Gliders Land at Lenhardt Airpark

By William Villani

October 5 saw the rollout of two freshly-restored WACO CG-4 combat glider fuselages at Lenhardt Airpark in Hubbard. Gathered to greet the hulking green airframes was an appreciative audience: members of the National World War II Glider Pilots Association and their families, convened in Portland for their annual reunion. This was the first time that the national group has met in Oregon.

One of those present was Vic Warriner, combat pilot of the 434th Troop Carrier Group. Warriner had flown Gen. Anthony McAuliffe into Holland during the Market Garden invasion of Holland in September 1944. On their way in to the landing area, one of the C-47 towplane’s engines was disabled by enemy fire. Skimming the treetops and with Germans not far below firing and throwing rocks at them, McAuliffe suggested that Warriner call the tow pilot on the plane-to-plane intercom and tell him of his predicament. That officer, a veteran UAL flier, responded promptly: "G--d--mit,I know the engine’s out! You concentrate on flying your glider and I’ll fly my airplane!"

Warriner related that McAuliffe was full of fight during the trip, asking if he could kick the side door open and spray the Germans with his Tommy gun. The general favored the .45 caliber Thompson, Warriner remembered. Once in England McAuliffe returned to his quarters from the "O" club after having a few drinks. Before retiring, he drilled a neat circle of holes in the ceiling with his submachine gun.

(McAuliffe would later become a legend during the Battle of the Bulge. Surrounded by Germans and facing a surrender ultimatum, he reportedly replied, "Nuts!")

Another glider pilot taking part in the Holland operation - an affair that would be chronicled in the book and movie A Bridge Too Far - was T. V. Sampson of the 440th TCG. He was tasked that day with flying in a medical team, although he was not apprised in advance of just who these passengers were.

With the glider hit and afire, he assured them that they would be on the ground in two minutes. They ended up sliding to a stop, still burning, with a German 88mm gun just 75 feet away - and pointed right at them.

Sampson and Warriner were among about 500 who had gathered at the Holiday Inn at Portland International Airport for the reunion, held October 3-5. Half of these were glider pilots, including several from Germany and England. Some four busloads assembled at the Airpark for the rollout and barbecue, which also featured a

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Random Flight

By Roger Starr

Since the Oregon Air Fair was not held this year due to a scheduling conflict with the NBAA convention, I really missed seeing many of our members and supporters. The Air Fair has proven to be a premier event for OAM to exhibit its purpose of bringing Oregon aviation history to the people. The next two years' dates for the fair have already been booked at the Oregon Convention Center.

History is being made by the events of today. This is obvious from our feature article. Not only was this the first time that the National World War II Glider Pilots Association have held their annual convention in Oregon, it was the first time Jack Lenhardt and his restoration team have tackled something other than military helicopters and a few powered aircraft. Another first in Oregon aviation history was the holding of both the National and World Helicopter Championships this summer in McMinnville and Salem respectively. OAM was present at all of these events in order to record them for future generations.

We are looking to undertake some interesting projects. The museum owns one complete and one partial example of the Link trainer. The complete one was used at Portland’s Benson High School prior to being given to OAM. We are hopeful of generating interest in the restoration of this artifact in order to utilize it at future display sites. If you have an interest in working on such a project, please let us know.

Another promising project is the long-overdue compiling of Oregon’s rich aviation history into a book. Initial discussions have been held with an individual who has agreed to write a grant request to help fund the coordination and research required. This is probably the most significant and appropriate proposal your Museum has undertaken to date. Stay tuned to see how you can help.

We have not forgotten about our much-needed hangar facility. The Board has made a decision to delay the construction for what is anticipated will be a short time in order to gain what is believed will be a long-term advantage. More information will be forthcoming as it becomes appropriate to inform our members.

Tim Talen’s article regarding the opportunity to acquire Tex Rankin’s Great Lakes airplane tells of a very significant find. Tex was a major figure in Oregon aviation from 1926 until his death in 1947. He taught hundreds of early-day pilots to fly from his school in Portland. He was the International Aerobatic Champion from 1937 until his death. Many well-known names and events are associated with the name Tex Rankin. The addition of this aircraft to our collection would greatly help our future efforts in depicting his history in Oregon.

