



# Plane Talk

Volume 15, Number 3

## The Newsletter of the War Eagles Air Museum

### Editorial

Beginning with this issue of *Plane Talk*, War Eagles Air Museum shifts into high gear to commemorate the Centennial of Flight. A hundred years ago, on December 17, 1903, Orville Wright took to the air over the sand dunes at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, in Man's first successful controlled powered flight. To observe this historical milestone, the Museum has planned many celebratory events. The first, the regional unveiling of the U. S. Postal Service's *First Flight* postage stamp, took place at the Museum on August 2. See Page 6 for the full story. On Page 4, you'll find a schedule of other events through the rest of the year. We hope you'll be able to attend some or all of these events.

This issue's featured aircraft is the North American AT-6F *Texan*. This aircraft figures prominently in our Wright brothers celebrations. In preparation, Dan Taylor and Carl Wright performed an annual inspection on this 1942 warbird, which had last flown several years ago and had not even had a recent engine run-up. Then Chief Pilot Jack Bell took her aloft for a 45-minute test flight. Everything was okay except for a minor brake problem, which Dan and Carl soon fixed. This cleared the venerable veteran to fly during the stamp unveiling ceremony. Current plans call for Jack, Dan or Skip to fly her again during the Centennial of Flight Fly-In, the Chili Cookoff and the December 17 celebration. Visit the Museum then and watch this exciting, noisy, round-engined vintage warbird fly. ✪



War Eagles Air Museum's AT-6F *Texan* aloft over Horizon City, east of El Paso.

### Featured Aircraft

In 1934, the United States Army Air Corps (USAAC) held a competition for a new primary flight training aircraft. North American Aviation's entry in this competition, the NA-16, was a metal-and-fabric, cantilever-low-wing monoplane with tandem open cockpits, fixed landing gear and a nine-cylinder, 400-horsepower Wright R-975-E7 *Whirlwind* air-cooled radial engine. Famed test pilot Eddie Allen took the striking blue-and-yellow trainer aloft for the first time on April 1, 1935. The North American entry handily won the competition, but the

*Featured Aircraft (Continued on Page 2)*

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## From The Director

It's my pleasure to welcome a new member of the War Eagles Air Museum staff. Rich Rollins, a local artist, sculptor and aviation enthusiast, accepted the Gift Shop/Administrative position opened when Robert Haynes left recently for a job with the Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS) after graduating from UTEP last December. Robert still volunteers at the Museum on weekends, and writes his *Historical Perspectives* column for each issue of *Plane Talk*. We wish Robert well in his new job, and hope to see him often. You'll find a short biography of Rich in the *Meet the Staff* column on Page 6.

With the once-in-a-century celebration of the Centennial of Flight this year, I urge you to attend or participate in as many events in observance of that milestone as you can. We've set up an exciting schedule of activities, including a fly-in, a chili cookoff, a classic aviation film series and a flight of the Museum's 1937 Piper J-3 *Cub*, the world's oldest flying Piper aircraft. We look forward to seeing you at some or all of these events.

The Museum continues to grow. We recently acquired a very nice 1968 Mercedes Benz 250SL for the automobile collection, and we expect to add one or more new aircraft soon. We often receive donations of books, magazines, photographs and memorabilia. Our sincere thanks to the donors who entrust the Museum with the preservation of their priceless heritage.

Skip Trammell ☼

### Plane Talk

Published by War Eagles Air Museum  
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Chief Pilot Jack Bell fires up War Eagles Air Museum's AT-6 Texan before a test flight, July 2003.

### Featured Aircraft (Continued from page 1)

USAAC required some changes before approving it for production. With a new sliding cockpit enclosure and revised (but still fixed) faired landing gear, the prototype, redesignated the NA-18, entered production in 1936 at North American's new 2,000,000-square-foot factory in Inglewood, California. The USAAC called it the BT-9, for Basic Trainer. The initial order was for 95 aircraft, soon upped in 1937 by an additional 248, in A, B and C models. The first production BT-9 flew on April 15, 1936. The cost of the first production models was \$29,423 each.

