



Plane Talk

Volume 19, Number 2

The Newsletter of the War Eagles Air Museum

Editorial

Honoring Our Veterans

With its world-class collection of World War II and Korean War combat aircraft and artifacts, War Eagles Air Museum naturally holds in very high esteem the pilots, crew members and other personnel who flew or maintained these aircraft. With our emphasis on preserving and interpreting our Nation's military aviation history for the benefit of current and future generations, we feel it is important for the public to understand the contributions and sacrifices of *all* military veterans, regardless of when and where they served.

With this in mind, we are proud to be involved in three upcoming special events that honor the servicemen and women who helped keep America free. Fort Bliss has asked us to perform flybys for two ceremonies—for Armed Forces Day on May 20 and Memorial Day on May 29. We will fly our PT-17 *Stearman*, our BT-13B *Valiant* and our AT-6F *Texan* over the crowds at low altitude (500 feet above the ground, thanks to an FAA waiver) in an aerial display sure to impress the onlookers. On June 6, the 62nd anniversary of the Allied D-Day landings in Normandy that marked the beginning of the end of World War II, we are holding a commemorative ceremony at the Museum to honor local veterans who participated in that historic battle.

We hope you are able to attend one or more of these events, and that you take a moment to think about and thank the veterans who are being honored. ☺



Featured Aircraft

At first glance, the airplane looks like a North American P-51D *Mustang*. It has the squared-off vertical stabilizer, the wide-track landing gear and the distinctive belly-mounted air scoop. But wait. Something isn't right. Then it hits you—it's the canopy. Rather than the teardrop-shaped canopy typical of *Mustangs* from the first D-model on, this airplane's canopy is elongated, flattened and bulged. There's a reason for it. This *Mustang* is a two-place trainer variant, the TF-51D, and it is one of the rarest aircraft in the world.

Featured Aircraft (Continued on Page 2)

▲ The late John MacGuire, founder of War Eagles Air Museum, pilots the world's only known flyable TEMCO-modified North American TF-51D Mustang over West Texas.

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From the Director

As many of you know, War Eagles Air Museum has become more active recently in flying a few of our vintage aircraft. Some regular visitors to the Doña Ana County Airport may be getting used to seeing our Boeing PT-17 *Stearman*, our Vultee BT-13B *Valiant* and our North American AT-6F *Texan* flying in the pattern and shooting touch-and-go landings. Whenever any of these aircraft fly, they are in the hands of extremely experienced, competent and capable pilots. Some of these pilots are World War II, Korean and Viet Nam war combat veterans. Some are current or former corporate, industrial or airline pilots. All have thousands of flying hours and multiple ratings—private, commercial, instrument, multi-engine, instructor and ATP (Airline Transport Pilot). All are current or former aircraft owners, from light general aviation (GA) aircraft to big twins and warbirds. Regardless of their background and experience, these pilots are as skilled and dedicated as any you will find anywhere. We are proud to have them fly our historic aircraft as they thrill onlookers with the sights, sounds and smells of the bygone days of aviation. If you ever happen to meet any of these men as you visit the Museum, feel free to tell them how much you appreciate what they are doing—we certainly do. Thanks very much to Jack Bell, Waldo Cavender, Gene Dawson, Dick Green, Don Mayes, Dan Taylor and Bill Whitney.

Skip Trammell ☺

Plane Talk

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Featured Aircraft (Continued from page 1)

The story of this *Mustang* is complex, incomplete and not well documented. Extensive research has not been able to fill in gaps in its historical record. But we do know that this rare TF-51D-25-NT, a vital piece of aviation history, exists today only because of lucky circumstances.

Two companies are key in the TF-51 story. North American Aviation (NAA) developed the original single-seater P-51, one of the most-used and best-performing fighters of World War II (a full P-51 history is way beyond scope here). The other company is called TEMCO.

