

## UPDATE # 77 - "CITY OF SAVANNAH"

B-17 Restoration  
November 8, 2010

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This will be another very full Update as the frantic pace of the "City of Savannah" project keeps us very busy. There were two major events involving the project that took place over the last two weekends (the reason that you are receiving this Update on a Monday). The first event was last weekend when Project Manager Jerry McLaughlin and Wednesday (Night) Crew Chief Bill Lienen traveled to Ft. Worth, Texas, to attend a gathering of B-17 teams, both flying and static. The second event was the first annual *Flying Fortress 5K* race sponsored by the Mighty Eighth Air Force Museum to support our restoration project.

The meeting in Ft. Worth was hosted by the Vintage Air Museum, and its owner, Mrs. Chuckie Hospers. Chuckie and her husband Dr. William "Doc" Hospers had owned their B-17 (originally known by its tail number as 44-8543) since 1979, when "Doc" Hospers purchased the B-17 and named it after his wife. Sadly, Doctor Hospers passed away earlier this year. After his death, Chuckie asked her old friends from the B-17 community if she could host this year's meeting of the informal B-17 group that her husband had helped to form in 1980. One of the reasons that Chuckie wanted the meeting to be held in Ft. Worth was to announce that she was selling the B-17 that bears her name, and that a new owner would be moving the aircraft to Virginia in the near future. For a history of "Chuckie" in its early years go to: <http://members.cox.net/b17brian/b17/Chuckie/index.htm>

There were eleven B-17 projects represented at the Vintage Air Museum and Jerry and Bill were introduced to the group by its longtime leader, Dr. Harry Friedman, whom you may have read about in this column in the past. Harry headed up the famous "Memphis Belle" project during the years that the *Belle* was in civilian hands, and is the author of *Memphis Belle – Dispelling the Myths*, the excellent inside story of the *Memphis Belle*, the individuals involved with the aircraft, and the original restoration work. Also in attendance at the meeting was our project's biggest out of state supporter, Tommy Garcia. Tommy and Harry made sure that Bill and Jerry were introduced to all of the attendees representing the other ten airplanes and brokered several small meetings between our guys and representatives of other groups that have mutual interests with the *City of Savannah* project. Among the men Jerry and Bill spent time with was Mr. Wilber Richardson, who was representing the *Piccadilly Lilly II* restoration project. (*Lilly* is the B-17 of the famous Planes of Fame Museum in Chino, California.) Wilber was the ball turret gunner on a B-17 named *Kismet* with

the 331<sup>st</sup> Squadron of the 94<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group. He received a Purple Heart and several Air Medals during a combat career that saw his crew fly their full tour of 30 missions (including two on D-Day) in only 79 days.



**Left to right: Jerry McLaughlin, Wilber Richardson and Bill Liening in front of the B-17 “Chuckie”**

During the roundtable discussion that the group held on Saturday morning Jerry informed everyone that the Mighty Eighth CEO, Henry Skipper, had invited the group to hold the 2011 meeting in Savannah at the Mighty Eighth. We’ll see what happens.

Seven days after the Ft. Worth meeting the parking lot of the Mighty Eighth was filled with almost 500 people, including volunteers, spectators and runners as the first annual *Flying Fortress 5K* race in support of the “*City of Savannah*” restoration took place with the front portico of the Museum serving as the start/finish line. The original idea for the race as a fundraiser, and a great deal of the work organizing the race, came from the wonderful Museum staffer who sends you this weekly Update, our own Jane Harper. Other Museum staff members, including Mandy Livingston worked with Jane to put the race together. There was also considerable help from local organizations that provided both financial and logistics support.

We are particularly grateful to Saturday Crew member Jeff Hoopes who brought the race to the attention of his employer, Spatial Engineering Corporation. Spatial management made a substantial cash donation to the “*City of Savannah*” project and paid for the entrance fees of many of their company employees in the race. Our good

friends from the Coastal Amateur Radio Society took the day off from putting together the “City’s” radio room and placed communications points along the course. Two hundred and sixty runners participated - including our Assistant Project Manager Richard Moscatiello and Wednesday (Day) Crew member Milt Stompler. At the conclusion of the race the runners and their guests were treated to free admission to the Museum Combat Gallery and tours around the exterior of the “City of Savannah”. Rocky Rodriguez’s Saturday Crew, along with the always present Bill Burkel, met with the visitors, answering questions and assisting them in taking pictures next to the aircraft.

After the public visits to the “City” the highlight of the day for our volunteers occurred when the race winners were announced and we learned that Milt Stompler had WON the trophy for the men’s 65-74 age group. This only several weeks after he had amazed us with his mastery of the Gregory Peck Hatch Trick whereby he hurled himself into the forward hatch of the B-17 as the famous actor had done in the movie “Twelve O’Clock High”. Milt has certainly become our athlete-in-residence!!!!



**Milt Stompler (#312) surrounded by fellow “City of Savannah” volunteers after the announcement of his victory in the first Flying Fortress 5K.**

The overall winner of the race was Robert Santoro, a Savannah police officer. The winner’s circle also included the military when Lieutenant Colonel Jose L. Aguilar, the Garrison Commander of Hunter Army Air Field, was announced as the winner of the men’s 35-44 age group. Thanks Jane, for a great idea, and for a job well done by all involved.



**Lt. Col. Aguilar and Jane Harper**



*More to come . . .*