May 2, 1943; Chinese boatmen watch as a stricken P-40 angles toward the waters of the Siang River. On its nose they discern the flashing teeth of the "Flying Tiger" insignia, made famous by the American Volunteer Group and now worn proudly by their successors, the 23rd Fighter Group. As the plane settles and sinks, they go to help the wounded American struggling in the water.

He is badly injured but impresses them with his composure as they pull him from the river. His wounds are serious; a bullet has passed through his abdomen, exposing his intestines. The Chinese rush him to the nearest medical care, but it is to no avail. That night they will light off 100,000 firecrackers in his honor.

Capt. John F. Hampshire Jr. of the 75th Fighter Squadron, leading U.S. ace in China at the time and the man whom no less an authority than John Alison would call "perhaps the top pilot and potentially the greatest ace of the war," was dead, just two weeks shy of his 25th birthday.

"Johnny" was an Oregon boy, born May 16, 1918 in Grants Pass. His father, John Sr., was a roadbuilder who had become enchanted with the pleasant seasons characteristic of the Rogue Valley. Settling in, it was he who coined the "It's the Climate" phrase that was to become the axiomatic description for the charms of Grants Pass. A member of the Cavemen and various other civic organizations, he donated the original wooden sign bearing that logo of which a modern replica now hangs over Sixth Street.

Johnny, an only child, was doted upon by his father and his adoring mother, Zola, in the family's big house on "A" Street. Tragedy was to color his life early, however. Zola, a wispy, fragile woman, died unexpectedly in the course of a routine tonsillectomy, leaving the two Johns to carry on, heartbroken.

Johnny grew into a rambunctious youth, his infectious personality and ingratiating, easy grin winning him many friends. From an early age he enjoyed playing with toy soldiers and other military-type items. Planes fascinated him, and by the age of 10 he could identify them by type as they flew over his home. His book report on a biography of von Richthofen, the great German World War I ace, impressed his teacher and classmates.

His interest in things aviation was given a natural outlet when Jerry Coigny arrived in town in his bright new 50 HP Luscombe Silvair. Jerry had worked assembling DC-3's at the Douglas plant in Santa Monica but had a hankering to set out on his own. He saved enough to buy the plane from Don Luscombe's factory back East. This Silvair, NC2590, was particularly interesting as it was only the third built and the first to be sold to the public. (Jerry had cut costs by traveling to the factory and tightening screws on the plane himself.)

(Continued on Page 4)
RANDOM FLIGHT

Thinking of the upcoming dedication of our Oregon History Center on April 22 brings to mind once again the gratitude that must be extended to so many. All of those that worked on the facility; provided material and equipment; and of course the funding. No matter how minor your part may seem, it contributed immensely to the total effort.

In order to ensure that this facility will continue to function as our center of activity, please remember that the Elwood Hedberg Endowment Fund is still receiving donations. In the short time since the fund was established, it has grown to more than $8,000. That is a fantastic start. We need to at least triple that total in order to meet our goal of generating sufficient income to cover the basic operating expenses of the Center.

At the end of February, I received an unexpected phone call. The caller asked if the Society was still interested in five boxes of memorabilia from the late Walt Bohrer and his sister Ann. Only one word came to mind, yes! A couple of hours later Walt’s stepdaughter and husband delivered the treasure trove to my office.

After they left, I became immersed in the contents of those boxes. Walt is familiar to many of us due to his many years of working for Tex Rankin and the many books he authored. But it was soon revealed to me that Walt’s life was more than we learned from his books. The most noted one, Black Cats & Outside Loops, is the story of Tex and his many adventures. Walt’s life did not revolve entirely around Tex. He was a very accomplished cartoonist, having authored one book filled with his creations. He was an editor of several aviation magazines. Evidence gleaned from the boxes indicate that he was sought after to edit not only other authors’ material, but radio scripts for the likes of Edgar Bergen & Charlie McCarthy.

I visited with Walt and his wife Nancy at their home on several occasions. They were most gracious and always welcomed visitors. They were very unassuming. One would never guess that they had hobnobbed with many of the notables of early aviation and other dignitaries. These boxes reveal a lot and are a true treasure to yet to be fully explored. We will have a small sample of the treasure on display at the April 22 annual meeting. I guarantee that you will be just as amazed as I was to read some of the original documents and who authored them. Does the name Governor Ronald Reagan sound familiar?