TEMCO - A Brief History

TEMCO (Texas Engineering and Manufacturing Corporation), was formed in Dallas, Texas in 1945 by Robert McCulloch and H.L. "Bert" Howard, two former executives who had worked during the War at NAA's Grand Prairie plant. With plant closure imminent at the end of the War, TEMCO came along and tried to keep it open by doing contract work for other aircraft manufacturers or, indeed, for any manufacturers—they built everything from popcorn machines to tractors. By 1951, after acquiring the Globe Aircraft Company and the Luscombe Airplane Company, TEMCO won a U.S. Air Force contract to overhaul and refurbish Douglas C-54 *Skymaster* transports. Best known for their role in the 1948-49 Berlin Airlift, *Skymasters* were also needed for the Korean War, and TEMCO needed more room to work on them. So the company leased Majors Field, an abandoned World War II training base 50 miles north of Dallas near Greenville, and increased its workforce 12-fold, from 500 employees to more than 6,000.

Although plagued by typical aviation industry boom-and-bust cycles, TEMCO managed to keep going with many aircraft modification contracts. In 1953 the company won a contract to convert 50 Boeing C-97 *Stratofreighters* into flying hospitals. The same year saw the kickoff of a four-year project with Riley Aircraft Sales to convert 138 North American NA-154 *Navions* into two-engine D-16

Twin Navions. By 1955, TEMCO was in to aviation electronics in a big way, with a contract to install intelligence gear on Boeing B-29 and B-50 *Superfortresses* (by 1960, electronics sales made up most of the company's revenue). The next year, 1956, in addition to building rear fuselages for Boeing B-47 *Stratojets* in Grand Prairie, TEMCO began work on a contract to convert 15 World-War-II-vintage *Mustangs* into two-seat TF-51Ds.

This was not the first two-seat *Mustang* conversion. In 1944, shortly after D-Day, General Eisenhower, the Supreme Allied Commander in Europe, took an inspection flight over the beachheads in a rear seat that had been fitted in P-51B-5-NA serial number 43-6877. On the news that this in-the-field conversion had worked well, NAA produced 10 two-seater trainers called TP-51D-NTs (serial numbers 44-84610, 44-84611 and 45-11443 to 45-11450). To accommodate the rear seat, NAA took out the standard 85-gallon fuel tank normally fitted behind the pilot and moved some of the radio equipment into the rear fuselage. These aircraft had full controls for the second seat and used the standard "bubble" canopy.

TEMCO TF-51Ds differed from NAA TP-51Ds only in having an enlarged canopy to give the second-seater more headroom. The starting points for the TEMCO conversions were 15 1944 P-51Ds (which the Air Force at the time called 'F-51Ds'), serial numbers 44-84654 to 84658, 84660, 84662, 84663, 84665 to 84670 and 84676 (War Eagles Air Museum's TF-51D-25-NT is 44-84658). The Air Force, beginning to convert to jet power, had little interest in the TFs, but other countries, especially in Central and South America, found them ideally suited to their needs in the area's raging brush-fire conflicts. And, halfway around the world, another nation also played a major role in the TF-51 story.

The Indonesian Connection

On August 17, 1945, nationalist leader Sukarno (he had only one name) declared Indonesian independence from the Neth-

Featured Aircraft (Continued on page 3)

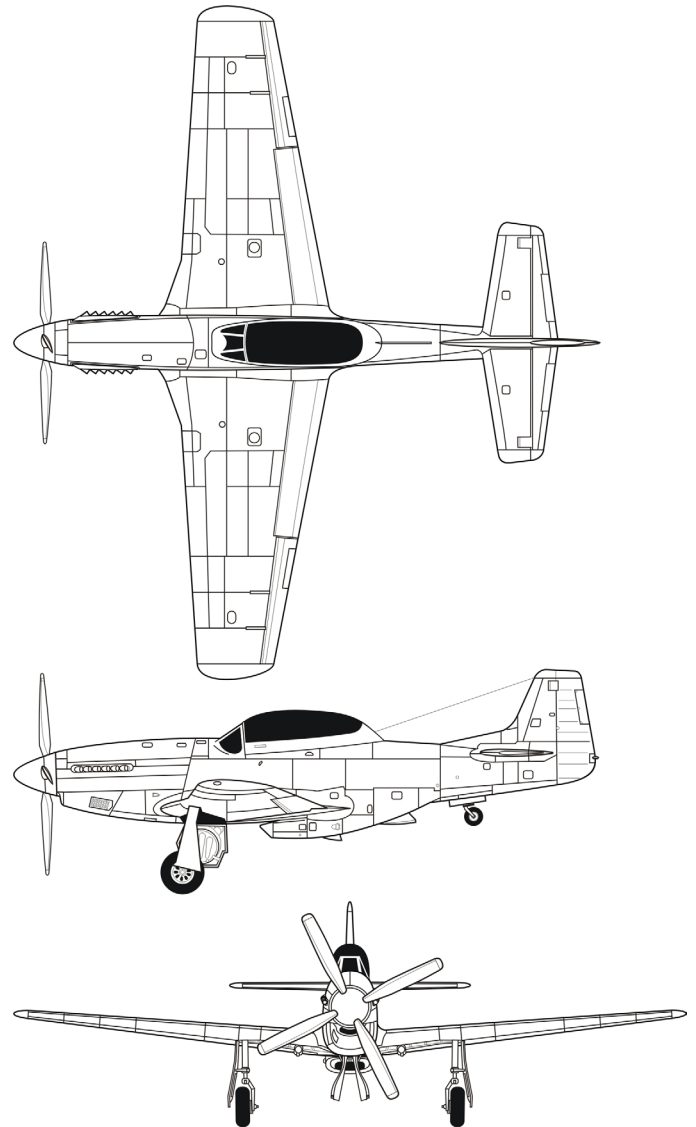
Featured Aircraft (Continued from page 2)

