

UPDATE # 68 - "CITY OF SAVANNAH"

B-17 Restoration
September 3, 2010

This will be a very long weekly Update, because we had a very long week at the Mighty Eighth – the biggest week for the "City of Savannah" project since the arrival of the airplane on January 15, 2009. The much anticipated arrival of Tommy Garcia at the Museum got its start on Saturday when Tommy arrived six hours early. He was as excited about the trip as we were and he left Houston early. He drove longer than he planned on the first day, so he arrived at the Museum for lunch instead of dinner. As he pulled up to the door the Museum was entertaining 200 members of the 401st Bomb Group and two other tour groups – it was a busy day. Fortunately the Saturday crew was there to greet Tommy and unload his trailer full of goodies for the "City of Savannah". All of his equipment, templates, drawings and parts were unloaded before he sat down with the Saturday Crew and had lunch in the shop as everyone got to know each other. After lunch Crew Chief Rocky Rodriguez took Tommy on a tour of the "City" so that he could see the progress that has been made since his last visit to Savannah nine months ago.

Sunday morning began bright and early with a group of volunteers tagging and photographing Tommy's donations for the accessioning process that will make the B-17 parts officially part of the Museum's archives before they are attached to the aircraft for final display.



Tommy Garcia's personal donations to the "City of Savannah" project

Tommy also brought a full set of plans and templates to prepare the wood work necessary for the interior of the aircraft. The Museum had purchased these items, through Tommy's good offices, from a representative of the movie production company that had produced these priceless materials for the 1979 movie *The Memphis Belle*. All of the wood working materials were also marked, photographed, and then moved to the shop area in preparation for the start of the woodworking project on Monday morning.

On Monday the shop area behind the bomber was a sight to behold as Deputy Project Manager Jim Grismer led seven carpenters and helpers in the mass production of the many, many wooden parts that make up the flooring of a B-17G aircraft. Watching the team one would have thought that this group had worked together for months to perfect their techniques. Not so! Some of the volunteers, because they work on different shifts, had not even met each other before they started working together on Monday morning. Tommy was in the middle of all the activity giving direction and answering questions. Often he was interpreting instructions that he had written on the various templates and plans twenty years earlier, when he

had put the woodworking project together as an employee of the company from whom we had purchased the materials. The saws and sanders finally stopped all the noise in the late afternoon. Jim estimated that eighty percent of the needed woodwork had been finished in that first work shift.



Tommy (in hat) explaining drawings to Scott Whitcher, Gil Patrick and Mort Glick



Our carpenters at work in the shop with the "City" in the background

Tommy's day was not finished when the first group of volunteers left for home on Monday. Jack Nilsen, of the Wednesday (Night) Crew, who are famous for their metal working skills, came in to meet with Tommy at 4:00 PM. They went over the "City" from nose to tail as Tommy marked areas where he had noted that metal work was required to strengthen or repair the aircraft in order to support the new flooring.

Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday became a blur for the volunteers as the carpenters began building even more complex flooring pieces, tables for the navigator station and radio room and the sophisticated bombardier position in the nose of the aircraft. Next in line were ammunition boxes for all the gunner stations and flooring for the tail section that needed to be bowed to fit the narrow entrance to the tail gun area. Sixty-five years and thousands of flying hours had, as Tommy had anticipated, changed the shape of some of the "City's" fuselage from the exact dimensions it had had when it left the factory in 1945. The carpenters spent hours over the next several days adjusting the contoured plywood to fit the aircraft's slightly adjusted shape. While this was going on Tommy was working Jerry McLaughlin and Richard Moscatiello inspecting the several large crates of B-17 inner wing duct work that had been removed from the wings of the "City" by the Smithsonian Museum staff, and shipped along with the aircraft as spare parts. The duct work, which directed air to the aircraft's engines and superchargers, will not be necessary for the static display of the "City of Savannah" in the Museum, and will, hopefully, some day find a home on a flying B-17.

After the duct work project was finished Tommy was dragged upstairs to the B-17 parts storage room where he spent many more hours mixing and matching the items he had donated to the Museum with B-17 parts that had been removed from the “City” after its arrival, and still more parts that had been located in the Museum’s archives.

Everyone associated with the restoration had need for Tommy’s expertise, and he was very generous in sharing his time. On Wednesday evening a staff meeting was held at which time all of the Crew Chiefs and Special Projects volunteers were gathered with Tommy in the Museum conference room and everyone talked about the issues that they are facing with regard to their portion of the restoration. Again, Tommy had all the answers. When the meeting ended he took all of the Crew Chiefs through the airplane. He answered their questions and brought out suggestions that had each of the Chief’s writing notes and asking more questions. When the inspection of the aircraft was finished the group sat down in the shop and talked about metal work that needs to be done on the “City” until the Museum’s night maintenance crew locked the doors and sent them on their way.

Another important event occurred on Thursday when Tim Steele, a Gulfstream Corporation employee, and “City of Savannah” volunteer, came to the Museum to talk with Tommy about the signage that will be placed on the inside and outside of the airplane. When the meeting ended Tommy said that he believes that with Tim’s expertise, the Gulfstream equipment available to produce the signage, and a book he has that documents the complete signage of a 1944 B-17G, the “City of Savannah” may become the standard bearer for accurate B-17G signage.

The final event of Tommy’s visit was a luncheon on Friday at which Tommy was presented with several gifts, including a copy of Donald L. Miller’s penultimate book on the Eighth Air Force, Masters of the Air, which was signed by the volunteers that had worked with Tommy during his week in Savannah.



Jerry McLaughlin and Henry Skipper standing with Tommy and the Certificate of Appreciation he received from the Mighty Eighth for his full week of effort on behalf of the “City of Savannah” project

As mentioned earlier, this was the most important week in the “City of Savannah” project since the arrival of the airplane almost twenty-one months ago. The amount of knowledge that Tommy was able to impart on our volunteers, his wonderful donations, and his promise of working with us in the future all bode well for a great deal of success in the future.

As we always say, stand by, there is more to come.....

(more photos below)



The shop area on Tuesday afternoon



Tommy (on left) with Museum CEO Henry Skipper and the Thursday carpentry crew



The Monday carpentry crew taking a well deserved lunch break



The Tuesday crew is pictured after lunch in Museum Pub



A visitor from Houston climbing out of the nose of the "City of Savannah"