Flight of a Maverick In the Secret War Against Hitler

by Robert H. Fesmire, Cadet 1944E
(excerpted from his book)

During October in 1942, I arrived in Douglas, GA, for about six weeks of primary flight training in a Stearman PT-17. It looked like an antique bi-winged plane, and there was no radio in it. The primary airfield was just as primitive. Planes took off and landed on grass.

Mr. Harley B. Pickett, Jr., was my flight instructor, and we hit it off perfectly. He was a great person, and I learned to love him. Because he was a civilian pilot, he was easier to get along with.

I soloed after ten hours of flying with him.

A few days later I reported to the operation office to practice acrobatic flying with Mr. Pickett. A second lieutenant I had never seen before approached me. He looked as though he was my age, and his face was angry.

“Mister!” he shouted to me. “What’s your name?”

I told him.

“I’m going to take you up for a test flight. I just arrived at this base and you’re the first cadet I’m going to wash out.” The hell you are, I thought to myself even as I clamped my teeth together.

The crazy lieutenant went on to explain that he had finished cadet training and was commissioned just a month ago. He had applied for fighter pilot training but wasn’t accepted. He was sent here as an instructor pilot. He wasn’t happy and was ready to sacrifice a few cadets here to make him feel better.

He was angry throughout my test flight. All he said as we left the plane was, “You’re through as a cadet.” I was dumbfounded, but Mr. Pickett was livid when he heard the news.

“I’m going to the base commander and straighten out that young shave-tail!” he told me. Within an hour he was back with good news. The hotshot lieutenant was ordered to give me another test flight.

Without letting anyone know, Mr. Pickett gave me two practice flights during the week. He was pleased with my skill in all maneuvers but

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2
Our Hamburger/Hot Dog Fly-In was Great

On 21 November the Museum board and volunteers put on a very nice hamburger/hot dog fly-in luncheon to benefit the museum and it was a big success. We had a good turnout even though the weather was threatening at times. We had planes fly in from Florida and South Carolina as well as from Georgia. Many of our EAA friends — Sweet Onion Aviators from Vidalia and the group from Cannon Creek — came as well.

We hope you will be able to join us for our next fly-in scheduled for February or March in 2010. The exact date will appear in our next newsletter.

A special thanks to all of the museum board members and great volunteers that made the Fly-In such a huge success!

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

and assured me once again that I would pass the flight test. I couldn’t have had a better friend, and I loved him.

The day came for the test flight with the dumb lieutenant. Aside from telling me which maneuver to make, he said nothing. After we landed he said “Okay” and walked away.

About ten days later I was ready for basic flight training. Unlike other bases where I had trained, I felt a little sad leaving Douglas. I would miss Mr. Harley B. Pickett, Jr., and I felt like I was leaving my best friend behind.”

Robert Fesmire went on to become a pilot of a B-24 for a crew of “Carpetbaggers,” whose mission it was to make night flights over occupied countries and drop OSS men and supplies to the underground. He belonged to a division of the 858th Squadron of the 801st/492nd Bomb Group, 8th Air Force. Their efforts were so secret that the code name “Carpetbaggers” was not released until after the war. And, thanks to the Pickett family, our museum has a signed copy of his book “Flight of a Maverick”.

“I was used to using my own judgment ever since I had been a child, and the experience carried over into my military life. I became a maverick pilot, and it contributed to our crew’s becoming one of the few to complete all of the missions we attempted. In “Flight of a Maverick” I offer true stories of my experiences, most of them told from the vantage point of a Carpetbagger pilot... the window of a black B-24.”

Very exciting plans are in the making for our 2010 Reunion of the 63rd AAF Flight Training Detachment this coming October. We look forward to seeing you again this year! More information to come in our next newsletter.

Our Hamburger/Hot Dog Fly-In was Great

On 21 November the Museum board and volunteers put on a very nice hamburger/hotdog fly-in luncheon to benefit the museum and it was a big success. We had a good turnout even though the weather was threatening at times. We had planes fly in from Florida and South Carolina as well as from Georgia. Many of our EAA friends – Sweet Onion Aviators from Vidalia and the group from Cannon Creek – came as well.

A special thanks to all of the museum board members and great volunteers that made the Fly-In such a huge success!

Very exciting plans are in the making for our 2010 Reunion of the 63rd AAF Flight Training Detachment this coming October. We look forward to seeing you again this year! More information to come in our next newsletter.

Forgotten Fields of America by Weezie Barendse

Author and WWII aviation historian, Lou Thole, has written four volumes about the “Forgotten Fields of America”. These books tell the story of the build up of the USAAF training program. He has created a pleasant irony in that “forgotten fields” are no longer forgotten. Instead, they are brought back to life again with vivid storytelling and imagery that meaningfully connects past and present. They are an excellent comprehensive study of an often overlooked portion of American history. Each chapter focuses on an airbase to tell part of that story.