erlands, ending 250 years of Dutch colonial rule, and united various militias into a People’s Security Force (BKR, for *Badan Keamanan Rakyat*). A few months later, the BKR became the TKR (*Tentara Keamanan Rakyat*), or People’s Security Army, to fight Dutch attempts to re-occupy their former colony

On April 9, 1946, Indonesia formed its own Air Force, the *Angkatan Udara Republik Indonesia*, or AURI, which flew old ex-Japanese Army and Navy aircraft found scattered in depots on Java and throughout the huge archipelago. AURI rarely had more than a third of its 100 aircraft operational at any time. In a major setback on July 21, 1947, Dutch attacks destroyed nearly all of AURI’s airplanes on the ground, except for a few hidden at remote bases. On July 29, three of the surviving AURI aircraft dropped incendiary bombs on Dutch Army barracks in Semarang, Salatiga and Ambarawa. While of no tactical value, the dawn raids were a big success psychologically, as they proved the Dutch wrong in their claims that they had completely destroyed the Indonesian Air Force.

Indonesia’s war for independence ended on December 27, 1949, when, under severe international pressure and faced with U.S. threats to cut off Marshall Plan funding, the Netherlands, despite being nearly assured of victory, signed a peace

treaty and recognized the new nation. At that time the ML (*Militaire Luchtvaart*) branch of the KNIL (*Koninklijke Nederlands Indisch Leger*, or Royal Netherlands East Indies Army) turned their aircraft and other assets over to the Indonesians and left. Some of the 253 aircraft that the Dutch left behind included 42 North American B-25 *Mitchells*, 34 Douglas C-47 *Dakotas*, 26 Noorduyn AT-16s (license-built Canadian versions of NAA’s AT-6 *Texan*), 63 Piper L-4J *Grasshoppers* and 26 P-51D *Mustangs*. These aircraft were the core of AURI for the next decade. Over the years, Indonesia grew its air force into the largest in the Southern Hemisphere by purchasing aircraft outright, including more P-51Ds and several TF-51Ds. The Indonesian *Mustangs*, retired when new jets entered service, later turned out to be a real bonanza for warbird enthusiasts around the world, and especially for one John MacGuire, founder of the War Eagles Air Museum.



North American TF-51D-25-NT Mustang Characteristics	
Powerplant	Packard-Merlin 1,490 horsepower 12-cylinder V-1650-7 1,649-cubic-inch inline "V"
Cruise Speed	350 miles per hour
Maximum Speed	425 miles per hour
Service Ceiling	41,900 feet
Length	32 feet 3 inches
Wingspan	37 feet 0 inches
Range	1,000 miles
Weight (empty)	7,200 pounds
Weight (maximum)	11,600 pounds

Mustangs in the Junkyard

Here’s the way the story goes...

In the late 1970s, an unknown pilot flying air cargo in Indonesia saw a pile of “airplane parts and pieces” in the woods near an old military air base in Jakarta. Later investigation found that the pile contained parts from at least five P-51Ds and one TEMCO TF-51D. Incomplete records and faded memories suggest that the TF-51D had entered service in Indonesia in 1968, after being with the Nicaraguan Air Force since early 1958.

The batch of *Mustang* parts was recovered in 1978 by warbird collector Stephen Johnson and shipped to his facility in Oakland, California. John MacGuire bought most of the parts from Johnson in 1979. Restoration of the TF took place between 1979 and 1983. Olivas Aviation of Fabens, Texas, rebuilt the wings, Vintage Aircraft, Ltd., of Fort Collins, Colorado, did the fuselage and Mike Nixon, of Vintage V-12s in Tehachapi, California, rebuilt the engine. The Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C., helped out by sending the Museum photocopies of about 10,000 P-51 engineering assembly drawings. There was one slight prob-

Featured Aircraft (Continued on page 6)

In The Company of Giants

by George Van Riper

The prospect of seeing my friend and mentor Jimmie Parker for the first time in years kept me awake most of the night of August 3, 2005. Jim lives in El Paso, Texas, near Fort Bliss. I live in Harker Heights, Texas, near Fort Hood. These two Army posts are about 500 miles apart by road, and not much less by air. The area between them is “arid”—an Indian word meaning “plenty sage brush.” Jim and I are both retired Army Aviators. He was my first aviation commander at Fort Hood in 1968 when I was a fledgling helicopter pilot.

For the last few years, Jim has volunteered at War Eagles Air Museum, writing newsletter articles and helping in the Oral History Program. He took me along to the Museum on Thursday, August 4. It was an experience I will never forget.



▲ Retired Army aviator George van Riper (l.) was kind enough to write this article after his recent visit to War Eagles Air Museum. With George is former volunteer and retired aviator Jim Parker (r.) in front of the Museum's recently restored MiG-21PFM.

First on the agenda was lunch with the Museum volunteers. By noon about 20 of them had gathered in the upstairs meeting room. Most were older men in their 70s or 80s. Many had white hair or, in some cases, no hair. Without exception they were warm and friendly to me.

As we sat down to excellent homemade Mexican food, Jim introduced me. He told the volunteers I was a retired Master Army Aviator and, like himself, a veteran of the helicopter war in Viet Nam. I was instantly accepted as a fellow pilot and veteran. As I shook hands all around, I realized that these were not just ordinary people. They have a lot of pride—not so much in themselves individually, but more in each other. They share a collective sense of humor unmistakably rooted in aviation. They show no mercy when a good story, true or not, scores a “direct hit” on an unsuspecting victim. Old eyes still laugh. And they all have a quiet dignity. You can see lines of tough experiences etched in their faces.

They proudly share stories of their brother aviators. One man told me about another: “See ol’ Emmet over there? He was trapped in a crippled B-17 over Sicily in 1943. His aircraft’d had a wing shot off and it was spinnin’ down outta control. He was sure he was gonna die, but then the ship exploded and blew him clean out of the fuselage. He managed to open his parachute and land safely, but the Italians captured him and he spent the rest of the War in the *Stalag Luft III* POW camp—y’know, the one where the ‘Great Escape’ took place.” Another man said, “Ol’ Jack over there at the next table, he was a Marine pilot, flew TBMs, F4-U’s, P-51s—you name it. He’s landed on most all of the aircraft carriers in the Pacific durin’ the War. Most of ‘em are museum pieces now—ships like the *Intrepid*, the *Hornet* and the *Ranger*.”

I learned that there were other real heroes at lunch that day as well. Bill’s B-24 was shot down over Italy in 1944. The Italians captured him, but he managed to escape. Aided by partisans, he walked 200 miles in four months to safety in Yugoslavia. Guy was the radio operator-gunner on the very first American-manned

B-17 to arrive in England in 1942. He flew more than 250 missions, got shot down three times and was wounded by cannon fire from a German *Focke Wulf* FW.190. Navy veteran Carl served on the minesweeper *USS Prestige*, which was the first American ship into Japan at the end of the War. He stood on ground zero at Nagasaki just a few days after the atomic bomb exploded there.

Most of these venerable World War II and Korean War veterans flew fighters or bombers on dangerous missions over enemy territory. At “only” 63 years old, I felt a little like “Grasshopper,” as the master priests of Shaolin Temple called young acolyte Kwai Chang Caine in the old TV series *Kung Fu*.

After lunch, Jim showed me the Museum. Fighters, bombers and trainer aircraft were all restored to their original condition. Many looked like they could resume their missions over Europe, New Guinea or the Philippines. The restorations obviously had spared no expense, and the results are well worth it. I also visited the sheet-metal and engine shops, where dedicated staff members and volunteers under A&P (Airframe & Powerplant) mechanic Dan Taylor restore old aircraft to proper flying order. They sometimes even make parts on the premises. I was very impressed. War Eagles Air Museum is quite a place, and not to be missed if you are traveling in the desert Southwest.

It was not until that evening, after dinner with Jim and his wife Carol, that I realized that during lunch I had been in the company of giants. The immaculate warbirds on display are not what I will remember most about War Eagles Air Museum. Rather, it is the men who had shared their lunch, their stories and their friendship with me. These old warriors, brave men who had hurled themselves through the air with incredible bravery in the fight against the evil forces of the Nazi Germans and Imperialist Japanese, are the real War Eagles. Tom Brokaw captured the essence of these men in his book *The Greatest Generation*. They are the real treasure of War Eagles Air Museum, and their stories are the real treasure of our Nation. 🌟

Historical Perspectives

by Robert Haynes



This column is the first of a two-part series examining the role of the Curtiss P-40 *Warhawk* in China in World War II, and how that role still affects U.S.-China relations today. One of the largest U.S. operations areas in the War, China was also the most isolated and difficult to supply. The long process of just getting to China showed U.S. soldiers that resupply would be very rare indeed. With the Japanese controlling the coast, all supplies for China had to come in by air or over extremely poor roads from Burma. Even this connection was broken when the Japanese occupied much of Burma in December 1941. Military operations in China underscored the need for innovative, unconventional, extraordinarily resourceful commanders who could accomplish their missions with little support and even less materiel.

In addition to being the starting point of World War II, with the July 7, 1937 clash of Japanese and Chinese troops at the Marco Polo Bridge near Beijing, China was one of the most complex theatres of operations. Were China not so vast, there would scarcely have been room for all of the various groups that fought each other there. The Nationalist government of Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek ostensibly ruled the country. Enjoying official Allied recognition, Chiang's government received war materiel and supplies via the Lend-Lease Act of 1941. But there was another player in China's internal political and military scene—Mao Tse-tung's Chinese Communist forces. Chiang's and Mao's forces often fought each other more than they fought the Japanese. In fact, before the Japanese attack, the Nationalists and the Communists fought a vicious civil war. By 1939, the two bitter rivals realized that Japan was their common enemy, and they agreed to stop

fighting each other and concentrate on driving out the Japanese. But neither side had the purest motives. Both armies hoarded supplies and avoided unnecessary combat with the Japanese in order to conserve their resources for the future battles between them that would decide who would control China after the War.

Various warlords, bandits, puppet states, foreign settlements, outside meddling and conflicts within the Allied command structure made the War in China impossibly complex. Warlords and bandits, for example, operated throughout the vast countryside. They often switched their loyalties between the Allies and the Japanese, depending on who they perceived to be stronger at any time. They ruthlessly exploited the rural peasants, taking advantage of the country's chaos. Then there were Japanese-controlled "puppet states." The largest of these was Manchukuo, in the north. The most notorious was Nanking. Although these states had large armies, the Japanese viewed them with contempt and only used them rarely.

For years China hosted several foreign settlements which were potential flashpoints between the Japanese and the supposedly neutral Western powers such as Britain, which had large colonies at Hong Kong and Shanghai. Japanese troops occupied these settlements after the Pearl Harbor attack. Another factor was China's northern neighbor, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), led by the ultra-paranoid Joseph Stalin. The Japanese had defeated Russian forces in 1905 and took over the southern

half of strategically important Sakhalin Island (which the USSR did not get back until 1952). To say that Stalin was suspicious of Japan would be an understatement. He became even more concerned when Japan moved into Manchuria and northern China, pointing a dagger at the USSR's "soft underbelly." Many Japanese leaders wanted to invade the USSR rather than China to obtain raw materials.