You will soon be receiving your annual dues renewal notice. I would encourage all members to give serious thought to the level of support they have been providing and consider an increase in membership level. Even though life members are not required to pay annual dues in order to remain a member, I ask them to also consider the fact that their current support in the form of contribution will only help assure our success. The costs associated with the normal administration and publications such as this newsletter need to be borne by all members.

Have a joyous holiday season.

Wil Heath was recently able to acquire five lateral steel filing cabinets from a U.S. Bancorp furniture surplus giveaway. Thank you to Wil for his initiative in following this up and to U.S. Bancorp for their generosity in making these available.
The CG-4 cockpit was small and fitted out in the most basic manner. Only a small amount of tubing and fabric protected the pilot. display of vintage aircraft. Several of these belonged to members of the Oregon Antique and Classic Aircraft Club.

The unveiling of the two CG-4s was a definite highlight for many of those present. The large fabric-covered steel tube and wood gliders are the most recent project for Jack Lenhardt's Lenair restoration shop. Past efforts have seen the completion of an FM-2 Wildcat as well as several rare early helicopters, including examples of the Sikorsky R-4 and R-5D; the R-5 had taken part in the first helicopter air-sea rescue. Once completed the WACOs will take proud places in two U.S. Army airborne museums in the east.

Sorouring and appeals across the nation have secured many hard-to-find bits and pieces. However, the big machines still await their huge wings. The WACO had an 84-foot span, almost all made of wood! The large amount of this material used in the gliders makes them a termites delight and a restorer's nightmare. Lenhardt has had help from a number of local businesses, including Kauffman Woodworking of Barlow and Industrial Welding Supply Inc. of Woodburn.

WACOs are a rare sight today, perhaps surprising given that almost 14,000 were built, most by the same company that had fathered the "alphabet soup" of Golden Age classics. At the end of the war they were so plentiful that many would buy them surplus, throw away the glider, and then use the huge packing con-
Gliders

(Continued from page 3) admonished by his passengers to "put that g---ned thing away, we're medics!" This was the first news he had of the nature of their mission. Together they set out into the hostile countryside.

Hearing someone approaching, they found cover in the underbrush, and could hear change rattling in the unknown person's pockets as he moved closer. He came so near that Sampson swore he could have reached out and touched his boot as he passed.

Sampson and his comrades spent an eventful night dodging fire that erupted occasionally around them. The next day they ventured out and saw the tops of two soldiers' helmets protruding from the grass in a nearby field. Not knowing if the helmets were those of friendly troops or enemy ones, Sampson sent one of the medics ahead to determine the answer. That man crawled forward into the middle of the field and then stood up, having discovered that the two and others surrounding them were G.I.s. These troops had been responsible for the shooting during the night, evidencing the confusion that often reigns during operations such as this.

Sampson went on to take part in the Rhine crossing in March of '45. After landing his cargo (3000 pounds of C2 explosives), he once again was part of the ground forces. Opening his waist belt the next day, fluffs of cotton came out. It transpired that, unbeknownst to him at the time, a bullet had passed through the bag containing his clips of spare ammo. Another had passed through his entrenching tool, being deflected

Remember your membership renewal
inches in front of his face. Both had come perilously close to ending his life.

That was Sampson’s last combat operation. He was scheduled to fly in the Japan invasion but that was canceled with the end of the war. He and his colleagues had done much to bring about that successful conclusion - many paying the ultimate price in the process.

At least two Oregon men were wartime casualties of the glider corps. They were:

~S/Sgt Ernest Julian Forbes, a 1935 graduate of Heppner High School. Sgt. Forbes was one of five killed in January 1943 near Dalhart, Texas when their glider crashed on landing. He is buried at Heppner Masonic Cemetery.

~2nd Lt. Harvey D. Thacker of the Reedsport area, pilot of the 84th TCS, 437th TCG. Thacker took part in the Normandy invasion and received the Air Medal. He was killed March 24, 1945 in the crossing of the Rhine. His name appears on the war memorial at the Douglas County Courthouse in Roseburg.

