



# The Flyer

February 2004  
Vol. Twelve, No. 2

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

On the Web at  
HighSkyWing.org

## Let's go to Fredricksburg!

by Col Bill Coombes

The response to the Wing "activity" or outing to Fredericksburg and the Hangar Hotel on April 3<sup>rd</sup> has been very positive. I've contacted the hotel and explained to them our plans and asked for a special discount rate. Unfortunately, the discount rate is still expensive and we need twenty rooms to be reserved to get that. However, I believe a number of people are still interested. The following is the list I have. If your name isn't on here and you wish to go, please contact me. I've sent this list to the hotel as well, so when you call or email to reserve your room they should be able to check it off this list and give you the appropriate discount.

Those who have said they wish to go include Cols McKown, Covington, Stine, Linebarger, Magness, Gillette, Meroney, McElrath, Wilson, Thornton, Claussen, Coombes, Roberts, and from the West Texas Flyers Kathy Wells and John Rogotzke.

Everyone needs to contact the folks there on your own, and I'd suggest doing so by the first of March. We will see how many are flying and how many are driving. It is an easy four hour car trip. Shopping on the main street will probably appeal to the ladies for Saturday afternoon. I propose that we all rendezvous in the hotel game room/lounge at 4 pm Saturday to organize dinner. I will try to set up some kind of group deal at one of the restaurants there for Saturday night. I figure on touring the Nimitz on Sunday. I believe we can get a group discount (\$3 per person) to visit the museum. It is open from 10 am to 5 pm every day of the week so we can still get out of Fredericksburg by a reasonable hour on Sunday.



**Don't Forget!**  
**Your 2004 Wing Dues Are Due**

At this point McKown, Covington, Linebarger, Wells, Rogotzke, Magness, Coombes and Wilson (in the two Fairchilds) are planning on flying. How many vacant seats there are is still a question. I will probably be able to take one and one-half people with me in Tarbaby. As the date gets closer we can work more on this aspect of the adventure.

It could be a really fun weekend away from Midland: plan on it!

## Other Wing Events

Beside the trip to Fredricksburg planned for April 3<sup>rd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup>, we are also planning an Aircraft & Ramp Safety Training Day in late March, and we expect to help the museum with their annual Open Cockpit day, which will be Saturday, April 10<sup>th</sup>. Inside, you will also read about the Wing's Clay Shoot fund raiser, scheduled for June 12<sup>th</sup>.

We did not publish a newsletter in January but sent out postcards, which were very effective at reminding folks of the Wing's Awards Banquet. A total of 77 members, family and friends showed up and a good time was had by all. This month's Wing meeting is back to the normal schedule of the fourth Thursday, and we again remind you to bring a covered dish or other item to share with your fellow Colonels and friends. Also, why not bring a friend?

The program this month will be a slide and video tour of the events at the Centennial of Flight celebration that Cols Dan and Penny Duewall attended last December. Penny will present the presentation while Dan is off flying for a living. This should be a very interesting program, so please try and join us.

Due to some conflicts, the April Wing staff meeting has been rescheduled to Thursday, April 1<sup>st</sup> at 7pm in the hangar.

Finally, it is time to pay your Wing dues for the new year, if you haven't already. Col Bob Stine will be happy to take your checks in person at the meeting or by mail to our Post Office box. Thanks.

## From the Back Office

by Col Ralph Gillette

Greetings and welcome to 2004. Since we did not do a newsletter for January, let me wish everyone a very Happy New Year. I don't know where 2003 went, but it surely flew by.

And speaking of flying, 2003 was very good to the High Sky Wing. We kept all three of our planes in the air for most of the year. We even had the PT-19 and Tar-Baby in the Airsho. Once again, 101X was a no show as Col Wilson was tending to the Snowbirds. We need to get a few more good men or women qualified in the SNJ so we can put our whole fleet in the air at Airsho.

We lost one of our own this past month. Col Rodney Jackson of Tar-Baby fame passed away. Without Rodney, we would not have had such great success with Tar-Baby and it surely would not have looked so elegant. He will be missed. Please keep his family in your prayers.

Col Jeremy Linebarger presented a proposal for a Sporting Clay Shoot to the Wing staff and we voted to go ahead with the plan. This is intended as a fund raiser replacing the golf tournament. The proposal includes utilizing Boy Scout Troop 233 for the operation of the shoot and we selected Jeremy as the committee chairman. He will need help from the Wing and I am sure he will not be afraid to ask. One thing we will need is sponsorships for the various stations and also donations of gifts and merchandise for door prizes and awards. Details will be forthcoming. The staff is very excited about the possibilities of this venture for fund raising.

