



The Flyer

April 2004
Vol. Twelve, No. 4

High Sky Wing of the Commemorative Air Force
Midland, Texas - Hangar: 432-563-5112

On the Web at
HighSkyWing.org

April Meeting is Friday the 23rd

We have moved the April Wing meeting to Friday, April 23rd to be able to have a dinner meeting with the four Navy aces who will be speaking at the next seminar series on Saturday.

Our guests will be John Strane, Ralph Foltz and Jim Duffy of VF-15 plus Diz Laird of VF-4. All four are Hellcat aces. As you may know, Col George Coombes also served in VF-15 and will act as their host. At the dinner meeting you will have a chance to visit with all four of our guests, and please plan to attend their seminar program at 2:00 pm on Saturday.

We will be cooking hamburgers and hotdogs for the dinner but ask that you bring a dessert or other side dish that would go with this type of meal. See you there!

Hangar Hotel Trip Great Fun!

Despite the bad weather that prevented us from flying to Fredericksburg for a Wing outing, many folks drove to the Hangar Hotel facilities, located at the airport there and had a great time.

Everyone enjoyed the hospitality, camaraderie, good food and shopping, as you can see from some of these pictures.



Everyone enjoyed the food and a chance to visit with other High Sky Wing members and our friends from the West Texas Flyers, some of whom also participated.



The hotel even had a special sign to greet us!

We hope to make this just the first in many Wing outings in the future. We were joined by members of the West Texas Flyers group, and they too had a great time, it seems.

If you have an ideas for a good place for another “getaway”, especially one that we can fly to, please contact Col Ralph Gillette, and let’s hope for better weather next time.



A visit to The Brewery Saturday night included being serenaded by Alpinhorns.

From the Back Office

by Col Ralph Gillette

Just a quick report on some of the items discussed at the last Wing Staff meeting.

The Ramp & Hangar Safety meeting day went very well and several ideas emerged to improve our overall safety. See the photos for some more details. Also, it was suggested that we hold regular "Tool Box" safety briefings and plan a time to clean up our tools and work areas better at the end of each work day.

Col Jeremy Linebarger reported on progress for the Iron Eagle Shootout, our clay shoot scheduled for June 12st. There is more info on the event later in this issue.

We had a suggestion from Col Gena Linebarger that we hold our Friday night open house at AIRSHO this year in the O-Club, with our Wing providing food and entertainment and the O-Club selling the liquid refreshments. The staff agreed this was a good idea and plans are underway to make it happen.

There was a major discussion about how new members are greeted and treated and some changes are in the works. We plan to have a welcome letter with HSW patch and membership card ready soon, plus membership cards for existing members.

In other news, despite the miserable weather that kept our planes grounded, a group of a dozen or more make the trip to Fredericksburg on April 3rd. Some visited the Nimitz Museum while others shopped or just enjoyed the Sauerkrauts show at The Brewery. All in all it was a great weekend, despite a three-day motorcycle rally in progress at the same time (Ed, you missed a good show!)

Our next meeting has been rescheduled to Friday, April 23rd and will be a dinner meeting with the VF-15 and VF-4 naval aviators who will be the speakers at Col Coombes' Saturday seminar. The Wing is cooking hamburgers and hotdogs but we ask you to bring a side dish or dessert to complement the meal. We all need to turn out for both the dinner and Saturday program.

With our emphasis on safety, please remember to be careful out there. There have been a lot of accidents recently on the local streets, so stay alert and remember to wear something CAF to the meeting.

Don't Forget!
Your 2004 Wing Dues Are OverDue

Executive Views

by Col Ted Claussen

OK, I know you've hear this else where in the newsletter but once again, just to be safe, our next meeting will be Friday, April 23rd at which time we will be honoring the VF-15 and VF-4 Hellcat aces. The High Sky Wing will provide the burgers, hotdogs, beans and potato salad. You need not bring a covered dish like you usually do; however, you may bring something to go with a "burger dinner" or perhaps a dessert if you would like.

We asked for help with program ideas and names and we got it. THANKS!

Another big "THANKS AND WELL DONE" goes out to those who helped with preparation, cooking and serving at Open Cockpit day. It was cold and windy but that didn't stop the crew. Thanks: Randy Skinner, Travis Skinner, Tom Horton, Paul Anderson, Don and Karen McCracken, Ed McElrath, Linda Gisolo, Becky Carter, Ralph and Carol Gillette, Erna and Ken Sass, Blake Cowart, Bob Stine, Natalie Neal, Tara Claussen and those I may have inadvertently left out.