This article is respectfully dedicated to their memory.

Acknowledgements: Thanks are due to Jack Lenhardt, T.V. Sampson, C.R. Shearer, and Vic Warriner.

1996 ANNUAL MEETING

President Roger Starr called the March 16, 1996 meeting of the Museum Corporation to order at 1:05 PM in the Map Room of the Village Green Motel in Cottage Grove. Roger welcomed the 33 members present and introduced the 15 of 16 members of the Board of Directors in attendance. He thanked the Directors for their work in 1995 and also praised Treasurer Allen Alsing and Secretary Elwood Hedberg for their efforts in managing the details of the museum finances and records. Hedberg then reported that the four directors presented for election (Art Lumley, Hal Skinner, Doug Yarbrough, and Annette Whittington) had been unanimously elected to four-year terms by members who voted in person or by absentee ballot.

The President reviewed 1995 museum activities, highlighting the summer fly-in at Cottage Grove which featured the Super V. He gave special recognition to Bill Robinet who piloted the SV during the fly-in and subsequent delivery to the Tillamook NAS Museum where it will remain on long-term display. Roger also noted other museum activities of 1995: the meeting of prospective members in Southern Oregon where the ‘Beaverton Outlaws’ video was shown; participation in the Newberg Vintage Festival; and the display at the Oregon Air Fair. Significant acquisitions during the year included the long-term loan of a Yates geodesic wing and fuselage from Joe Bello of Salem and a rare Hall Scott engine donated by Al Irvine of Cottage Grove.

Roger turned the podium over to Vice President Royce Beatty who introduced the two program speakers. John Donnelly, Executive Director of the Pearson Air Museum, presented a 45-minute narration of slides about the past, present and future of the Pearson Air Park which is located in an historic preservation area near Ft. Vancouver, WA. An early civilian and military airfield, Pearson has a rich history which involves Oregon, Washington, and national aviation personalities. The Pearson board is interested in establishing a cooperative relationship with the Oregon Aviation Museum. John’s presentation was well received by the members present.

Royce then introduced Mason Armstrong, a former 52nd Fighter Group Spitfire and P-51 pilot in the Mediterranean Theater of WWII now living in Roseburg. A member of the American Beagle Squadron, he related many interesting tales regarding the unit’s exploits during bomber escort, ground support, and tank destroying sorties. He showed a 15-minute video tape he narrated on the squadron’s 50th anniversary in 1991 which illustrated details of the squadron’s activities. Mason graciously presented the tape to the museum library.

The annual meeting was adjourned at 2:50 PM. The museum would like to thank all who attended and our two speakers for making this a very interesting and entertaining afternoon.

email the museum at oamuseum@aol.com
Help Save Tex Rankin's Great Lakes

By Tim Talen

Every once in a while a great opportunity presents itself and for the museum the chance to acquire the Tex Rankin Great Lakes is just that opportunity. As many of you know, Tex flew a Great Lakes biplane throughout the Thirties at countless airshows and contests around the entire nation. His last Great Lakes, NX315Y, was a highly modified airshow performer powered by a 150 HP Menasco engine. This ship was used by Tex not only for airshows but in promoting Hollywood films (and performing in some, too). The museum already has home movies of Tex and the Great Lakes performing his routines while on the Oregon Air Tour of 1939.

In the mid-Fifties the Great Lakes was heavily damaged and the famous aircraft languished in a Pennsylvania junkyard for many years. It was “found” by a Great Lakes enthusiast hoping to rebuild the ship and is currently awaiting restoration. The museum, however, must raise $8,000 by December 15 to complete the purchase.

Won't you help bring this extremely important airplane back to Oregon? Your donation will be greatly appreciated - just note on your check "Tex's Great Lakes" - and be sure to get that sent by our deadline, December 15!

Send your check to:
Oregon Aviation Museum
Tex's Great Lakes
P.O. Box 553
Cottage Grove, OR 97424

Oregon Aviation Museum
PO Box 553
Cottage Grove, OR 97424

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED