

# WARBIRD FLYER



★★★EAA Warbirds Squadron 2 Newsletter★★★



## CO's Cockpit

By Ron Morrell

Welcome to 2012, hopefully the Mayan calendar chiseler just ran out of stone and we will still have a 2013! It is an honor and a privilege to take over the reins of Commander of the Cascade Warbirds. I would personally like to extend my thanks to Greg Anders for all of his hard work and the dedication of so much of his time over the past four years. One of the most important commodities we all have is our time and Greg went above and beyond in his commitment to keeping our squadron moving in the right direction. As Greg moves on to other endeavors, he will continue to serve on our board and lend us his historic perspective and corporate knowledge.

I also would like to thank the outgoing members of our Board of Directors. The time and expertise we received from Curt, Carter and Betty was invaluable and I have high hopes that they will continue to be tuned into the squadron and help us keep moving down the right path.

All organizations must grow, change and adapt in order to continue to flourish. This takes new members and new ideas as well as the re-commitment to the tried and true ideas that put them on the path to success in the first place. Our new additions to the board of directors will be tasked to help us keep those concepts alive. I welcome Michael, Bob and Paul to the table and ask them to step up and get involved with our organization by bringing their fresh new ideas and expertise.

We should all welcome new perspectives and keep an open mind to ways to satisfy our mission statement and keep our members involved while not losing sight of the fact that our participation is one of our best assets. My first act as I took command was to announce to the members in attendance that I have set up a specific email address for any and every member to have direct access to my

computer screen/smart phone/iPad and even the future computer chip that will probably be implanted one of these days. Every message that I get from one of our members will be read and responded to (if needed). That address is: CWBCommander@gmail.com. I intend to keep the lines of communication as open as possible without overloading our members with unneeded spam and I promise I won't be too quick to hit the "delete" key.

We spent the first meeting of the board of directors for 2012 discussing this year's direction and our new emphasis on doing what we do best. The flying season will hopefully

start with a Cascade Warbird event/fly-in that will get our aircraft owners together with as many non-owners and general enthusiasts at a good old-fashioned day of camaraderie, airplane noise and even some defying of gravity flights. We have a tentative date of the third weekend in April and hosting being at the Heritage Flight Museum in Bellingham. The details will be to follow but we hope to have the weather gods cooperate and get a good number of squadron aircraft up to the northern reaches of Washington with no empty, non-pilot seats and then find other hardy squadron members in attendance to venture forth and get some altitude (and maybe attitude) while the Bellingham tower is in a cooperative mood. We want to make this a good spring warm-up for the pilots as well as shake spring into some of the non-owner participants.

A month later is our premier event in supporting the veterans and the Warbird spirit in the Pacific Northwest. The 21st of May is our yearly visit for the B-17 tour and a great way to help put our squadron in the limelight with the local media and the EAA as we show the rest of America how to host an event that is so important in the history of military aviation. Help us make it great!



Continued on page 2

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★★★ Cascade Warbirds ★★★  
EAA Squadron 2 Newsletter

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This is the official publication of the Cascade Warbirds EAA Squadron 2. As such, it serves principally as a communications vehicle for our membership. The views and opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the individual writers, and do not constitute the official position of the Squadron or the EAA. As members you are encouraged to contribute articles, comments, squadron news, and anything else involving Warbirds or associated subjects to the editor. He will gladly work with you and see that your material is put into print and included in the newsletter, no matter your level of writing experience or computer expertise.

Articles can be submitted via e-mail, to the editor's address. Deadline for submission of articles is generally two weeks prior to the next publication, but earlier is always appreciated!

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## Editor's Page

By Frank Almstead

I am now in my seventh year as editor of the *Warbird Flyer* and I am as amazed as always at the quality of submissions our members bring forth to share with one another. First I'd like to congratulate Stan Kasprzyk for winning the Warbird Literary award last year for his article "Five Kills - Five Bags." In addition, I'd like to thank our members who shared their biographies with the rest of us. As you know it was a goal last year to have at least one member story per quarter, and we accomplished that goal together. I hope that the short narrative captured within these pages inspires you all to go on and record further details for your family. It is something that your grandchildren will thank you for when they are old enough to understand. Secondly, I'd

like to thank Greg Anders, John Clark, Fred Smyth and Ed Rombauer. Combined, they continue to put out material that makes up the core of the newsletter. In particular, Ed's safety articles are, in my opinion, one of the crown jewels of this production. Lastly, I'd like to thank the new authors that continually step forward to share their stories, news, interests, etc. It is this diversity that makes the *Warbird Flyer* the quality publication that it is. We start the new year out with yet another member, Michael Rutledge, sharing part 1 of an epic story. It is one that I've already enjoyed reading and hope you will too. In closing, I have to say that the gauntlet has been thrown down for the 2012 Warbird Literary Award... Who wants it?