Few people realize how many now vacant airfields in the US were once home to hundreds of thousands of men and women as they trained to serve our country. He has delved into what really happened in these places, and keeps alive the stories of real people’s work and sacrifices.

Mr. Thole would like to include the 63rd FTD in his next volume and has asked that we help with this effort. He wants copies of articles that deal with human interest stories, the opening of the station and the closing, and any news about Douglas that had an impact on the base.

Pictures are also a challenge. Should you have any pictures or know where we could find them that we could scan and use, it would be great.

If you have articles or photos, please contact Weezie Barendse at weezieb@charter.net or 172 Basswood Road, Douglas, GA 31535.

P-40E is Airborne

After years of hard work, Don Brooks’ Curtiss P-40E #41-5709 Warhawk got back into the air on 25 August 2009! This was her first time since 29 September 1942 when it was damaged in an Alaskan landing accident. Exactly restored by Tom Reilly, the fighter was flown by test pilot, Elliot Cross. Since that first flight, approximately five hours have been put on the plane.

The 63rd FTD Legacy Fund

Leaving a gift to charity in your will is a very special way of helping to secure the future of the WWII Flight Training Museum which portrays the history of the men and women who took to the air to defend our nation from 1939 to 1945.

This fund exists to help operate the museum and to further our mission of sharing the important role of our military airmen, as well as to grow as an educational organization. Contributions will be used to safeguard and maintain the historical integrity of the structure; to provide funds for the historical interpretation of the lives of the pilots, their training and their aircraft; and to provide an important educational resource to the community that it serves.

Bequests to the WWII Flight Training Museum are exempt from inheritance tax as the museum is a 501c3 non-profit educational foundation.
The Fifth Air Force has its beginnings as Far East Air Force (FEAF), which was the military aviation arm of the United States Army in the Philippines just prior to and at the beginning of World War II. Formed on August 4, 1941, FEAF was the predecessor of the Fifth Air Force of the United States Army Air Forces and United States Air Force.

**World War II** • Immediately after the outbreak of the Pacific War in December, Brereton sought permission from theater commander Gen Douglas MacArthur to conduct air raids against Japanese forces in Formosa, but was refused. As a consequence, FEAF was largely destroyed on the ground by Japanese air attacks. Following the Japanese invasion of the Philippines, the remnants of FEAF relocated southwards to bases in the Dutch East Indies. After those islands also fell to Japanese forces early in 1942, FEAF headquarters moved to Australia and was redesignated Fifth Air Force on 5 February 1942. Its surviving personnel and aircraft were detached to other commands and the headquarters remained unmanned for several months, but elements played a small part in the Battle of the Coral Sea (7-8 May 1942).

Headquarters Fifth Air Force was re-staffed at Brisbane, Australia on 18 September 1942 and placed under the command of Major General George Kenney. United States Army Air Forces units in Australia, including Fifth Air Force, were eventually reinforced and re-organised following their initial defeats in the Philippines and the East Indies. At the time that Kenney had arrived, there were three fighter groups and five bombardment groups.

**Fighter Groups:**
- 8th F (P-39) Townsville, Australia
- 49th FG (P-40) Darwin, Australia
- 35th FG (P-40) Port Moresby, New Guinea

**Bomber Groups:**
- 3rd BG (B-25, A-20, & A-24) Charters Towers, Australia
- 19th BG (Non-Operational. Battle scarred from Philippines & Java) Mareeba, Australia
- 22nd BG (B-26) Woodstock, Australia
- 43rd BG (Not Equipped) Port Moresby, New Guinea
- 38th BG (B-25, Not operational) Charters Towers, Australia

In addition, Fifth Air Force controlled two transport squadrons and one photographic squadron comprising 1,602 officers and 18,116 men.

Kenney was later appointed commander of Allied air forces in the South West Pacific Area, reporting directly to General Douglas MacArthur. Under Kenney’s leadership, the Fifth Air Force and Royal Australian Air Force provided the aerial spearhead for MacArthur’s island hopping campaign. On 4 November 1942, the 5th Air Force commenced sustained action against the Japanese in Papua New Guinea.

The Fifth Air Force along with the Thirteenth Air Force was assigned to the newly-created United States Far East Air Forces (FEAF) on August 3, 1944.

When the war ended, Fifth Air Force had an unmatched record of 3,445 aerial victories, led by the nation’s two top fighter aces Major Richard Bong and Major Thomas McGuire, with 40 and 38 confirmed victories respectively, and two of Fifth Air Force’s ten Medal of Honor recipients.

Shortly after World War II ended in August, Fifth Air Force relocated to Irumagawa Air Base, Japan, about September 25, 1945 as part of the Allied occupation forces. The command remained in Japan until December 1, 1950 performing occupation duties.

Source: www.wikipedia.org
In December of 2003, a small group of local citizens interested in history, aviation and heritage preservation gathered together to both protect the site of the Raymond-Richardson Aviation School in Douglas, Georgia, and to create and operate a historical museum that would tell the story of not only our community’s role in WWII, but also share the lives of the men and women who lived, worked and trained at the facility. Thus, the 63rd Preservation Society was formed.

The WWII Flight Training Museum is operated by this non-profit organization and is entirely funded by donations, grants and contributions. We believe that the museum can make a great contribution to the preservation of our heritage and to the education of both children and the public in general.

Is it a future worth securing? We think so. We hope you do, too. Become a friend of the museum through membership and help us preserve WWII aviation’s beginnings.

YOU CAN HELP!

In December of 2003, a small group of local citizens interested in history, aviation and heritage preservation gathered together to both protect the site of the Raymond-Richardson Aviation School in Douglas, Georgia, and to create and operate a historical museum that would tell the story of not only our community’s role in WWII, but also share the lives of the men and women who lived, worked and trained at the facility. Thus, the 63rd Preservation Society was formed.

The WWII Flight Training Museum is operated by this non-profit organization and is entirely funded by donations, grants and contributions. We believe that the museum can make a great contribution to the preservation of our heritage and to the education of both children and the public in general.

Is it a future worth securing? We think so. We hope you do, too. Become a friend of the museum through membership and help us preserve WWII aviation’s beginnings.

YOU CAN HELP!

In December of 2003, a small group of local citizens interested in history, aviation and heritage preservation gathered together to both protect the site of the Raymond-Richardson Aviation School in Douglas, Georgia, and to create and operate a historical museum that would tell the story of not only our community’s role in WWII, but also share the lives of the men and women who lived, worked and trained at the facility. Thus, the 63rd Preservation Society was formed.

The WWII Flight Training Museum is operated by this non-profit organization and is entirely funded by donations, grants and contributions. We believe that the museum can make a great contribution to the preservation of our heritage and to the education of both children and the public in general.

Is it a future worth securing? We think so. We hope you do, too. Become a friend of the museum through membership and help us preserve WWII aviation’s beginnings.

YOU CAN HELP!

In December of 2003, a small group of local citizens interested in history, aviation and heritage preservation gathered together to both protect the site of the Raymond-Richardson Aviation School in Douglas, Georgia, and to create and operate a historical museum that would tell the story of not only our community’s role in WWII, but also share the lives of the men and women who lived, worked and trained at the facility. Thus, the 63rd Preservation Society was formed.

The WWII Flight Training Museum is operated by this non-profit organization and is entirely funded by donations, grants and contributions. We believe that the museum can make a great contribution to the preservation of our heritage and to the education of both children and the public in general.

Is it a future worth securing? We think so. We hope you do, too. Become a friend of the museum through membership and help us preserve WWII aviation’s beginnings.

YOU CAN HELP!

In December of 2003, a small group of local citizens interested in history, aviation and heritage preservation gathered together to both protect the site of the Raymond-Richardson Aviation School in Douglas, Georgia, and to create and operate a historical museum that would tell the story of not only our community’s role in WWII, but also share the lives of the men and women who lived, worked and trained at the facility. Thus, the 63rd Preservation Society was formed.

The WWII Flight Training Museum is operated by this non-profit organization and is entirely funded by donations, grants and contributions. We believe that the museum can make a great contribution to the preservation of our heritage and to the education of both children and the public in general.

Is it a future worth securing? We think so. We hope you do, too. Become a friend of the museum through membership and help us preserve WWII aviation’s beginnings.

YOU CAN HELP!

In December of 2003, a small group of local citizens interested in history, aviation and heritage preservation gathered together to both protect the site of the Raymond-Richardson Aviation School in Douglas, Georgia, and to create and operate a historical museum that would tell the story of not only our community’s role in WWII, but also share the lives of the men and women who lived, worked and trained at the facility. Thus, the 63rd Preservation Society was formed.

The WWII Flight Training Museum is operated by this non-profit organization and is entirely funded by donations, grants and contributions. We believe that the museum can make a great contribution to the preservation of our heritage and to the education of both children and the public in general.

Is it a future worth securing? We think so. We hope you do, too. Become a friend of the museum through membership and help us preserve WWII aviation’s beginnings.