From the Flannel Wrench Locker

by Col Bill Coombes

"Two down and two to go" are the words rattling around the hangar maintenance department these days as, thanks to the work of many Wing members, both SNJ's received annual inspections and were returned to service with nary a squawk. I want to thank Col Jim Moore for service above and beyond as he joined me for six straight days of working on the airplanes. Along with Jim were Cols DUEWALL, Wilson, Claussen, Meyer, Kingon, Trowbridge, Hall, Davis, Meroney, Thornton, and McCracken. Now all we have to look forward to is June and the annuals on both the Fairchilds. Col H.D. Butler has offered to come up to help with the inspections as he has considerable knowledge of the PT-19 (obviously). Hopefully both of our little airplanes will "pass" with flying colors.

Kudos to all those who came to the Safety Saturday program! We had more than twenty Wing members attend and we all enjoyed an intensive overview of hangar safety and ramp safety presented by Col Lyn Fite, Col. Mike Reed, Randy and myself. I think that the consensus was that we try to have some kind of safety program at least one Saturday a month. This month we want to focus on cleaning up the hangar and

doing a “safety survey” of all areas in the hangar. Our Wing Safety Officer, Col McCracken, is already planning how to implement that survey.

The big Fredericksburg Fly-Out turned into a Drive-Out, as the weather was simply horrible for flying. However, a number of Wing members made it down to the Hangar Hotel and enjoyed the experience. Wing Leader Gillette took some photos of the inside of the Convention Center part of the Hotel in hopes that this will help as we design the interior of the new “Commemorative Center.” Special thanks to Col Deb and Miles Magness for all their help in organizing the activities once we arrived, and special thanks to Col Tom McKown for assuming my dubious title as chief “spiller” of tea and water: he was able to drown Carol Gillette with a clever sideways upset of a full glass of water at dinner Saturday night!

The weather is getting better and I hope that we can give some deserving Wing members rides in the Wing’s “fleet” at the next meetings or Saturday work day. If you’ve been waiting patiently for a ride, your chance is coming. Don’t be shy, just tell Randy or myself of your desire and we’ll work to make it happen. After all, flying these airships is what we’re all supposed to be about!

Lefty-loosey, righty-tighty.

Fabled Fifteen

By Col Bill Coombes

The Navy’s most successful squadron, and perhaps most famous, VF-15 was established on 1 September 1943 with Cdr. David McCampbell as the first Commanding Officer. Initial carrier work-ups were done on the USS *Hornet*, with the entire Air Group (VF, VT, and VB-15) then going aboard the USS *Essex* for combat deployment beginning in May of 1944.

Cdr. McCampbell flected up to command of the Air Group, and Cdr. Charles Brewer followed McCampbell as skipper of VF-15. *Fabled Fifteen* participated in all the fast carrier fleet offensives of the second half of 1944 including the Mariannas Turkey Shoot, where it was credited (by most recent sources) with 68.5 kills, the most victories in one day of any Navy squadron. Cdr. Brewer was killed in action, one of 20 aviators in VF-15 lost during the tour, and was succeeded by Lt. Cdr. James Rigg. The men of VF-15 finished their only wartime cruise in November of 1944 with 310 victories in the air, the most of any

single-tour Navy squadron. Twenty-five aviators, led by Cdr. McCampbell with 34 victories, achieved the status of ace.

VF-15 reformed for a second tour in January of 1945 with Lt. Cdr. Gordon Firebaugh as CO but the war ended with the “new” squadron at Barber’s Point, Hawaii, awaiting assignment to a carrier. VF-15 was disestablished 20 October 1945.

The author would like to acknowledge the assistance of six of the members of VF-15 in preparation of these articles, as well as the work of Barrett Tillman, Jay Miller, Edwin Hoyt, Edward Sims, and David Anderson.

As the Props Turn

by Col Randy Wilson

As Col Coombes has reported, our SNJ 101X has been carefully inspected and pronounced airworthy for another year, and after a couple of test flights, Bill and I flew the two SNJs on a memorial fly over for Army Specialist Robert Arsiaga, who was killed in Iraq and buried here in Midland earlier this month.

Next, I got to be a check pilot as Col Rusty Hall became our newest rated SNJ pilot. Rusty did a very good job as we shot takeoffs and landings at both MAF and Schlemeyer field and did our airwork south of Odessa.

Col Hall has agreed to help maintain the SNJ, along with the other Wing pilots who enjoy the privilege of flying 101X and flew it back to Burnet, TX where it will be based for the next few weeks while Rusty campaigns it at various central Texas shows and fly-ins. The plane will be available for our Memorial Day fly over and any other local events as needed. Our next candidate for a pilot in the SNJ is Col Dan Duewall, and we hope to have him rated in the very near future.

Last Saturday, Rusty was unable to fly back to MAF as planned due to the weather, so Bill and I flew the two Fairchilds on a fly over in support of the opening of the Chaparral Gallery at the Petroleum Museum. It was something to think that we were flying two planes whose total horsepower (400 hp) was substantially less than most if not all of Jim Hall’s racing cars and engines on display in the new gallery!