Let's hear it at [editor@cascadewarbirds.org](mailto:editor@cascadewarbirds.org) ☘

## CO's Cockpit (cont'd)

Another emphasis item for the rest of the summer is to spread ourselves out better than before. In a good way that will show the surrounding communities our aircraft and our spirit. We will attempt to put out the information and details for more weekend small venues that want to see airplanes on the ground and in the air. The small fly-in is a great place to make more friends and to let more families, kids and enthusiasts see our airplanes in action. We are committed to get you information earlier and hopefully get non-owners to accompany us owners in our airplanes for day trips to these venues. There is no better feeling than to show up at a small airport with a friend in the other seat AND to get to hang out during the stay with people who want to know about the airplane, the pilot, and the other enthusiasts around the area that help make these flights possible. I encourage all of the members to stay on the lookout for these types of opportunities and let us on the board of directors know about them.

The other big events for this year will include the father's day airshow in Olympia. This is always a great meeting place for the squadron and the local aviation buffs. We will do our best to keep the rain and

clouds at bay but, as with previous years, the flying will find a way to happen. Later in the summer and early fall, as always is Oshkosh and the Reno National Championship Air Races. We hope to find out some information about Vintage Aircraft Weekend and how we may be able to participate in the best local showing of warbirds for the local Seattle enthusiasts without having an official airshow. We are planning the same level of participation as in previous years, if not more. The final formal event of the season will most likely be the Fairchild airshow on the East side of the mountains. This is the year of the semi-annual airshow at Fairchild AFB and we will be looking for the details to share with you soon. Our understanding as of now is that it will be after the Reno weekend.

This is just a rough overview of what we think is going to be happening this summer and there will always be changes, additions and more information to follow. I personally hope that we can make this year one that emphasizes our squadron to those who count most; our own members!

My goal for the squadron for 2012: "Keep 'em Flying" and "Let's plan on the Mayans being wrong". ☘

# Buffalo Soldiers On: Part 2

By John Clark

In part one of this article from the December 2011 Warbird Flyer, we introduced the relatively short operational career of the Brewster F2A Buffalo from a trend setter to utterly obsolete in just four years. A once great performing airplane became at the US Navy's ever increasing demands for greater combat capabilities that added significant weight without additional power. In part two, we will cover it's usage around the world by foreign air arms including those of an axis power who took the airplane to the then unequaled kill ratio of 26:1 with slightly more than just three dozen airframes.

After designing, testing and modify versions of the F2A Buffalo for the US Navy, the Brewster company was eager to secure foreign contracts prior to the start of World War Two. Great Britain, Netherlands, Belgium, Australia and Finland all purchased variants of the, by then, outclassed airplane. All foreign models would be derivatives of the Buffalo designs which were originally contracted by the US Navy.

## *With the Commonwealth Air Arms over Asia*

The airplane, in the form of a de-navalized B-339E (US Navy model F2A-2), fought along side the American Volunteer Group (aka Flying Tigers) with the British Royal Air Force. These 34 aircraft, originally destined for France before it's fall to the Germans, were reluctantly accepted into the RAF. Considered a second rate aircraft, the type was sent to fight what was believed to be a second rate enemy in the China Burma region.

The RAF pitted woefully unprepared pilots, outmoded tactics and a nearly non-existent supply chain in the face of the then much larger and more capable Japanese Army Air Force (JAAF). The RAF used the B-339 to slightly better effect in the Malaya Singapore region. There they fought against the Imperial Japanese Navy and JAAF but the lack of an early warning system meant that most missions were launched in the face of a much higher enemy. Among other commonwealth air arms to fly the Brewster in combat in the skies over Asia were the Royal Australian Air Force and the Royal New Zealand Air Force. The RAAF and RNZAF, like their British counterparts had many pilots that would go on to become aces in other aircraft but all experienced the bitterness of retreat to the superior Japanese forces.

The Dutch experienced similar results in the Southeast Asia theater with their stable of B-339D fighters. So many B-339's were destroyed on the ground that they ceased to be an effective means for repelling the Japanese raids.