Early in its development, the BT-9 became a candidate for the U. S. Navy's new instrument trainer. But the Wright engine would not do at all—the Navy did not use it in any other aircraft in its inventory. North American mated a 500-horsepower Pratt & Whitney R-1340-6 *Wasp* nine-cylinder air-cooled radial to the first production BT-9C airframe, calling the result the NA-28. The Navy liked the design, which it called the NJ-1, and ordered 40 aircraft. Delivery commenced in July 1937.

Over the next few years, the basic design evolved through several intermediate stages until, by 1940, it became the aircraft we know today as the AT-6 (Advanced Trainer) or SNJ. Major changes from the

early models included an all-aluminum semi-monocoque fuselage instead of fabric-covered tubing, a Hamilton Standard variable-pitch propeller, a hydraulic system to power the flaps, inward-folding retractable landing gear, a new triangular fin/rudder shape and angular wingtips. An armed version with two .30-calibre machine guns, one on the right side of the engine cowling and the other in a flexible mount in the rear cockpit, re-

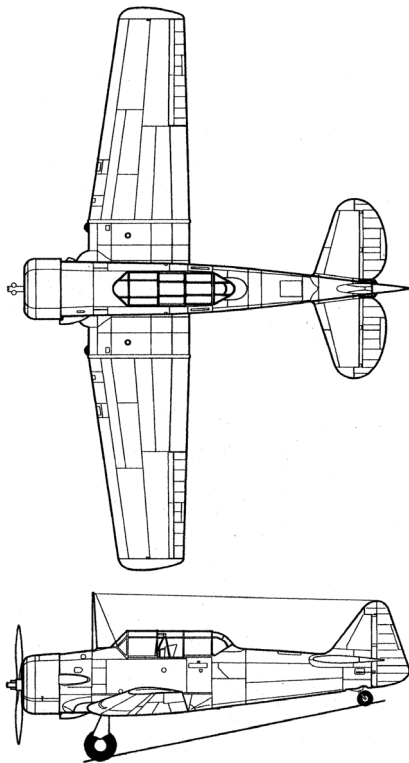
ceived the designation BC-1 (Basic Combat) and entered production in 1938.

By early 1941, with a USAAC contract for 517 AT-6As, a Navy contract for 120 SNJs, and a Royal Navy order for 526 *Harvards* (as they called the BC-1 with

### Featured Aircraft (Continued on page 3)



In the front cockpit of the Museum's AT-6F.



Drawing adapted from:  
<http://www.top-flight.com/manuals/topa0130-manual.pdf>

AT-6F Characteristics	
Powerplant	650-HP Pratt & Whitney R-1340-AN-1 9-Cylinder Air-Cooled Radial
Maximum Speed	205 MPH
Range	750 miles
Service Ceiling	21,500 feet
Weight (empty)	4,158 pounds
Weight (loaded)	5,300 pounds
Length	29' 6"
Wingspan	42' 1/4"

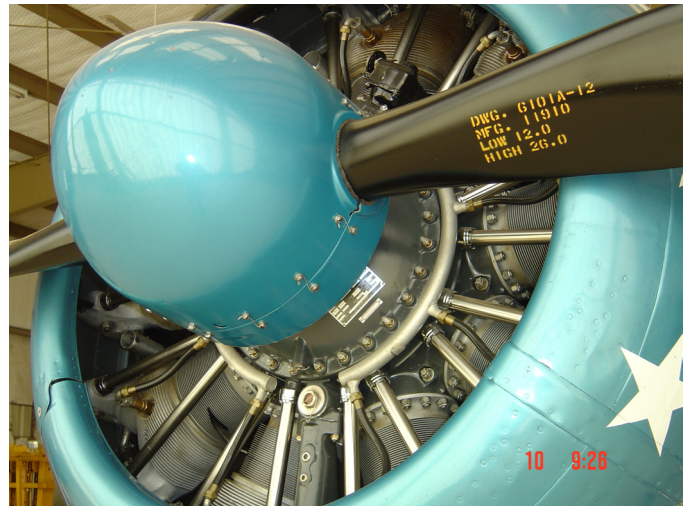
**Featured Aircraft (Continued from page 2)**

British-specification instruments and radios), North American could not keep up with the demand. The company built another new plant in Dallas which, beginning in 1942, became the dominant AT-6/SNJ production source. This is one reason why the aircraft became known in the U. S. as the *Texan*. The Australian Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation al-

so produced a model called the *Whirraway* (an aboriginal word meaning “challenge”), beginning in March 1939, and the Noorduyn Aviation, Ltd. company, in Montreal, Canada (later the Canadian Car and Foundry company) built *Harvards* under license beginning in 1940.

