

## **UPDATE # 78 - "CITY OF SAVANNAH"**

B-17 Restoration

November 15, 2010

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It seems that every week for the last several months there has been a major event regarding the restoration of the "*City of Savannah*". Last week was no different. Last week's events also followed in the tradition we seem to be setting of meeting really wonderful people who want to help us succeed. The latest person to fit all of those qualifications is a great guy by the name of Skip Shelton. You may have read about Skip several weeks ago when our Saturday Crew Chief, Rocky Rodriguez, found him holding court at the Second Air Division (B-24) exhibit and telling his fellow Museum visitors about his adventures as a teenage B-24 pilot and nose art painter in 1945. Yes, that's correct. Skip graduated from flight school and got his wings in late 1944, at the age of 19! He left shortly thereafter for England, where he was assigned to the 713<sup>th</sup> Squadron of the 448<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group as a B-24 co-pilot. When Skip's squadron commander discovered that the young pilot had a flare for art work, after noting the nose art he had painted on his own crew's airplane, Skip was quickly assigned to paint the nose art on all new B-24's arriving at their base. At the commander's insistence Skip was even removed from several missions to get the art work done, something that Skip did not find distasteful. As he told us, "I was never shot at while painting an airplane".

You can see the nose art from Skip's B-24, "*Frisco Frisky*" by going to:

<http://www.b24bestweb.com/friscofrisky.htm>

After the war Skip made a career flying corporate airplanes, starting with war surplus DC-3's and eventually retiring from the cockpit of Savannah produced Gulfstream jets. When he wasn't flying he was painting everything from water colors to murals. Today that is his full time job, when he is not painting our B-17.

Local media were at the Museum much of the day on Wednesday covering Skip's work on the "*City*". You can read the excellent article that appeared in the Savannah Morning News on Veterans Day at: <http://www.greenwichtime.com/default/article/WWII-vet-paints-museum-s-B-17-bomber-808530.php>

As the members of the media, the Wednesday Day crew, Museum staff, many visitors, and Skip's family, stood by the nose of the "*City of Savannah*" Skip worked with our own Allen Lewonski and Tom Van Tilson to begin the painting process. Skip's wife, Shirley, had prepared graphite forms to mark the fuselage with outlines for the individual letters that would replicate the words painted on the nose of the original "*City of Savannah*" in December of 1944. Under Skip's supervision, Allen, who is a graphic artist in his real life, transferred the images to the metal skin of the aircraft. When Allen was finished with his tracing, Skip mounted the scaffold and the actual painting began.

Skip worked through the day, with only two breaks, one for lunch and one to hold a series of interviews with the several media representatives who were present, when he also cut a cake

bought for the occasion by our farthest traveling volunteer, Carl Finney. When the nose portion of the painting was finally completed, and Skip came down off of the scaffold, the Museum doors had been locked for several hours, and it was the Wednesday Night crew who were helping Skip and Shirley pack up their paints and equipment for the night.

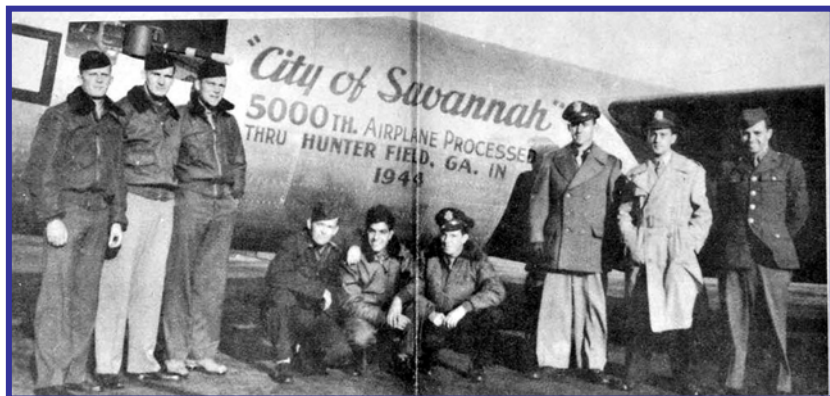


“City of Savannah”, 1944



“City of Savannah”, 2010

Thursday morning, Veterans Day, saw Skip and Shirley return to the Museum to repeat the process all over again by replicating the message that had been painted on the left waist area of the original “City of Savannah” aircraft for media pictures with the crew in 1944. Once again there was a big audience watching Skip and Shirley, including visitors, and more media. On this day, without the crew of volunteers that is available on Wednesday, the crowd was only half as large as the previous day. Assistant Project Manager Richard Moscatiello served as Skip’s assistant as the work progressed between interviews and a break for lunch. Working from the floor of the Museum, instead of a scaffold, made the job progress much faster than it had on the nose, and Skip was able to finish by mid-afternoon.



As Skip was packing up his painting gear Henry Skipper and Jerry McLaughlin congratulated him on a job well done, and presented him with two gifts, an official “*City of Savannah*” restoration team patch, and a copy of Masters of the Air, Donald L. Miller’s definitive 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force history. With handshakes, hugs and promises of a return by Skip and Shirley for the January volunteers dinner, everyone began walking towards the Museum exit when, of course, one more media representative arrived. Skip walked off with him for a final interview. It had been a grand two days for all concerned.



*More to come . . .*