Japanese control beyond northern China and the coastal cities was weak. Thus the American Volunteer Group (AVG), which became the 23rd Fighter Group of the U.S. Army Air Corps on July 4, 1942, was able to use the countryside to good advantage. The AVG set up a rural radio network that proved to be vital for the day-to-day operations of all U.S. and Allied aircraft in China. For example, the network tracked Japanese aircraft as they formed up to attack U.S. bases, and allowed P-40s to be rolled out, armed and airborne before the Japanese arrived. Lost pilots used this network to get vectors for home, and it also directed rescue crews to the locations of downed airmen.

Part 2, next issue, will discuss the aircraft and tactics of the AVG and its leader, Major General Claire L. Chennault. ✪

Model T Roadster Restoration



▲ After many months of hard work, the dedicated members of the 1914 Ford Model T Roadster restoration team are very proud of the product of their labors: (l. to r.) Armando Villalobos, Carl Wright, Vaun Rodgers, Bill Swartout, Dr. John White, Jim Jennings, Ray Davis, Dario Toffenetti. Not pictured—Sal Alaniz.



▲ Sporting a brand-new paint job in the (fictitious but attractive) markings of the Texas Air National Guard (with which she never served), Friendly Ghost dominates the War Eagles Air Museum hangar in this undated photo.

Featured Aircraft (Continued from page 3)

lem: the drawings, printed on huge rolls of paper, were not in sequence. It took volunteers two months to cut apart, sort and collate the drawings for the airplane that would bear the name *Friendly Ghost*.

Friendly Ghost took to the air in 1983 at Fabens Airport in the hands of John MacGuire, but its first flight had some surprises, as related in this slightly edited tale from the Fall 1992 *Plane Talk*:

“...On his first taxi run, John found that, when he reached the end of the runway, there was no space large enough to turn around the TF-51D. He had to cut the engine and get a tow vehicle to pull him back to the starting point. On his second run, John realized halfway down the runway that he was running out of space and



▲ Here's another photo of John MacGuire flying Friendly Ghost over his ranch in far West Texas.

that his only alternative was to take off. In a few seconds time, he transitioned from a Cessna pilot to a TF-51D pilot. After he caught his breath and his knees stopped knocking, John began to feel the thrill of flying one of the hottest prop-driven fighter planes of World War II. But now, he faced his second dilemma—

landing. It was out of the question to land on the short Fabens runway, so John headed for Dell City, which had a runway long enough to accommodate the TF-51D. After making several practice passes over the field, he eased back on the throttle and slowly set the *Ghost* down for a perfect landing...”

There's also an interesting story behind the paint job on *Friendly Ghost*. Some sources and websites erroneously report that this TF-51D was for a time assigned to the Indiana Air National Guard. This is not true. The paint scheme—overall polished metal with blue “lightning bolt” side and tail stripes, and a blue nose surrounded by white stars—indeed resembles the colors of IANG aircraft. But this was just a design that John MacGuire picked because he thought it was attractive. Similarly, the aircraft never flew with the Texas Air national Guard, despite its “TEXANG” markings. John simply decided to paint his prize TF-51D with TEXANG markings in honor of his adopted state. The Museum's NAA AT-6F Texan sports a similar paint scheme for the same reason.

Today, *Friendly Ghost* is one of the first aircraft you see when you enter the Museum. Although she is not today maintained in airworthy condition—her engine is “pickled,” for example, and she is “out of annual”—she could easily be restored to flight status. Thanks to a chance discovery by an unknown pilot in a distant land, and the skills, dedication and resources of warbird enthusiasts and Museum staff and volunteers, visitors can enjoy seeing this one-of-a-kind example of a historically significant aircraft. ✪

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▲ Here's a sight unlikely ever to be seen again—a formation of three Mustangs over West Texas. The most distant aircraft is the TF-51D Friendly Ghost, the middle one is P-51D Ghost Rider (formerly owned by Apollo 8 astronaut Frank Borman), and the photograph was taken by Rob Satterfield from the cockpit of P-51D Silver Ghost (now owned by Apollo 8 astronaut William Anders).

Membership Application War Eagles Air Museum

The War Eagles Air Museum collects, restores and displays historic aircraft, mainly from the World War II and Korean War time periods, to encourage awareness and appreciation of military aviation history through exhibits, educational programs and special events. The Museum is a nonprofit organization as defined by the United States Internal Revenue Code. Operated by staff and volunteers, the Museum is supported by funds obtained from admissions, memberships and contributions. All dues and contributions are tax deductible to the extent permitted by law.

