

Update #39 – “City of Savannah”

B-17 Restoration
December 11, 2009

Last week might have been a quiet one for the project, but this week made up for it.

On Saturday morning eight of our volunteers, from all four work crews and the management team, piled into a 15 passenger van and drove through a serious rain storm to meet with Gary Norville and his team at American Aero Services in New Smyrna Beach, Florida. Parked outside of Gary’s hanger they found the Collings Foundation’s two famous WWII bombers, the B-17 “909” and the B-24 “Witchcraft”. Both planes are temporarily in Gary’s hands for their annual maintenance before they begin their 2010 nationwide tours. Gary and several of his staff spent a great part of the day working with our volunteers as they climbed all over the “909” taking measurements and pictures that will be used in the very near future when the restoration of the “City of Savannah” will require preparing floors and outfitting the interior of the aircraft.



The “City of Savannah” team that visited American Aero Services last week posed for the camera beneath the chin turret of the B-17 “909”: (L to R) Jim Grismer, Steve Ward, Jerry McLaughlin, Ken Rombouts, Bill Liening, JEB Harper, Tonnie Glick, Mort Glick, and Ron MacDonald (holding Katie).

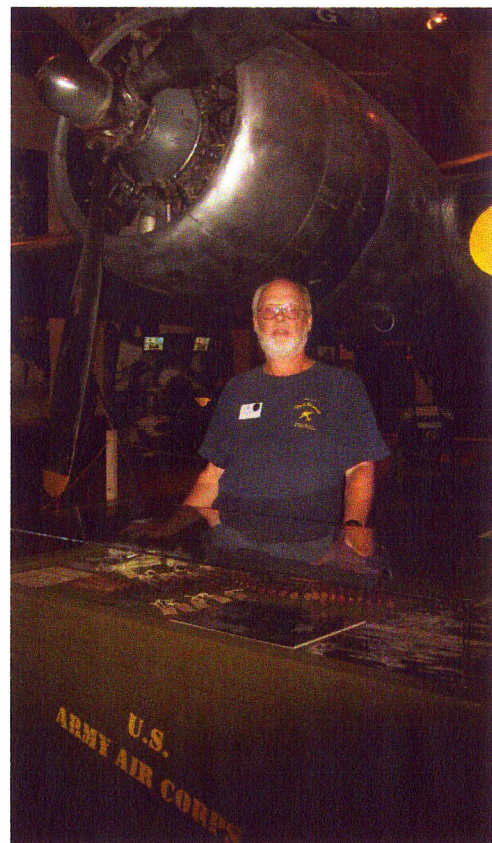
While some of the group was checking out several aircraft restorations underway in the American Aero hanger, Gary took several of “City” volunteers for a tour of his parts storage area. When they were done viewing this impressive assembly of war bird parts Gary invited the entire team out to his home, where they met his wife, Carol, and a large assortment of God’s creatures – ranging from small ducks to large bulls. Passing through the animals the group entered Gary’s barn, which was filled with yet more WWII aircraft parts. There is no doubt that we will be talking with Gary when the parts acquisition portion of our project gets underway.

When the group arrived in Florida they were also introduced to the newest member of the “City of Savannah” team – Ron MacDonald. Ron drove up to New Smyrna Beach from Orlando, where he is an artist for the Walt Disney Corporation at Disney World. Ron is designing a patch for the project that will hopefully be available to all of us shortly after the first of the year.

One of the volunteers who made the trip to Florida was Tonnie Glick. We would like to take this opportunity to thank Tonnie for the research she is doing in the archives of the Savannah Morning News that has uncovered new material about the day the original “City of Savannah” got its name. We’re looking forward to seeing what else she uncovers from her research.

Wednesday, December 9, was a day that everyone associated with the project was looking forward to as a turning point in the restoration. This was the day that the ColdJet dry ice technology would be employed on the “City”. Everything went as planned with arrival of the ColdJet rep, the dry ice and the compressor needed to power the machine - but the expected result for cleaning paint from the fuselage interior and wings was not to be. Eighteen volunteers and museum staff were on hand to witness the test. Unfortunately the machine was not up to the job. The ColdJet Corporation has been most generous in providing the machinery and their representative at no cost to the museum – but it is evident that preparing the aircraft for final restoration will require more traditional labor intensive methods of preparation. Continued testing with the machine showed that it will successfully remove residue fire retardant from the bomb bay and engine dirt. All four crews will be employed next week to use the machine to clean the bomb bay and engines.

We’d like to end this week’s update on a positive note – and Scott Witcher and Marshall Brooks have provided that opportunity. Scott, who works with the Friday restoration crew, has constructed two superb display cases that will be used to tell the story of the restoration process for the “City of Savannah” to museum visitors as they pass beneath the nose of the airplane. Marshall, a senior member of the volunteer management team, will be preparing a series of displays related to the project using historical and current materials. The cases, and the story they will tell, are a terrific addition to the project and we all thank Scott for his initiative and dedication. If any of you have ideas for display material please feel free to contact Marshall through the museum office.



Scott Witcher standing under the nose of the “City” with one of the display cases that he constructed to tell the story of the restoration project.

More to come.....