## *Nordic Combat and Redemption*

How was it that the Buffalo came to fight for an Axis power? The Soviets sought to repatriate Finland along with several other countries that had succeeded from Russia twenty years prior to the outbreak of WWII. The Finns found themselves fighting a common enemy alongside Germany in a struggle to retain their sovereignty. In a reverse twist of fate to the Asian experience, the second rate Soviet pilots in their now even more obsolete Polikarpovs and LaGG's were sent to battle the Finns in the better performing Brewster. The Russian Air Force

has a small number of capable allied lend-lease aircraft like the Hurricane, Spitfire and Tomahawk but most of the force included old and slow bombers flown by some of their least capable pilots.

The B-239 model (former US Navy F2A-1) was not referred to as the Buffalo in Finnish service. It enjoyed such appellations as "Pylyly Walteri" (translated: Sky Pearl), American Car and the Beer Bottle. The Finnish Brewsters were outfitted with four 0.50 in machine guns and had a reflector sight to replace the original telescopic tube sight. The batch of 43 aircraft were shipped with a de-rated export engine which was designed to operate with 87 octane fuel. Being rather industrious, ground crews solved a chronic problem of propeller seal oil leakage at high power settings with simple modifications. While US Navy, Marine and British crews reported poor flying characteristics and weapons reliability in combat, the Finns found the Brewster an easy airplane to fly and fight. Devoid of the heavy naval equipment, this lighter, better armed and more reliable version of this airplane served as great platform with which to form an aerial defensive perimeter around Finland.

It was the careful study of the failures of the Buffalo at the Battle of Midway that helped Finnish pilots to develop their tactics. The Finns would instead closely mirror the energy fighting tactics so successfully employed by the Flying Tigers. The Finns achieved great success by using the advantages of altitude, surprise and high speed attacks. They were also excellent marksmen no doubt aided by the projector gunsight that replaced the original tube sight. Unfortunately for the Soviets, the Red Army Air Force's cultivated as much fear of their leaders as the enemy. The net result was unyielding formation tactics with little or no initiative on the part of individual pilots. The Finnish pilots' aggressiveness proved superior to the Soviets who rigidly followed their leader.

Finland's top five aces Hans Wind, Ilmari Juutilainen, Jorma Karhunen, Lauri Nissinen, and Eino Kinnunen scored an astounding 141 kills in the B-239. Pilots Wind and Juutilainen alone shot down 39 and 34 Soviet aircraft, respectively. Their top scoring pilots seemed to prefer certain airframes and just two aircraft had credits of more than 70 kills from all the pilots that flew them. The Finnish completed the war with a k/d ratio of 26:1. The total counts were 496 kills against only 19 Brewsters lost. Even though some sources have the kill count as low as 476, this ranks among the highest aerial kill-to-loss ratios achieved by a fighter in any war. Among these kills were two German Ju-87 Stukas in the later stages of the conflict when Finland sought to eradicate their former allies from their homeland. The Finns were fierce fighters for their sovereignty against any enemy and the Brewster B-239 served them well in this capacity.

Though only eight Brewsters soldiered on through the end of the war, the type flew in Finland until 1948 where the final five airframes were put into storage. With that event the story of the worst fighter with one of the best records of all time came to a close. ✪

# Squadron News

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## SCHOLARSHIP FUND

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The CWB Memorial Scholarship Fund received several generous donations in recent weeks. The squadron wishes to extend a heartfelt “Thanks for your Generosity” to Crash Williams, John Sessions, Stan and Jeri Gatewood, and Fred and Anita Smyth. Their combined contributions to this very important mission totaled \$2,600 over the past fiscal quarter. In addition, the Historic Flight Foundation is donating a very generous 25% of the proceeds from the sale of the 2012 Warbirds calendar. If you haven’t got yours yet, send \$20 to CWB, 1066 Yates Road, Oak Harbor, WA 98277.



## DUES!

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It’s that time of year again and we are before you on bended knee - figuratively speaking, that is. If the mailing label that brought you this newsletter has the date 12/11 displayed, it’s time to renew your membership. Please send US \$20.00 to CWB, 1066 Yates Road, Oak Harbor, WA 98277 and help us Keep ‘Em Flying.

## CONTACT US

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We now have 270+ members in the squadron and it is a challenge to maintain all the contact info that we deem necessary. The two most important items are the snail mail

addresses so that we can get our newsletter to you and the email addresses so that we can get all the operational info to you in a timely fashion. As you might guess, no one else is going to update the database - it has to be you. Corrections to fred@fcsmyth.com. Thanks.

## HANGAR SPACE

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Member Kathy Bauer has hangar space available to rent at AWO. There is room for 1 or 2 aircraft. Please contact Kathy for more information at kathleengbauer@comcast.net

## DREAMING OF OSHKOSH?

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Oshkosh is coming the week of July 21-29. You’ve seen the pictures... You’ve heard the stories... You’ve thought that you’ll never be able to afford it... Well, have we got a deal for you. There is still room available in the Squadron’s Oshkosh Flophouse. It’s a block from picturesque Lake Winnebago. It’s within crawling distance from the finest local establishment. It is the perfect summer getaway! And now, for the low, low price of just \$300 for the week, you can bunk with your squadronmates! If you are interested in this one of a kind experience please contact Dave Desmon at davedesmon@yahoo.com. All it takes is a \$150 deposit for now to hold it. At these prices, this opportunity is not going to last!



## NEW MEMBERS

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We always appreciate new members as they are the lifeblood of a thriving organization. In the past few weeks we have welcomed the following folks into our midst:

Steven Allmaras	Bellevue, WA
Rick Davis	Everett, WA
Shawn Duffee	Renton, WA
Tom Hoag	Bellevue, WA
Jim Shadle	Seattle, WA
Jim Stuart	Bellevue, WA

## THE ULTIMATE B-25 EXPERIENCE

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HFF plans to enlist (draft) twelve lucky crew members to journey to/ from the 70th Reunion of the Doolittle Raiders at the National Museum of the U.S. Air Force in Dayton, Ohio. Last year 17 B-25s attended this event. The basic flight plan is one-way in B-25 “Grumpy” and one-way in a jet. Hotel rooms and key event tickets will be included. The departure will occur on April 16th with the return on the 20th. A donation of \$5,000 will help defray trip expenses and aircraft maintenance, and will be partly tax deductible. The first of two crew briefings will occur during February. For more information or to indicate interest, email airborne@historicflight.org.

# Annual Cascade Warbirds Christmas Party 2011

by John Clark

As the year 2011 drew to a close, the Cascade Warbirds continued their annual traditional with another wildly successful Christmas Party. This year's event was once again held at the Hawthorne Inn in Smokey Point where the "drive" home for the evening consisted of an elevator ride to your room.

The event started at 1730 hours with the cocktail "hour" that lasted until 1900. Group after group of Warbirds members and their guest filed in and virtually filled the entire event room by the time dinner was served. As we've come to expect, a fine and extensive buffet of was offered for both the main course and the dessert. Our favorite server, Beaver, dropped by for the evening even though she was on temporary leave from her job. She was greeted warmly and felt like she was among friends.

Cascade Warbirds Commanding Officer Greg Anders kicked off the presentation portion along with Fred Smyth. One of the first official acts was to call a moment of silence over the loss of our friends George and Wendy at Reno this year. Next, a call for all veterans to stand and be recognized was given and it seemed that nearly 1/3 of the audience stood up.

Thank you all for your service! Everyone was delighted to see Larry Cruz in attendance. Larry was injured in the crash at Reno but his amazing spirit and zest for life was ever apparent through the entire night.

We were truly honored to have WWII P-38 pilot Dave Toomey and his family in attendance. Dave graciously agreed to pin the wings on the squadron's newest rated pilot, Ginny Ivanicki; a task he had not done since 1945! Greg Anders noted that when he asked Dave how fast a P-38 could fly, Dave's response was a tongue-in-cheek "It depends how scared you were!"

Not to be outdone, Dave Desmon helped Ron Morrell don his "wings" in honor of becoming our newest rated airline captain. There were many jokes about learning to fly with wrong arm on the flight controls from the left seat. Ron's wings were a little exaggerated as they were strapped onto his back and spread out nearly as far as his outstretched arms. There would be no mistaking who was

in charge of his airplane!

Awards were next on the docket and the recipients were all surprised at the recognition they received. Stan "Sundance" Kasprzyk was awarded the annual literary prize offered by Frank and Susan Almstead for the article "Five Kills - Five Bags." You can read this award winning article in the April 2011 edition of the Warbird Flyer at [cascadewarbirds.org](http://cascadewarbirds.org). The 2011 Volunteer of the Year award went to the very deserving Ed Rombauer in recognition for his work as Safety Officer and as the Warbird Flyer publisher. Finally, Fred Smyth was honored with the first annual "Search For Excellence" award offered and sponsored by Crash Williams. Fred was surprised, a little taken aback, and most of all very grateful for the honor.

No Cascade Warbirds holiday party would be complete without great gift giveaway. Five lucky attendees took home their choice of wine, 2012 Historic Flight Foundation calendars and other assorted Warbirds swag. In the now annual tradition, two grand prizes for a seat on the B-17 "Aluminum Overcast" went to Bill Lamberton and Mike Weisner during the airplane's Seattle stay in late Spring. The evening's formal events



were closed with a very well received video slideshow from the Cascade Warbirds year of 2011 events featuring photos from Al Sauer, Tony Caruso and John Clark.

People slowly migrated out of the hall as the main event wound down but then something rather exciting occurred. Cue the Christmas Party: Part II. Nearly two dozen attendees retired to the hotel's lounge for karaoke. Dave and the Davette's (Dave Desmon and Bob Hill) sang their always popular duet version of a Jimmy Buffet song. Bob Hill performed a couple of solo songs while Al Sauer and Kirsten Norris joined in some group efforts. Your author even chimed in for a few songs. We helped closed out the place after last call for both songs and tasty beverages.

A good time was had by all! Don't forget to drop by the Cascade Warbirds website's front page or our Facebook page to see the video slideshows from the event you enjoyed or missed. ✪





Christmas Party 2011  
John Clark and Tony Caruso Photos

# U-Turn

By Ed Rombauer

The Vietnam War was in full fury, and all of the A-1E Skyraiders had been traded off to the Air Force for rescue service—I was looking for a new ride. My choices were either a few months vacation in sunny Pensacola learning to fly helicopters, while enjoying the beach during the day and swapping lies at the O-Club at night, or an S-2F Squadron flying anti-submarine patrols over the cold Pacific. As the Navy helicopters of that time were “a work in progress,” I opted for the familiar and went with a fixed wing rather than a “fling” wing aircraft, even though the S2s wings fold and have no spar.

It's never a good thing when, upon joining a new squadron, you are asked to report to the C.O. To my surprise, he greeted me warmly and asked if I had met all of the other pilots in the squadron. “No,” I replied, “I've been busy studying for the NATOPS test for the S-2 and have not met everyone yet.” The Skipper looked at me for a moment and then informed me that when I started to fly, I would be flying with an aircraft commander by the name of “Ted”. Since Ted was one of the pilots I hadn't met, the name meant nothing to me. He then dropped the other shoe. “Be alert when you fly with him, Ted is not one of our stronger pilots and he had a bad accident a short time ago. Welcome aboard—Dismissed.” As I left the C.O.'s office my mind was busily trying to remember all the squadron gossip that I had heard.

At the end of W.W. II, military pilot training was going full throttle preparing for the coming invasion of the Japanese homeland. In an instant, with the end of the war, the need for pilots ended and most of the fledgling aviators were released from active duty. Ted was one of these. He joined a non-drilling reserve unit for several years and then later, during a period of pilot shortages,

decided to go back to the flying Navy. His flight time was generated by limited SNB training and proficiency flying and then later S2 flying in the A.S.W. squadron that I would join. Basically, he was a low-time pilot with marginal I.F.R. skills, however since there were always two pilots in the S2, and he was easy to work with, he managed to stay out of trouble.

One Pacific Northwest fall day Ted and a senior officer, who was the aircraft commander, took off on a training flight, heading south over the state of Oregon. The weather and visibility were good below a higher level overcast, a perfect time to log some flying in the clouds time. The old S2, with both engines operating, was a

reasonably solid platform with which to fly in instrument conditions, however with an engine out, due to the short fuselage, you could lose directional control very quickly. As they flew south at an altitude that kept them in the clouds, Ted and the Commander took turns hand flying the aircraft. Since there was no crew onboard there was no need to practice anything other than basic instrument



flying. In those days the radios and instruments were all very basic. The pilot had to work at flying.

Somewhere over central Oregon the training flight turned into a real emergency. The left engine exploded in a shower of oil as a connecting rod went through the engine seizing it almost immediately. As the aircraft slewed around to the left with the loss of the engine, the Commander feathered the left engine while pushing hard on the rudder pedal and increasing power on the remaining engine. “Let's turn around and head back to base,” he yelled at Ted. Flying the Tracker on one engine with no load on board was really not too demanding as each engine was capable of producing almost fifteen hundred horsepower if needed. However, as the rudder could run out of ability to keep the aircraft flying straight



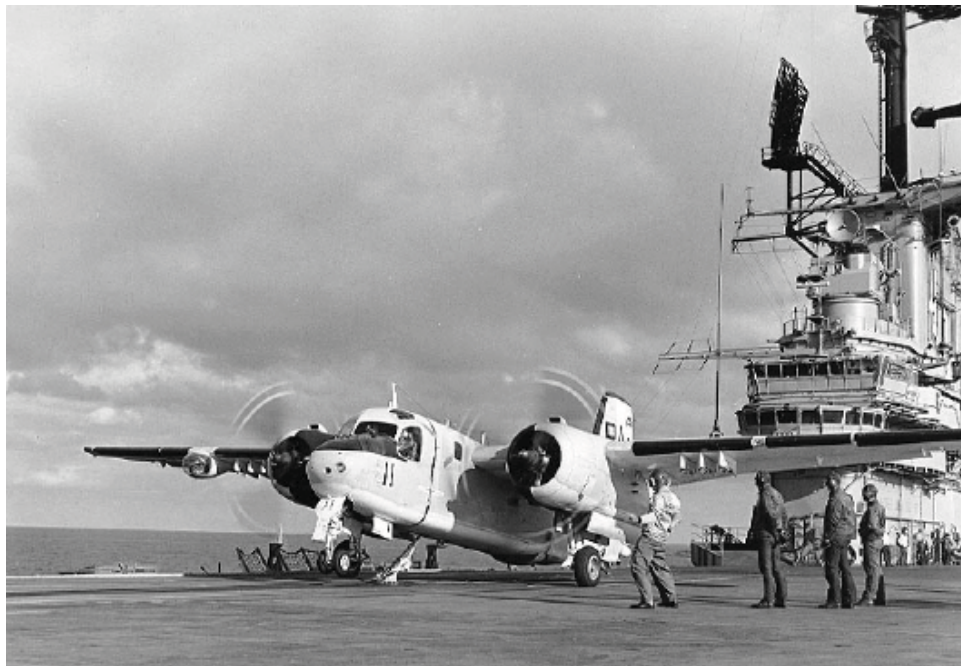
at lower airspeeds on one engine, the trick was to keep the airspeed up enough to maintain directional control. Also, the S2 was not noted for being very streamlined, it was built more like a brick than an arrow, which meant that it slowed down in the turns, requiring the use of more power.

It was in the turn that they ran into trouble. An engine-out turn under actual instrument conditions can be demanding, especially if there is a bit of turbulence or if they banked the aircraft the wrong way—into the dead engine. Whatever the cause, it was in the turn that the pilots lost control. As they banked the aircraft around to return to base, the airspeed rapidly dropped, until with a shudder and the controls shaking, the S2 stalled and began a flat spin. Spin recovery under instrument conditions in a disabled aircraft was a skill level above the ability of these airmen. “Let’s get out of here—bailout,” the Commander yelled at Ted.

Getting out of an S2, while wearing a parachute, is challenging under the best of conditions and this was far from the best of anything. Ted managed to raise the center console between the pilots and latch it up against the instrument panel which would allow both of them to crawl out of their seats. “Go back and get the hatch open—I’ll be right behind you,” the Commander shouted at Ted. Ted began to crawl towards the back, down a narrow aisle between the unoccupied crew stations. The slowly spinning aircraft made movement towards the exit not only difficult but painful, as there were a lot of sharp objects that the motion of the aircraft threw him against. With a lot of effort Ted made it back to the exit, however the force of the spin was pushing him away from the hatch. Reaching out as far as he could to the exit door, he managed to pull the emergency door release which should have allowed the door to separate from the

aircraft. The spin, however, was working against him and the hatch stayed firmly in place with Ted pinned against the opposite crew compartment. Looking forward, Ted saw that the Commander was slowly making his way towards him. “I can’t get the door open,” Ted yelled. The Commander, realizing that the centrifugal force of the spin was keeping them from leaving the aircraft, told Ted that he was going back to the cockpit to try and regain control.

Perhaps it was the good engine quitting, or maybe it was a trick of aerodynamics but as Ted watched the Commander turn around and start to crawl forward, the S2 suddenly flipped upside down and continued its



S-2E Tracker prepares to launch from USS Bennington in 1967 (US Navy Photo)

spiral down in an aggressive inverted spin. Ted suddenly found himself flying through the air—outside the airplane! A tug on his ripcord and he was home free. Witnesses on the ground reported seeing the S2 descend out of the overcast in an inverted spin, then quickly right itself and glide to the

ground in a perfect crash landing. You may think that the Commander was able to reach the controls in time to recover, however the investigation reported that he died of trauma before he could reach the cockpit.

I found that flying with Ted was generally uneventful, but later realized that it wasn’t Ted that I had to watch out for. Ted knew the limits of his ability and stayed within those limits—it was my ability when flying with him that I had to watch, as there would be no “experienced” pilot to help me if I got into trouble. Another thought that occurred to me after thinking about this crash: never let an aircraft dictate the terms of your demise—fly it to the end. ★

# Sometimes It Works Out: Part I

By Michael Rutledge

What started out as a simple story about an airplane, turned out to have much more to do with the significant events and people who shaped my life, of which a very particular Stearman played a major part. At the urging of my wife and some close friends, I decided to finally capture the details on paper for my sons to read, and for future generations of Stearman owners and enthusiasts to learn of how one very small story contributed to the Stearman legacy.

Michael-

## *The Beginning*

“I’m going to own that Stearman someday.” And that’s how hundreds of Stearman dreams begin. I made that definitive statement when I was 12 years old, but the story starts before then.

I was born and raised in Galesburg, my father; Russell Massingill was a WWII Navy veteran and well known brick layer in the area. When I was five I remember him taking me to the airport to “see an airplane he used to own”. As we passed the drive-in theater I started to see the colors of dozens of planes lined up abreast on the grass. When we pulled into the airport, there stood a majestic, yellow Stearman, and J-3 parked alongside it. We were immediately greeted by Jim Leahy. While Jim and my dad talked I walked straight for the massive landing gear and drug my hands across the tire treads and progressed to the smooth steel propeller, an action that would earn a stern reprimand if I caught either of my sons doing that today. Jim chased me down and introduced himself while walking with me, pointing out details on “404” that I can specifically remember to this day. After about five minutes he asked “are you ready to go flying?” I must’ve said yes, because the next thing I knew we were taxiing out to the grass. I was on my dad’s lap in the front cockpit, no headset, and his hands wrapped around my waist as a substitute seatbelt, which was apparently considered an adequate restraint system in 1976.

After a brief run-up, we started to roll forward. For reasons unbeknownst to me now, as soon as the wheels broke ground my chubby, little, hands grabbed the side tubing in a death grip, and what came out of my mouth could’ve only been described as a piercing scream of pure fear. Before we had finished the turn to cross wind, my dad gave Jim a hand signal to return to land. An auspicious beginning for a career professional pilot and a life-long Stearman love affair, but the hook was firmly set. At the age of five I got my first airplane ride in 404 from the grass at Galesburg during the 1976 fly-in that would impact the rest of my life.

After that flight, I started to learn more details about my dad’s relationship with the airplane. He and Jim worked

closely in the construction industry, and often times on the same projects, which is how they became associated. In 1966 they decided to form a partnership in a Stearman, and spent the next year searching for the “one”. They finally found their plane in West Bend, WI. A well known crop dusting operator, Clifford Ducharme, owned Aerial Blight Control and had a large fleet of Stearmans. Mr. Ducharme decided he could make a profit returning some of his dusters to stock configuration, and so it was for N9914H. Actually, the plane had been Mrs. Ducharme’s personal ship for a few years before they decided to sell it. So Jim and dad brought the plane back to Galesburg, and from there the story really begins.

I was too young to understand at the time, but from reviewing dad’s logbooks after his passing, it turns out he was a fairly low time pilot and the Stearman may have been a little daunting for him. In addition, from 1967 to 1969, Jim began attending more fly-ins and performing in airshows. All of which probably further strained the partnership for a guy who simply wanted to fly an open cockpit biplane over the Illinois corn fields. So in late 1969, my dad sold his half of the Stearman to Jim. I still have the original bill of sale with my dad’s signature on it. After that fateful first airplane ride in 1975, my dad never really spoke of his Stearman ownership again unless I specifically asked. He did continue to fly, but it consisted of him taking me out in his Cherokee 140 and chasing boats on the Mississippi River. Still a pretty neat father-son activity, but my nightly dreams consisted of Stearmans and 404 in particular. I drew pictures of it in school, built wood models of it at home, and when other boys my age spent all summer playing sports, I was riding my bike to the Galesburg library looking up everything I could find on Stearmans and flying in general. During a subsequent fly-in when my parents couldn’t afford the gate fee, I rode my bike out to the airport intent on watching the fly-in through the fence. Unfortunately, I didn’t make it all the way to the highway before they tracked me down and forced me to return home.

In the years that followed, Dad continued to pull back from aviation until he finally sold the Cherokee, and his flying activities consisted of a monthly magazine he got in the mail. Although the fly-in was still a major annual event for Galesburg, we never drove the 4 miles to see the Stearmans again. Undeterred, every time I heard a radial engine overhead I would burst out the door and follow it on my bike until it flew out of sight. During that time Jim would still come by the house periodically and I would bombard him with all of my stored up Stearman enthusiasm. I’m not sure how he even finished a sentence with my parents in between my rapid fire questions on aerobatics, his opinion on Continental versus Lycoming, and showing him

my completed model airplanes and drawings.

On July 3rd, 1983 my Dad passed away when I was 12 years old. I don't remember much of the trauma that followed, but during the fly-in two months later, my Mother took me out to the airport where I again met Jim next to his Stearman. Being older now, we seemed to have a different relationship than when I was 5. My mother handed Jim a container with dad's ashes, to which he opened the lid and wryly mumbled, "Hmm, doesn't look like Russ." I once again strapped into 404, with Dad on my lap this time. Jim took off during a lull in the fly-in activities and with little discussion we spread the ashes over the grass strip. After departing to the west, we proceeded to roll and loop over the fields and landed just as the sun went below the horizon. When I got out Jim hugged me for a moment and I looked up at him and said

"I'm going to own that Stearman someday". His simple response was, "I'll bet you will."

Later that year, we moved away from Galesburg and lost all contact with Jim, and the Stearman. During the teenage years that followed with no real flying influences, I suspended my love of aviation and Stearmans for sports and girls. With little parental guidance, and a failed attempt at college,

I enlisted in the Navy in 1990. I spent three years as a helicopter flight engineer, and the following nine years as a Navy SEAL. My new wife Dena and I were stationed in San Diego where my flying spark was once again re-ignited. I was a very junior enlisted man, so to say that my loving and understanding new bride sacrificed both finances and precious time with me at home so I could get my pilot's license would be a gross understatement. During our time in San Diego in between deployments, I volunteered to do what amounted to slave labor for an exploitive and slightly odd gentleman who towed banners with a 450 Stearman. I can't remember exactly what I did for him, but only that at the end of the day I was allowed to investigate every inch of his Stearman. One afternoon after wiping it down, I sat in the cockpit, and remembered my previous promise to myself and started to wonder what had become of 404. During the 9 year period we lived in San Diego, I progressed to my

commercial license, towing gliders with crop dusters, and flew every tail wheel airplane I could rent or borrow for the sole purpose of someday being able to fly a Stearman. I was even offered a unique partnership in a T-34, and eventually started flying a host of antiques and warbirds to include a T-6, and even a T-28. Yet, I never got the opportunity to fly a Stearman. I think subconsciously I was protecting the experience as no Stearman other than 404 would have sufficed.

Our first son Joshua was born in November, 2000 which necessitated Dena quitting her profession and staying at home. With that, the disposable income which had previously gone to funding my flying had now come to a screeching halt. The choice was simple; get a flying job capable of supporting the family, or stop flying in lieu

of paying the bills. After my return from a stressful overseas deployment following the September 11th, 2001 terrorist attacks, Dena and I were elated to find out I had been accepted for a commission and follow on training as an Army Aviator. The details of how I finagled the application process and inter-service transfer alone could fill another chapter, but within a few months we packed up our infant son and moved from San Diego to Fort



Stearman 404 (Michael Rutledge Photo)

Rucker, AL for flight school and an eventual assignment to Ft Campbell, KY.

It was during our time in Kentucky that our life started to enter another chapter. For the first time since I was a kid, I was once again within driving distance of Galesburg. In 2004 during our first September in Kentucky, I packed up my now 4-year old son Joshua after flying until 9pm, and left my newborn son Matthew with Dena while we drove the eight hours through the night to the fly-in. Bringing my own son to the fly-in for the first time was emotional experience in its own right. After spending the weekend watching the Stearmans again, I was reminded that this was still where my heart was...right where I left it when I was 12. During that fly-in I also introduced myself for the first time to Tom and Nancy Lowe and explained my relationship to the fly-in and Jim Leahy. That meeting would become an encouraging and inspirational force in the years to come. ✪



## CASCADE WARBIRD

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**Have Your Dues Expired?  
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#### **Cascade Warbirds** **Quick Look Calendar**

##### *January*

- 14 Squadron Meeting at  
Museum of Flight
- 21 Heritage Flt Museum  
Open House at BLI

##### *February*

- 11 Squadron Meeting at  
Museum of Flight
- 18 Heritage Flt Museum  
Open House at BLI
- 16-19 National Warbirds  
Operators Conference
- 24-26 Northwest Council  
of Airshows
- 25-26 Northwest Aviation  
Conference

##### *March*

- 10 Squadron Meeting at  
Paine Field
- 17 Heritage Flt Museum  
Open House at BLI

\* Denotes Max Effort Event  
See Website for Detailed List

## Check Six



Boeing B-17F-20-DL of the 401st Bomb Squadron does a low level fly by in Basingbourn, England. (Photo: [www.ww2incolor.com](http://www.ww2incolor.com))