After a potential Army or Navy combat pilot learned his basic flying skills, he then transitioned into the AT-6 or SNJ as the next step toward earning a seat in a high-performance fighter aircraft. The model became one of the most widely used aircraft in history. The Army procured 10,057 AT-6s, and the Navy bought in excess of 1,900 SNJs. The rest of the total production run of over 18,000 aircraft went to 34 different countries, where they trained thousands of pilots during World War II.

After the war, the popular and widely exported aircraft saw service in 55 countries. Spain and South Africa were the last countries to operate them, which they did well into the 1980s. The *Texan* was in continual production for nearly ten years, and in active service, somewhere in the world, for more than 50 years. As recently as 1993, *Texans* were still in service in 22 countries as basic trainers and light attack aircraft. Maneuverable, simple to maintain and repair, and easy to handle, it remains a favorite of warbird collectors today. ✪



**AT-6F Texan powerplant—the 650-horsepower Pratt & Whitney R-1340-AN-1 nine-cylinder air-cooled radial engine.**



**Jack Bell and Bill Swartout back on the ground in the AT-6F after a spectacular flight performance for the First Flight postage stamp unveiling ceremony, August 2, 2003.**

*Centennial of Flight  
 Information  
 On The Web*

**C**heck War Eagles’ website for the latest information on Centennial of Flight events and plans. While you’re there, go to the Guestbook and you’ll find pictures of the events posted as they become available. ✪

## Centennial of Flight Events

War Eagles' series of Centennial of Flight commemorative events kicked off with the U.S. Postal Service's regional unveiling of the *First Flight* postage stamp at the Museum on August 2. Many additional events will take place before the end of the year, at the Museum and at other venues in El Paso and West Texas. Here's a convenient calendar for your planning purposes:

- |                 |  |
|-----------------|--|
| September 20    | War Eagles Air Museum/Ninety-Nines Centennial of Flight Fly-In at Santa Teresa Airport   |
| October 4–5     | Amigo Airsho   |
| October 12      | Classic Aviation Film Series— <i>Wings</i> *   |
| October 19      | Film Series— <i>The Great Waldo Pepper</i>   |
| October 25      | Chili Appreciation Society International (CASI) sanctioned chili cookoff at War Eagles Air Museum  |
| October 26      | Film Series— <i>The Spirit of St. Louis</i>  |
| November 2      | Film Series— <i>Only Angels Have Wings</i>   |
| November 7–9    | Experimental Aircraft Association (EAA) Chapter 125 Centennial of Flight Fly-In at West Texas Airport  |
| November 9      | Film Series— <i>Twelve O'clock High</i>  |
| November 16     | Film Series— <i>Chain Lightning</i> (picture at right)   |
| November 23     | Film Series— <i>The Bridges at Toko-Ri</i>   |
| November 30     | Film Series— <i>No Highway in the Sky</i>  |
| December 7      | Film Series— <i>Strategic Air Command</i>  |
| December 14     | Memorial plaque dedication at the site of 1953 B-36D bomber crash in the Franklin Mountains  |
| December 14     | Film Series— <i>Flight of the Phoenix</i>  |
| December 17     | World's oldest airworthy Piper J-3 <i>Cub</i> takes flight at War Eagles Air Museum (weather permitting), launching all-day Centennial of Flight celebration |
| January 4, 2004 | Dayhike to American Airlines aviation monument on Guadalupe Peak   |



\* All films in the Classic Aviation Film Series are presented at the International Museum of Art, 1211 Montana Avenue, El Paso, Texas. For more information, call (915) 543-6747.

## Volunteer Program Update

Now is the time—if you're a War Eagles volunteer, we need your help. With the big slate of activities scheduled in celebration of the Centennial of Flight, the Museum needs dedicated volunteers who can commit a few hours of their time to help out.

For example, we need people to control crowds and marshal aircraft at the Centennial of Flight Fly-In at Santa Teresa Airport on September 20. We need volunteers to staff membership and refreshment tables at special events, to greet visitors and answer questions at the Museum, and to serve as judges at the Chili Cookoff. For the Classic Aviation Film Series, we'd like to have knowledgeable volunteers attend each showing to tell the audience a little about the aviation or historical aspects of whichever film is being screened. For instance, *Twelve O'clock High* is about World War II in the air in Europe. Anyone with experiences as an airman in this era, and willing to share those experiences, is welcome to attend and offer insights, even if it means telling the audience "Nothing in this film is even remotely accurate."

While many of our most pressing volunteer requirements relate to Centennial of Flight events, we still have about 30 projects that need to be staffed. For example, thanks largely to dedicated volunteer efforts, we've cycled through driving most of the Museum's collection of 44 classic cars and motorcycles. That means we need to start again—it takes about five months to work through the entire collection. Please consider signing up to take a car for a spin around the airport before or after lunch on a Thursday.

Regardless of your skills and interests, you're sure to find one or more projects that can use your help. Please take a look at the latest project list, and then come out to the Museum and pitch in to make it a better place for everyone. ☘

# Historical Perspectives

by Robert Haynes



On Sunday, September 12, 1943, a Fieseler Fi-156C-5 *Storch*, coded SJ+LL and adorned with Nazi markings, landed on a high meadow near the Campo Imperatore resort hotel in Gran Sasso in the Abruzzi Mountains about 75 miles north of Rome. Piloted by *Hauptmann* Gerlach of the Luftwaffe, its mission was to pick up a very important passenger—Benito Mussolini, dictator of Italy for the previous 23 years and now held prisoner in his own country. Italian Field Marshall Pietro Badoglio had ousted Mussolini from power in a bloodless coup on July 24. Following a plan devised by *SS-Hauptsturmführer* Otto Skorzeny, 90 commandos of 1 *Kompanie* of the *Fallschirmjäger-Lehrbatallions*, who had landed moments earlier in 12 transport gliders, freed Mussolini from his Alpine prison. The erstwhile Italian dictator, along with Skorzeny, climbed into Gerlach's waiting *Storch*. After a dramatic short-field takeoff from the 6,500-foot-high plateau, the small STOL aircraft, its prominent spindly landing gear suggesting its avian namesake, carried Mussolini to temporary "freedom" as a puppet of Adolf Hitler.



Mussolini boards Fieseler *Storch* at Campo Imperatore resort hotel, Italy, on September 12, 1943. Photo from Fieseler Fi.156 *Storch* im Zweiten Weltkrieg.

This month's column examines some of the thought processes that may have been going on in Mussolini's mind, and some of the alternatives that may or may not have been open to him,

when he boarded the *Storch* that started him on a journey that eventually led to his death less than two years later at the hands of Italian partisans.

We can easily argue today that Mussolini "should have known," on that September afternoon, that the war was all but over. We can ask ourselves how he could possibly have thought the Axis powers still had a chance against the Allies. It is easy for us to say this today—we have known the outcome for sixty years. But remember, Mussolini did not then know what we know today. He had to make a decision—either return to his old ally or accept his new isolation—and he had only his experience to use to help him make it.

Many people, placed in Mussolini's position and forced to evaluate options without knowing the future, would no doubt choose just as he did. Hitler had promised Mussolini, with his usual mesmerizing persuasiveness, that the Axis' recent string of battlefield defeats would end as new "wonder weapons" entered the fray. This was easy to believe. The Germans were indeed developing new weapons, although their deployment was still some time away. For example, the V-1 "cruise

missile" (also built by Gerhard Fieseler Werke GmbH) entered service in June 1944. The Messerschmitt Me-262 jet fighter first fought Allied aircraft in August 1944, and the V-2 rocket began raining down on England in September 1944. While these weapons were not operational when

Mussolini was "rescued," they were well along in their test programs, and Hitler likely extolled their virtues to the Italian ex-dictator. Today we know that these weapons, while technically advanced, were too few and too late to make a difference in the outcome of the war. However, Mussolini evaluated their potential in 1943, not 2003.

Another of Mussolini's anxieties, one that greatly influenced his decision-making process, was the thought of Italy facing total destruction. Although there is no question Mussolini was a brutal dictator, he was still a passionate Italian with no desire to see his homeland destroyed. Archival records clearly show many instances where Mussolini openly expressed concern that all he had built, and all that Italy had become, would be annihilated. He realized that not only the Allies, but the Germans as well, threatened Italy's physical and cultural existence. The record shows that Mussolini believed Hitler would *not* allow Italy to become a base for Allied operations against Germany. Thus he reasoned it was better for Italy to protect herself from Allied invasion, with German assistance, rather than capitulate and risk the possibility that a larger German force would, in "scorched-earth" combat, utterly destroy Italy in an effort to protect Germany.

Some people today may believe this reasoning is naïve—that Mussolini should have known the Germans would sacrifice Italy anyway as soon as the Allies moved on shore. But the Allies had a very difficult time landing on Italian soil. Had the Italian forces maintained more unity and mounted a more effective defense, the Allies might not have taken Rome, and the war could have lasted much longer.

In conclusion, consider the following "thought experiment." Place yourself on that Alpine meadow, standing next to that idling Fieseler *Storch* with its flaps set for take-off. Do you climb aboard and strap in, or do you stay behind and watch your last hope climb away and vanish over the distant horizon? 🌟

See box on Page 6 for sources.

## Postage Stamp Unveiling Ceremony

On August 2, a sunny Saturday morning, War Eagles Air Museum hosted the regional unveiling of the U. S. Postal Service's *First Flight* commemorative postage stamp. A local advertising blitz preceded the event. Jack Bell, Terry Sunday and Dan Taylor promoted the ceremony the week before on the Leon Metz radio talk show. Dan and the Postal Service's Don Berger ap-

peared live on the Channel 9 Morning Show the day before, and Terry highlighted the event in a live Channel 7 weather remote from the Museum Friday night. Volunteers and staff blanketed El Paso and Las Cruces with posters, and most local newspapers ran announcements. These efforts must have worked—about 300 people showed up for the ceremony, far exceeding estimates. In fact, it was the largest turnout ever for a stamp unveiling ceremony in the area. Postal Service employees sold out of the 500 stamps they brought, and ended up taking names and addresses of eager customers who then got their stamps by mail.



security, membership and refreshment tables, media questions and the myriad other things that had to be taken care of to make the ceremony a success. ✪



Noted El Paso historian and author Leon Metz addresses the standing-room-only crowd in the Museum at the *First Flight* postage stamp unveiling ceremony, August 2, 2003.

At 9:00AM, a trio of flag-carrying Skydive El Paso parachutists dropped in right on-target on the ramp in front of the Museum. After a Civil Air Patrol Honor Guard carried the flags inside, our own Reverend Carl Wright offered the invocation. Then El Paso author/historian Leon Metz spoke about early aviation in the border area. After Leon's remarks, El Paso Postmaster Felix Guerra, assisted by Suzie Azar, Sean Cuellar, Julie Juliusson, Betty MacGuire and Skip Tram-

mell, ceremoniously whipped the black velvet cloth away from a beautiful 2x3-foot blowup of the *First Flight* stamp. The crowd went wild.

The highlight of the event for many was at about 9:45, when Chief Pilot Jack Bell and back-seater Bill Swartout took off in the Museum's AT-6F *Texan* and put on a spectacular show over the airfield. With low passes down the runway, a couple of wingovers and an exuberant barrel roll, this mini-airshow was a fantastic crowd-pleaser that had everyone applauding and hoping for more.

Special thanks to the many volunteers who helped out with crowd control, ramp

## Meet the Staff

Rich Rollins recently joined the War Eagles Air Museum staff. He has a background in business and the talents of an artist.

