to channel rain and snow melt away from the hangar doors.

Structural plans are pending for the new hangar doors and are to be submitted to the new building inspector.



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\$675. A round trip from San Francisco to Hong Kong was \$1365 or one way for \$760.

Stubby wing-like projections – sea wings – on either side of the fuselage at water level served to stabilize the aircraft on the water and add lift when in flight. They also served as gangways to exit/enter the aircraft and contained fuel tanks

Captain Ford eased the throttles forward commanding the four 14-cylinder twin cyclones to lift the giant flying boat up off the water at Treasure Island, San Francisco and head on a 350-mile hop to Los Angeles. A short stay and it was off on a 2,400 statute-mile flight to Hawaii. The date: December one, 1941.

Topping the tanks with 100 octane fuel, putting supplies and passengers aboard, some R&R and it was off on the second leg of the flight to New Zealand making stops at the islands of Canton, Fiji and New Caledonia. The date: December three.

Approaching New Zealand, news came that turned everyone's world up-side-down, the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Suddenly the Pacific Ocean was unsafe and the locations of the enemy were not known. Immediately Ford ordered all radio communications cease lest the enemy might be listening.

During the week following their arrival at Auckland, New Zealand, Ford spend every day at the American Consulate waiting for instructions from the Pan Am office in New York. Finally they came: Remove all lettering and insignia from the aircraft and head West. Use your own discretion. The crew was on their own. The crew and ground personnel immediately began removing all identification from the aircraft. They were almost done save for the American flag on top of the wing. Ford ordered the crew to stop and begin taking parts off of the two spare engines at the Auckland base and get them aboard the Clipper.

There were no charts or maps for west of New Zealand. They would be flying into uncharted and unknown territory in radio silence.. Many hours were spent at the local library pouring over geography books and maps . Flying over the vast expanse of the Indian Ocean with no fueling stations was out of the question and flying over vast stretches of land was nerve-wracking for the crew of a flying boat. They came up with a planned route not knowing where the Japs would be: Gladstone and Darwin in Australia, Surabaya, Trincomalee, Karachi, Bahrain, Khartoum, Leopoldville, Africa where there were company facilities, then across the Atlantic to Natal, Brazil, another company base, then to Port of Spain in the West Indies and home to New York.

They left Auckland December 16th and headed west, Approaching Surabaya, Dutch East Indies, they were set

upon by Dutch fighter planes not knowing if they were friend or foe. Seeing the American flag on top of the wing they held their fire. Still being cautious they shadowed the giant flying boat into the harbor, their guns at the ready with safeties off.

A low overcast forced them to descend to 300 feet over the Indian Ocean. The crew saw a black object in the water. As they drew closer it began to rise out of the water showing the rising sun on the coning tower – a Japanese submarine. Ford shoved the throttles forward and pulled back on the yoke as the sub's deck gun was swung around. Getting up into the overcast a flash lit up the clouds beneath them.

The incident was reported to British authorities at Trincomalee, Ceylon who could not believe an enemy sub could be in their coastal waters without them detecting or seeing it.

There was no 100 octane fuel at some stops. The crew had no choice but to go with 90 requiring the flight engineer to carefully balance the fuel/air mixture and monitor the manifold pressure to keep engine temperatures below the red line. All 100 fuel was transferred to one tank, using the empty tank for the 90 fuel. The 100 fuel was used for take offs, switching to the 90 once achieving cruising altitude.

Arriving at Leopoldville they were on company territory. Preparing for the 3,100 nautical miles across the Atlantic they topped the tanks with 5,100 gallons of fuel, overloading the Clipper by 2000 pounds. Getting out of Leopoldville was a hassle what with the 100 degree heat making for a less-dense atmosphere and having to thread their way through the river gorge before gaining access to the open sea.

War-time security prevented any weather reports en route and head winds or going around storm fronts could use up more fuel than expected. Arriving in Natal, Brazil there were two hours of reserve fuel, having been in the air 23 hours and 35 minutes.

The mid-shift controller at LaGuardia was shaken out of his doldrums by the blast from the loudspeaker: "Clipper NC18606 inbound from Auckland, New Zealand." The harbor was closed during the night, putting the Clipper on hold until daylight. Ford gently put the clipper down in the harbor. Suddenly it shuddered to a stop. "Thirty thousand miles of hell and we get hung up on a sand bar!!!" Being a bit irritated Ford rammed the throttles to the stop, gunning the engines to get the aircraft over the sand bar, then moving into navigable water taxied to the dock and tied up. The date: January 6, 1942.

Excerpts taken from the book: The Long Way Home, A Journey Into History With Captain Robert Ford by Ed Dover.