War Eagles Air Museum memberships are available in six categories. All memberships include the following privileges:

- Free admission to the Museum and all exhibits.
- Free admission to all special events.
- 10% general admission discounts for all guests of a current Member.
- 10% discount on all Member purchases in the Gift Shop.

In addition, a Family Membership includes free admission for spouses and all children under 18 living at home.

To become a Member of the War Eagles Air Museum, please fill in the information requested below and note the category of membership you desire. Mail this form, along with a check payable to “War Eagles Air Museum” for the annual fee shown, to:

War Eagles Air Museum
8012 Airport Road
Santa Teresa, NM 88008

Membership Categories	
<input type="checkbox"/> Individual	\$15
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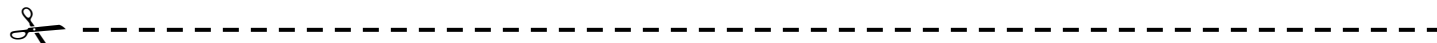
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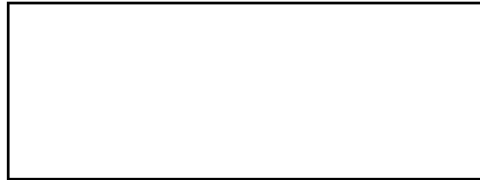
War Eagles Air Museum sincerely thanks the following individuals and organizations for their donations to the 2005 Corporate Youth Sponsors Program. This program educates local student groups about the contributions of military aviation to America’s history. For many students, visits to the Museum funded by these generous donors kindle an interest in aviation and related technical career fields. ✪

War Eagles Air Museum Corporate Youth Sponsors				
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War Eagles Air Museum

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Museum Co-Founder Credited with Saving El Paso Landmark

On March 17, 2006, more than 2,000 people gathered in downtown El Paso to celebrate the grand re-opening of the historic Plaza Theatre, and to thank War Eagles Air Museum co-founder Betty MacGuire, who is credited with saving the theatre from demolition 20 years ago.

When the Plaza opened in 1930, it was the largest theater between Dallas and Los Angeles. Its size, architectural extravagance, elaborate decor and technical innovations made it a unique venue that soon became known as the “Showplace of the Southwest.” Patrons were awed by the intricately painted ceilings, mosaic-tiled floors, decorative metal details and antique furnishings. It hosted Hollywood luminaries such as Clark Gable, the Marx Brothers, John Wayne and Mae West.

An event at the Plaza was a magical affair to remember. Seated by ushers who catered to their every need, theatre guests would see the main lights dim while tiny “stars” blinked and “clouds” appeared on the blue “sky” ceiling. The huge Mighty Wurlitzer Organ, with 15 ranks and 1,071 pipes (one of only six of its kind ever built and the only one known to still exist in the world today), would rise from the orchestra pit and the organist would play a musical medley before the show.

By the 1950s, however, the advent of television, the movement of families from cities to distant neighborhoods in the suburbs, and competition from new drive-in theatres all caused a gradual decline in the Plaza’s patronage—and that of similar venues nationwide. By 1973, the Plaza was no longer in use. The beautiful pieces of artwork and the Mighty Wurlitzer Organ were auctioned off, and the theatre was scheduled for demolition. Fortunately, a local family acquired it at the last minute and it was, at least tem-

porarily, saved from the wrecking ball. But the magnificent building sat vacant and unused for many years.

In 1986, the Plaza again faced destruction to clear the way for a parking lot. That’s when Betty MacGuire, then-President of the El Paso Community Foundation (EPCF), took action. Under a tight six-week deadline, Betty and the EPCF held a city-wide public awareness campaign that raised \$1 million to buy the Plaza, thus saving it for a second time. In 1991, the EPCF donated the Plaza to the City of El Paso. In 2002, EPCF and the City formed a partnership to restore the Plaza. The final restoration cost in excess of \$26 million, of which the EPCF raised \$12 million, and included the relocation of the Mighty Wurlitzer Organ to its rightful place inside the theatre that, once again, is justifiably the “Showplace of the Southwest.” 🌟

For more information, visit:

www.war-eagles-air-museum.com