A native of New England, Rich majored in marketing and art, earning a B.A. degree in fine art from Castleton State College in Vermont in 1987. He worked for several years at a Connecticut consulting firm, helping clients with tax credit programs and immigration law compliance. In 1991, he founded his own consulting firm (RTI Management Services) to assist small- to mid-sized companies with tax credit programs. RTI grew to serve clients in over 500 locations in 30 states. In 1995, Rich moved to the El Paso area.

Rich's works of art can be found in the collections of Secretary of State Colin Powell, National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice, President and First Lady George and Laura Bush, New Mexico Senator Pete Domenici, and in many private collections in El Paso. You can see a small sample of Rich's work at:

<http://www.thepaperheart.com/rollins2.htm>

Rich shares our passion for aircraft and enjoys welcoming our visitors. With his computer skills, he will also help out in areas such as data base management, museum correspondence and general administrative tasks. ✪

## Historical Perspectives

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Collins, James L., Jr. (Consulting Editor), *The Marshall Cavendish Illustrated Encyclopedia of World War II* (Volume 10), Orbis Publishing, Ltd., 1972

Piekalkiewicz, J., *Fieseler Fi.156 Storch im Zweiten Weltkrieg*, Motorbuch Verlag Stuttgart, 1984

## 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
<input type="checkbox"/> Family	\$25
<input type="checkbox"/> Participating	\$50
<input type="checkbox"/> Supporting	\$100
<input type="checkbox"/> Benefactor	\$1,000

NAME (Please print) \_\_\_\_\_

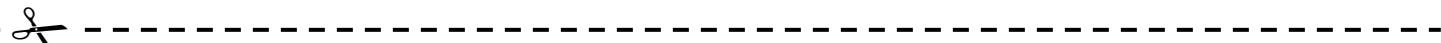
STREET \_\_\_\_\_

CITY \_\_\_\_\_ STATE \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

TELEPHONE (Optional) \_\_\_\_\_

E-MAIL ADDRESS (Optional) \_\_\_\_\_

Will be kept private and used *only* for War Eagles Air Museum mailings.



**W**ar Eagles Air Museum sincerely thanks the following organizations for their 2003 support of the Corporate Youth Sponsors Program. Because of their support, student groups in the El Paso/Juarez area can learn about the contributions of military aviation to America’s history. For many students, visits to the Museum made possible by donations from these sponsors kindle interest in aviation and related fields as possible career choices. ✪

War Eagles Air Museum Corporate Youth Sponsors			
Bronze	Silver	Gold	Platinum
Alamo Industries, Inc.	Advanced Aircraft Services West, Inc.	Jobe Concrete Products	El Paso Aero, Inc.
Frank Borman	Jon T. Hansen	Robert F. Foster, Inc.	El Paso Electric Co.
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	J. Cesar Viramontes		



## War Eagles Air Museum

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8012 Airport Road  
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## Project Status

**W**ith 2003 being the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Wright brothers' first successful powered flight, the Museum is focusing on publicizing the events we have planned to observe this occasion. To help spread the word, a local graphic designer has developed a logo and poster that we'll use to advertise aviation-related activities for the year.

You'll soon see the poster on display in west Texas and southern New Mexico. We think it's a great way to spread the word about the many exciting events the Museum will host or sponsor between now and the end of the year. If you're planning a road trip or a vacation somewhere in the area, stop in at the Museum and grab a few posters. It will help out a lot if you post them in businesses and other places (with permission, of course) along your way.

Speaking of projects, War Eagles' new employee Rich Rollins (see his bio on Page 6) single-handedly crafted a detailed quarter-scale (10-foot wingspan) replica of the Wright flyer. Rich finished his replica in an incredible time of just four weeks. He had it ready to serve as the centerpiece for the stamp cancellation ceremony, where it was prominently exhibited behind the podium and next to a new display case containing Wright brothers memorabilia. Rich covered the wings and control surfaces with muslin, the same material the Wright brothers used. This exquisite wood, metal and fabric model helps visitors understand the actual design details of the aircraft, and allows them to better appreciate the Wrights' ingenuity.



The replica will play a major role in the upcoming Centennial of Flight events, and you may even see it in a parade one day soon. ✪

For more information, visit:  
[www.war-eagles-air-museum.com](http://www.war-eagles-air-museum.com)