We want to get back to giving our deserving members rides in the planes, so don’t be bashful if you want a ride in the SNJ, J2K or PT-19. We hope to do rides before the May Wing meeting, if all works out.

Fly safe y’all!

Col Robert Morgan's Visit

By Col Randy Wilson

Retired Colonel Bob Morgan is better known to many as the man who flew the original *Memphis Belle*, the first B-17 crew to finish 25 missions over Europe in World War II. As part of the museum's seminar program, so well run by our own Col Bill Coombes, many of us got to enjoy a dinner with Col Morgan and watch the original color documentary about the *Memphis Belle* and her crew, as well as hear several very interesting remarks about the later Hollywood movie by the same name.

Due to maintenance and scheduling issues, neither CAF B-17 was available to be at HQ for this program, so we had to arrange for *Thunderbird* to join us from the Lone Star Flight Museum. Fresh out of the paint shop, the B-17G did provide a great backdrop for Col Morgan's two programs, as seen in the photo below.



Col Morgan (center) with the LSFM crew of *Thunderbird* and our own Col Clyde "Doc" Watson, who served as Morgan's escort and aide for the visit.

After the Saturday program, Col Morgan was kind enough to autograph copies of his book for many of the visitors but the real surprise came when the *Thunderbird* crew offered him a chance to fly their B-17 for the crowd. Col Morgan is still an active pilot and needless to say, he accepted the invitation. Also invited were Cols Coombes, Watson and myself.

The crowd watched as the B-17 took off on runway 10, after which, Col Morgan moved into the right seat and made a several very nice passes (with tower cooperation) right over the CAF main hangar and crowd. Here are a few photos taken that day.



Col Morgan in the right seat of *Thunderbird* as he lines up for one of the passes over the CAF hangar and crowd. He says he has flown several of the surviving B-17s over the years as he still attends 20+ air shows a year.



Hanging on in the back at one of the waist guns, Col Bill Coombes gained a new respect for those who did this at 25,000 feet while being shot at over Germany. However, notice the big smile on his face this day!



Another shot on the flight deck of the B-17 after Col Morgan has moved into the right seat and is piloting the plane.

HSW Safety Day Training

The Wing's first safety day was held on Saturday, March 27th with the help of Col Lyn Fite (below) of Fite Fire & Safety and Col Michael Reed, CAF Marshalling Detachment National Leader.



Col Mike Reed briefs HSW members on the more critical hand signals used to communicate with pilots. Thumbs down on a start up means "you are wet" with fuel.



A view out the right waist gunner's window on one of the passes over the airport.



After the first two passes, many folks had gone back into the hangar, so only a small crowd is left on the ramp for a third, unexpected pass. Obviously everyone enjoyed the sight of a B-17 right over the CAF HQ ramp and complex. Our special thanks to the flight crew of *Thunderbird* for making this possible. Thanks to Phil Barnes for this photo.



Using our PT-19 with Col Randy Wilson acting as the "dummy" pilot, we practiced a bit of marshalling.

HIGH SKY WING - CAF
Post Office Box 61064
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Iron Eagle Shootout!

The Wing's first annual clay shoot will take place on Saturday, June 12th at the Windwalker Farms Sporting Clay Complex, between Midland and Stanton.

The clay shoot is a major fund raising event for our Wing and our aircraft, so we need everyone to pitch in and help Col Jeremy Linebarger and his crew who are putting this event on, with the help of Boy Scout Troop 233.

Participation levels and fees run from \$125 for a single shooter to \$2,000 for a *Bomber* sponsor. Full details about the event, fees, prizes and awards can be found in the printed handouts available at the hangar and next meeting or you can get the info on-line, along with a printable entry form on our website at this URL: http://highskywing.org/clay_shoot.htm and there are links from our home page.

Deadline for registration is June 1st and if you have any questions about the event, call Jeremy (432-528-9642) or Gena Linebarger (432-528-0997).

High Sky Wing Elected Officers

Wing Leader: Ralph Gillette - 570-8093 ofc

Executive Officer: Ted Claussen

Adjutant: Mary Alice Tidwell

Finance: Bob Stine

Operations: Randy Wilson - 352-4258 cell

Maintenance: Bill Coombes - 689-8359 home

Safety - Don McCracken

Hangar Phone: (432) 563-5112

all numbers are Area Code 432 unless indicated

What's Happening & When

Apr 23 - Wing meeting & VF-15 dinner - 7pm

Apr 24 - VF-15/VF-4 seminar program - 2pm

May 6 - Wing staff meeting - 7pm

May 27 - Wing meeting - 7pm

May 31 - Memorial day events

Special Dinner & Meeting is Friday, April 23rd at 7:00pm in the Hangar