Thanks to the family for allowing this material to become a significant part of our growing collection.
Annual Meeting Set for April 22: Dedication to feature WASP
The Society's annual meeting is set for Saturday, April 22, and will celebrate the dedication of the History Center. It will coincide with the gathering of the Oregon Antique and Classic Aircraft Club. Join your history friends for the ceremony and then remain for the presentation by Women's Airforce Service Pilot Katherine Miles.
The WASPs were a group of civilian ferry pilots who flew a variety of combat types, including such planes as the A-26, B-17, and P-47, across the country. A number were from Oregon, including 1934 Jefferson High graduate Ethel C. Sharon, killed in a 1944 crash in Nebraska, and Portland's Hazel Ah Ying Lee, killed in a P-63 accident in Montana. Some three dozen WASPs lost their lives in the course of their duties; in fact, Oklahoma's Paula Loop died in a BT-13 crash near Trail.
The schedule for the meeting is as follows: Board meeting 11 AM; no-host lunch 12 PM; OACAC business meeting 1:30 PM - 2 PM; refreshments 2 PM - 2:15 PM; program featuring Katherine Miles 2:15 PM - 3 PM; facility tour 3 PM.
See you there!

I Saw Tex Fly News
by Ron Bartley

The previous two newsletters have included photographs of our new aluminum wing ribs, and the wooden ribs like those Tex added to the Great Lakes wings. The photograph in this issue shows some of those ribs on the spruce spars of the lower left wing.

Steel wing fittings and drag wires are currently being repaired and refinished with cadmium plating. When completely assembled, but prior to fabric covering, this wing will be used as a guide for assembling the remaining three wings. It will also be available for display at Oregon aviation events this summer.

Glider Donated to OAHS
The Society was excited to receive the donation of a Rutan Solitaire glider (N59HW) from Harry Wenger. One of many innovative designs to spring from the mind of Portland native Bert Rutan, the Solitaire features numerous inventive touches such as the retractable engine in the nose.
The Society extends its thanks to Mr. Wenger for this generous donation.
Johnny Got a Zero
(Continued from page 1)

Proud of his new silver bird (it would later be destroyed in the Pearl Harbor attack), Jerry
set out barnstorming up through California. After overflying Mt. Shasta and spending a
lucrative stop at Hilt right over the border, he flew up to Grants Pass. Impressed with the
warm reception he received there, he decided to stay as the FBO at the local field, which was
then on the northwest side of town.

Jerry soon had a number of local youths
clocking up hours on the Silvaira and the
Grants Pass Flying Club’s Cub. When they
weren’t flying they were plugging coins into
Jerry’s slot machine at the airport;
the spare change helped keep
Jerry and new wife Lucy going
during tight Depression times.
Students included lumber scion
Ben Spalding and future restaura-
teur Jerry Collins. Among the
most promising was Johnny
Hamphire, soon elected president
of the club.

Johnny was a very dedicated
student, and even lectured locally
on the bright future for flying. But
his devotion to a hobby that
many viewed as dangerous may
have concerned his devoted father.
Apparently money for his lessons
was not forthcoming at one point.
A cash-strapped Johnny
swapped his big oaken desk to
Coigny so he could continue his
training. He had to carefully leverage
the heavy item out of the upstairs room he
occupied in the Hampire’s big A Street
home.

Several incidents may have alarmed John Sr.
if he knew of them. Kenn Carrell, Johnny’s
friend and a fellow flying student, remembered
one of Hampire’s high-flying adventures that
almost led to trouble for the young pilot. He
was with Johnny one day when they decided on
a lark to dip down into the bowl of Crater
Lake. They hadn’t realized that the high
altitude (11,000’) combined with dead air down
near the lake’s surface would deny them lift
required to get back out. After sweating a bit,
they were able to escape the predicament.

Another incident was inspired by a visit to
Medford to see Tex Rankin fly. Impressed by
the top pilot’s slow rolls, they were determined
to give them a try. According to Carrell, they
“had the foot and hand work figured out OK,
but failed to recognize the importance of
horsepower ...450 for Tex and (50) for us.”
They lost several thousand feet of altitude
before returning to level flight.

Hampire earned his private ticket and
spent some time at Oregon State College before
enlisting in the Air Corps. He went to
California and graduated from flight school.
Postings to Surinam and Panama followed and
he clocked up many hours flying patrols with
the Sixth Air Force.

This routine duty would lead to a
nonroutine assignment. Gen. Claire Chennault,
famous leader of the Flying Tigers, had traveled
to Washington to beg, borrow or steal whatever
resources he could obtain to support his
guerrilla air war in China, far at the end of the
supply chain. After some wrangling, he was
able to secure a quantity of P-40K’s then
assigned to Sixth AF as well as their pilots.