Winter staff is coming February 20 thru 22. Everyone is invited to attend. There is a lot of very good information passed around during the various sessions and the chance to talk to other CAF people from far away places, like Hobbs or Dallas, always adds to the enjoyment of the weekend. Details are available on the CAF web site or through headquarters.

You will be quite pleased with the new seating arrangements at our next meeting. Not only do we have very comfortable chairs, thanks to Col Pat Wilson a couple of years ago, but now Col David Linebarger made a trip to Sam's and we have some gleaming white fiberglass tables to eat off of. Thanks for the extra effort David. I know you had some help with the off loading, but don't know who else to thank.

Remember, our next wing meeting is on Thursday, February 26<sup>th</sup> in our hangar. It will be a regular meeting with pot luck, so bring something good to eat. Be careful out there and remember, wear something CAF.

## As the Props Turn

by Col Randy Wilson

In lieu of a maintenance column this month, Col Coombes has brought us the *Saga of the Tar-Baby* for your enjoyment, so I'll simply report that all three of our planes are currently airworthy, and we will need to start on the annual of the SNJ in March. More on that at the next Wing meeting, I'm sure.

As you may know, Col George Coombes has acted as the Chief of our Flight Evaluation Board for many years but has decided to step down from that post. At the last Wing staff meeting the following Wing members were elected to serve on the FEB. The make up of the FEB is defined in CAFR 60-2.

Col Randy Wilson - FEB Chief & Ops. Officer  
Col Bill Coombes - Maint. Officer  
Col Dan Linebarger - Unit pilot

I agreed to act as FEB Chief until another suitable candidate could be found. We are also in need of aircraft coordinators for the PT-19 and J2K to take some of the load off Col Coombes. These would also serve on the FEB for their respective aircraft. We are working with a couple of candidates to help fly the SNJ and will have more news on that soon.

We have discussed having an Aircraft & Ramp Safety Training Day next month on a Saturday. Members would have a chance to get instruction and practice on how to handle the various aircraft on the ramp and in the hangar, hooking them up to the tugs, driving the tugs and also how best to man-handle them, when needed. How to fight an engine or other aircraft fire and basic marshalling techniques and signals would also be part of the program. Fire safety in the hangar would also be topic.

I hope to coordinate a date with the local CAF Marshalls and also Col Lyn Fite at the Winter Staff Conference and will try and have a date for this training day by the next Wing meeting. If you have any ideas for other types of safety training or practice, please let us know and we will be happy to include them in the program.

Safety both in the air and on the ground should be a major concern and project for us all. Fly safe - y'all!

## The Saga of The Tar-Baby

by Col Bill Coombes

or *Flying with Mr. Fairchild's Flivver...*

“One day atter Brer Rabbit fool ’im wid dat calamus root, Brer Fox went ter wuk en got ’im some tar, en mix it wid some turkentime, en fix up a contrapshun w’at he call a Tar-Baby, en he tuck dish yer Tar-Baby en he sot ’er in de big road, en den he lay off in de bushes fer to see what de news wuz gwine ter be.” Just as the Tarbaby stuck ole’ Brer Rabbit in Joel Chandler Harris’ immortal story, so too did a certain airplane, specifically a Fairchild F-24, stick to the High Sky Wing of the Commemorative Air Force.

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*...a wonderful opportunity...*

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As most aviation adventures begin, someone said, “It is absolutely a wonderful opportunity!” This is, of course, the siren’s song of a deal too good to pass up, and that song was heard loud and long by members of the High Sky Wing of the Commemorative Air Force in the Fall of 2000. Being flush with money and a gung-ho attitude, the members of the Wing began to think longingly of another airplane to add to the fleet. After some financial figuring and deep conversation, the Wing staff approved spending just a bit of the Wing’s bank account. The result was the purchase of a 1946 Fairchild F-24R, N81348, purported to be in excellent condition, with no need of major work. The CAF did not have a flying F-24 in its fleet, and so the High Sky Wing jumped with both feet into the world of the F-24.

A ferry mission was undertaken in December of 2000, with intrepid aviators Col. Howard Martin, Col. Roy Green, Col. Don Luttrell, and Col. Dan Secker winging westward to the Left Coast to pick up the airplane. The airplane was located in central California, at an airport with much character but without the necessary equipment to conduct a thorough inspection. However, donning rose-colored glasses, the logbooks of N81348 were examined and all appeared in order. With an eye to the distance back to Texas, the hours of available daylight, and rather leisurely cruise speed of the F-24, our heroes began the journey early in the next morning with full tanks and a case of 50 weight engine oil, thoughtfully provided by the previous owner. Little did anyone know that, rather than being “fuel-limited,” N81348 was “oil-limited,” managing to fly for only two hours before it was

necessary to add several GALLONS of oil. With a “Hmmm, what does that indicate?” the flight crew elected to press on, rapidly getting current in the ground handling quirks of -348, the aforementioned quirks caused by brakes that either stuck or failed to work at all. There were many stops between California and Texas, and more “hmmms” were “hmmmed.”

Dusk was rapidly approaching from the East at CAF HQ, and the sun was rapidly setting in the West when -348 appeared overhead at Midland International Airport. Eyes strained to locate the airplane, which was painted in a RAF desert camouflage scheme that worked effectively in hiding it in the gathering darkness. However, a successful landing was made with two minutes to spare before official sunset, and Cols. Secker and Luttrell triumphantly taxied up to the HSW hangar, to the applause of all the other CAF colonels in attendance. With her nose raised at a jaunty angle, and her wheels shrouded in those ‘30s vintage Smilin’ Jack wheelpants, -348 looked every inch a remarkable airplane, worthy of inclusion in the CAF fleet.

However, a more jaundiced view of the airplane by the Wing Maintenance Officer Col. Bill Coombes revealed that amid the snaps and crackles of a cooling Ranger engine was the unmistakable drip, drip, drip of oil spattering the tarmac. Summoning others to push the airplane into the hangar, Coombes soon discovered that a) both brakes were practically locked so tightly that it took six strong men and a few boys to move the airship, and that b) an outline of the fuselage, IN OIL, was clearly visible on the ground where -348 had come to rest. The “Hmmmmms” got louder.

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*...sparing no expense...*

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Soon thereafter, at the usual Saturday work party, a compression check revealed that three of the engine’s six cylinders had ceased producing power, preferring to pump oil out the breather instead. “No problem!” was the response from the multitudes, as the Wing had a “newly gone through, practically zero-time” Ranger purchased a year earlier as a spare for the Wing’s PT-19. Determining then to “spare no expense” (something that sadly would become a trendy saying used much too often), the old engine was removed, the motor mount and oil tank removed, powder coated a flashy yellow, and the new engine was installed. All the wiring was seen to be a trifle suspect (“The wire’s

OK, but the insulation is shot!”), so Col. Ted Claussen was drafted to begin the process of rewiring the entire airplane. The saga of the “Tarbaby” had well and truly begun.

As the weekends rolled by, and the HSW’s intrepid crew of Fairchild fanciers probed more deeply into the innards of -348, other “minor” problems manifested themselves. The aforementioned brakes leaked, both externally and internally, and were full of a fluid that more resembled swamp water than hydraulic fluid. The tailwheel post leaned about five degrees from vertical, and when removed and disassembled, was discovered to have only about half of the necessary parts to make it function correctly. An overhaul of the entire unit was done, “sparing no expense,” by a noted Fairchild restorer. Whilst peering into the rear fuselage someone noted that some holes, thoughtfully drilled by the manufacturer for bolts to help hold the tail assembly on, were vacant. Another “hmmmm” escaped some lips. This was actually a bit of a good thing, as it made taking the horizontal and vertical tail off the airplane: they needed “a bit” of attention due to some suspect covering.

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*...Hmmmmmm...*

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Since much of the airplane is fabric-covered, it was determined that a “punch test” might be in order, even though the log books indicated a relatively recent recovering. Since those books were now seen as lacking a modicum of accuracy, the punch test was conducted. Actually, it was a screw driver falling out of a shirt pocket that performed the first “test.” The rapidity with which it fell through the covering (both top and bottom of the elevators) surprised even the most optimistic HSW members. Continued testing revealed that, while the right wing and fuselage were satisfactory, the left wing’s linen was as brittle as the shroud wrapping King Tut. The only solution was a complete left wing-ectomy.

While this was happening on the exterior of the airplane, inside the crew compartment, while mapping a course of action for rewiring and following wires from the engine compartment to the instrument panel, Col. Claussen discovered that a) some of the instruments looked suspiciously like those acquired from the friendly neighborhood AutoZone, b) some others did not work and c) the fuse panel included one cleverly rolled up silver inner wrapper from a piece of

Wrigley’s Spearmint gum pressed into service as a 5 amp fuse. More “hmmms,” more vows to “spare no expense,” but now some doubts as to the wisdom of the entire endeavor began to be heard amongst the membership.

These doubts never caused the intrepid (and rapidly more broke) High Sky Wing to give up, or back away from the challenges of doing what was, essentially, an almost complete restoration of a very tired airplane. Col. Rodney Jackson came on board as lead mechanic, and he, along with Cols. Jim Moore and Rudy Silas, accomplished the lions share of the rebuilding necessary for the “Tarbaby” to take flight. The wiring was done, the wing was removed, repaired, recovered, and rehung, the tailwheel assembly returned from Kentucky and was reinstalled, along with the entire tail assembly, and all the cables were inspected and re-tensioned. Col. Luttrell, part of the original “Fairchild rescue society,” was responsible for getting the interior redone in a more tasteful leather, and a new radio stack was installed, along with a brand new custom-made (“spare no expense”) instrument panel.

Col. Coombes urged that a new paint scheme be adopted, that of a Coast Guard coastal patrol Fairchild 24, or J2K-2. This silver and yellow paint job added the final touch to what was becoming a show-stopper little airplane. The time was now drawing nigh for a post-restoration test flight, but who would do the honors? The tragic loss of Col. Secker in May of 2001 took the only experienced Fairchild 24 pilot in the CAF. Of the other active pilots within the Wing, Col. Coombes and Col. Randy Wilson held a drawing, with the loser getting the honor of committing aviation in -348 first.

It was thus blind luck that Col. Wilson found himself at the end of Runway 10 Midland International Airport on a pleasant June morning, one hand on the stick, one on the throttle, and one on the ever-present rosary beads, ready to take wing in Tarbaby. With a mighty roar from the 200 horsepower Ranger, -348 began a leisurely but not necessarily straight roll down the runway. Prior to touching the weeds Col. Wilson expertly pulled back on the stick and the Tarbaby was flying. A mighty cheer escaped the lips of the few survivors of so many work parties as the silver and yellow airplane orbited the field. It was a short orbit, as Col. Wilson reported that the airplane was somewhat out of rig (are we surprised by now?) and wanted

to fly in a rather steep right bank. After a smooth landing, and triumphant taxi back to the hangar, Col. Wilson proclaimed the airplane flyable, in need of some work on the ailerons, brakes and airspeed indicator (which had indicated 40 knots of airspeed throughout the flight) and probably in need of another test pilot as well. Eyes turned to Col. Coombes who, with the confidence instilled by 250 ground- loop-free hours in a Luscombe, took over the piloting chores from that point on.

After even more “tweaking,” of the brakes, throttle linkage, and aileron and rudder trim tabs, the “Tarbaby,” Fairchild J2K-2/F-24R46, now flies regularly with the High Sky Wing. She even managed to impress the judges enough to win “Best Liaison” airplane at the 2003 CAF Airsho. That plaque, now proudly hanging in the High Sky Wing pilots’ lounge, symbolizes the determination of so many members who rose to the challenge of “Keeping Them Flying.” And, isn’t that what we are in business to do?

## WWII Cover Girl - Alice Coombes

by Cols Blake Cowart

As a young teenager, Alice Coombes moved from Illinois to southern California with her family. As a student in high school, she worked in the fields of the area farms picking tomatoes. Many of the men that would normally fill those jobs were serving our country during wartime. During her Senior year, she got a job as a soda jerk at a local fountain. After working only a week, she was invited to lunch by her boss to learn that he was “firing” her. In actuality, he realized that she had much more to offer than just serving sandwiches and root beer. He had contacted a friend of his that was a photographer that was able to point Alice’s kind and gentle nature in a different direction.

In short, Alice became a cover girl for several national magazines of the era such as *The Family Circle*, *True Confessions* and *Romance*. Also included were appearances in *Our Navy* magazine. A picture was submitted by one of the guys in her father’s Sea Bees outfit; with the blessing of her father of course. She also did recruitment ads in *Post* magazine in which she appeared as a Navy WAVE.

With this notoriety, Alice was asked to join the United Service Organization and helped as a hostess at the Hollywood Canteen in 1944. The Hollywood Canteen was likely the most widely known of the 3,000 or so USO locations all over the world. The

purpose of the USO was to entertain the troops and boost morale no matter where they were. She worked every Thursday at the canteen for a year and also worked at the veterans hospital visiting injured soldiers. Additionally, Alice and her mother served as air raid wardens in her neighborhood in Los Angeles. This required the two of them to patrol the area and inspect against uncovered windows during “blackout” conditions. The West coast constantly guarded against attack from enemy planes.



Alice left the USO after serving for a year. She married George Coombes who was essentially her high school sweetheart. George was a Naval aviator in combat training while she served in the USO. They will celebrate their 59th wedding anniversary this year.

They moved to Midland, TX. in 1957 as George was employed with UNOCAL Oil Company. They have been ardent supporters of the Commemorative Air Force for many years and are charter members of the High Sky Wing.

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Once upon a time, a long, long, expensive time ago Bill seems to be saying "Hey, Rand - If I get it fixed, will you test fly it?" Be sure to read Bill's **Saga of the Tar-Baby** in this issue.

### 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

Feb 21-22 - CAF Wing Staff Conference  
Feb 26 - Wing meeting  
Mar 6 - Wing staff meeting  
Mar 25 - Wing meeting  
Apr 3-4 - Fredricksburg outing  
Apr 7 - Wing staff meeting

**Next Wing Meeting is Thursday, February 26th at 7:00pm in the Hangar**