The P-40’s were worn-out after hundreds of
hours patrolling the Caribbean, but were still a
help to Chennault’s strapped command. More

Alison got over the incident immediately
and he and Johnny became fast friends.
Hamphire’s skills and easygoing manner,
and his friendly way with the enlisted men, made
him a popular and respected officer. The nature
of the air war in China, however, meant a lot of
waiting for the P-40 pilots with their shark’s
mouths painted on their planes. The Japanese
picked their fights carefully, and there were
limited opportunities to engage in aerial
combat.

Sometimes, when there was enough precious
avgas stockpiled, Chennault would take the war
to the Japanese. One such example was the
October 25, 1942 raid on Hong Kong. A force
of B-25 Mitchells (including
Cottage Grove native and Doolittle
Raider Everett “Brick” Holstrom)
set out to bomb the docks there.
Hamphire and the P-40’s of the
75th led the escort.

Ki-43 Hayabussas of the
Japanese Army rose to intercept
the bombers, and a melee ensued. The
bombers claimed one quickly
with a high deflection shot. Soon
after he heard a call from one of the
B-25s under attack from the rear
by Oscars. Hamphire closed in
and blew one of them out of the
sky for his second victory. The
crippled B-25 was able to
clashand on its way home, some
of the crew evading successfully.
It was the opening of what
would be one of the most brief and
meteoric ace careers of the war.

Between the Hong Kong raid and his untimely
death, Hamphire would down up to
17 enemy planes in only six separate combat
missions. Almost all of these were fighters shot down in
air-to-air engagements, and all but one were
multiple kills - two or three in one fight. There
was no easy meat on Hampire’s plate; he
earned his victories through his piloting skills
and his aggressive nature.

Perhaps the most remarkable of Hampire’s
kills involved a cheeky taunt from the Imperial
Japanese forces. On April 24, 1943, the
Hamphire hit the 75th at Lingling with a fighter
cruise with 44 Oscars and Tojos.
Hamphire and 13 other Warhawks took them
on in what he later described to his father as
“dilly. They really sent in their first team this
time and they had the most beautiful air
discipline I’ve ever seen... it was impossible to
catch one asleep or by itself, so it was mighty
tough going for awhile.”

When the smoke cleared, the 75th was
victorious, claiming 5 of the enemy with no
losses themselves; Hamphire claimed two.
There was an interesting postscript when a

(Continued on Page 6)
I Saw Tex Fly - over Oakland

a recollection by Wendell Davenport

(Editors Note: Mr. Davenport saw Tex Rankin fly at the 1938 air races in Oakland, CA. Here he graciously presents his recollection of Tex’s performance and the other history he witnessed at the event.)

Here are the events of the 1938 Oakland Air Races as I remember them.

I was twelve when friends of my family asked me if I would like to go with them to the Oakland, CA Air Races. I had been fascinated with airplanes and flying from my earliest memories so I gave them an emphatic, Yes!

It was a warm summer day, perfect for flying, when we pulled into the parking area near bleachers that had been constructed for the event. Prior to the races themselves there were a few preliminary events. First to perform were Paul Mantz and Frank Clarke billed as “The Hollywood Duo.” They tore up the sky in Boeing P-12’s (Model 100 civilian models - ed) with their wings close to interlocked ... quite spectacular!

The next event, as I remember, was a fellow flying a J3 Cub. He landed on a platform attached to a speeding car. When he attempted to take off, the aircraft stalled and nosed into the ground. Unhurt, he climbed out, pulled the tail down onto his shoulder, and walked off the field.

The next event was Alexander De Papana, a Romanian flying a Bucker Jungmeister. He was pure poetry in the air, and wrapped up with a falling leaf. Next up was the great Tex Rankin flying his Ryan ST. He also ended his aerobatic routine with a falling leaf. I remember thinking at the time that his maneuvers were not as exciting to watch as Papana's. Most of the reason for this was due to the difference in airplanes. The Bucker was a far superior aerobatic aircraft to the Ryan.

Soon after Tex Rankin's aerobatic routine the race planes started to taxi into position on the field. There was no runway, just open field. They all lined up, I think six abreast, and at the drop of a flag accelerated over rather rough ground until airborne.

Roger Don Rae flew the Folkerts Special, Marion McKeen flew the Brown Racer Miss Los Angeles, Art Chester flew his Jeep, Tony LeVier flew the Goon, Harry Crosby flew his Crosby Special, and I think there was one other but I can't remember who it was or the aircraft. LeVier won the race in the Goon.

The day ended with a parachute jump by the “Bat Man” Mickey - I can’t remember his last name. He had a pair of “bat” wings attached to his ankles and held extended with his hands. He also had canvas between his legs. He jumped at about 8,000 feet, soared down to about 1,000 feet, pulled the ripcord and his chute opened just a few hundred feet above the ground. He landed in the parking lot behind the bleachers and the word came down that he had broken his leg.

This was all heady stuff for a 12-year-old flying enthusiast! I’m somewhat amazed that I remember as much as I do after 61 years.

(Thanks, Wendell! Photo: Tex, Dorothy and NC315Y at Corning, CA 1931. OAHS Collection.)
Johnny Got a Zero
(Continued from Page 4)
lonely twin-engine plane swooped in and bombed the field with leaflets. Johnny saved one and sent it to his father. It read:

To officers and men of the United States airforce:
We express our respects to you men who have taken great pains to come to the interior of China.
We of the Fighter Command of the Imperial Japanese Airforces take pride in the fact that we are the strongest and best in the world.
Consequently, we express our desire as sportsman to hold a decisive air battle with you in a fair and honorable manner.
We then can best prove to you the spirit and ability of our airforce.
With hearty wishes for a decisive battle,
The fighter command of the
IMPERIAL JAPANESE AIRFORCES

The pilot of the leaflet plane would get a decisive battle sooner than he expected, as Hampshire pursued him. As Johnny wrote his father, “the (pilot) that dropped them ran into a little hard luck on the way home. For a while it looked like I’d never catch him, but I finally did after chasing him over a hundred miles. So that ended the show for that dog.”

Johnny and his father carried on a regular correspondence; the two were very close. The junior Hampshire always closed his letters by signing, “Your Partner, JH.” John Sr. proudly shared the missives with the local populace, excerpts appearing in the Daily Courier, the area newspaper. Many of Johnny’s friends back home were following his exploits in faraway China.

All were shocked to learn of John’s death over Changsha. He had taken off to intercept a Japanese raid that day and was immediately in the thick of things. He quickly downed two raiders, including one he snatched right out of Alison’s gun sights. Flying alongside his friend, he grinned and held up two fingers, signifying the day’s claims so far. Then he dove back into the fray.

No one saw what happened next. A few of the pilots mentioned having seen a crippled P-40 ditch in the Siang River close to shore. Soon a message was received from the local Chinese in that area. It was short and bloodcurdlingly direct: AMERICAN PILOT LANDED IN RIVER. HIT IN STOMACH, GUTS RUNNING OUT. SEND DOCTOR QUICK.

A rescue mission was hastily contrived to get help to their wounded comrade. Despite the fading light, Joe Griffin volunteered to try to fly a doctor in to help their friend. Dr. Spritzler was wedged into the radio compartment of a P-40 (possibly a P-43 Lancer) and they set out on the perilous flight. It was too late, of course, and they were fortunate to return safely; but such are the things men do to help a comrade in times of war.

Medals and awards flowed in to the senior Hampshire in the wake of his son’s death. They included the Silver Star and Distinguished Flying Cross, and several high Chinese decorations. There was even talk of a Medal of Honor. The Grants Pass Bulletin advocated a blood bank named for Johnny, and the Courier insisted that the planned new airport should bear his name after the war.

John Hampshire Sr. was nonetheless devastated by the loss of his only child. No amount of recognition for Johnny could make up for his death. The father survived his son only briefly, passing to pneumonia on May 2, 1945 - eerily two years to the day after Johnny was shot down over China.

The years went by. Communist forces overran China; Johnny’s remains were disinterred and relocated to Hawaii, where he rests today. Grants Pass got its new airport, but the city forgot its promise to name it for its many-starred son. Forgot, that is, until Johnny’s high school classmate D. J. Klassen led a campaign fifty years later to secure some recognition for the happy-go-lucky Oregon boy who gave his life in a far distant land.

Through the efforts of Klassen and other like-minded patriots, the airstrip at Grants Pass is now known as John Hampshire Field, and a sign commemorates this. There is also a memorial with an eternal flame that burns in his memory, and a scholarship fund has been established to keep Johnny’s memory evergreen. A video biography is scheduled to air on Medford’s KSYS public television in May.

The Portland Oregonian eulogized Johnny in an editorial published six days after his death. It noted that “(h)e fought for our homes and our liberties... He fought for the river he loved, and the homes that cluster beside it, for his folks and his friends... We must never forget the debt that we owe. We must never forget him.”

(Special thanks to D.J. Klassen, Gen. John Alison (USAF ret.), Emory Barney, Gen. Bruce Holloway (USAF ret.), and the Coigny family. Please send a SASE for a full list of references.)

Oregon Aviation Historical Society
PO Box 353
Cottage Grove, OR 97424

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED