



Plane Talk

Volume 25, Number 2

The Newsletter of the War Eagles Air Museum

Editorial

We've put a lot of effort into refurbishing our library in the last few years. Our extensive collection of books, periodicals, newspapers, photographs and documents resides in what we call the "balcony," a narrow glassed-in area beside the second-floor offices and overlooking the display hangar. The balcony originally had no climate control. In the winter, it got cold. In the summer, it got *hot*—brutally hot. Fluctuating temperatures are bad for the preservation of printed material. So we made the balcony into a real library. First, we installed a dedicated climate-control system to maintain the temperature and humidity at moderate levels better suited to preserving our holdings. We put in a dropped ceiling and tightly sealed all the gaps. We installed "book-safe" lights that do not fade printed materials, and we set up a computer workstation. Our goal is to make our library readily available to researchers and historians. Dedicated volunteers Ted McClard and Frank Harrison have been organizing and cataloguing the collection for months, putting together a list of our holdings that we will distribute to local university and city libraries.

And their task just got *much* bigger. We recently got an amazing donation of over 2,500 top-quality aviation books and magazines. We estimate the weight of the donation at more than a ton, and it more than doubled the size of our library. Ted and Frank have their work cut out for them as they beaver away to integrate the new material in with the old. ✪



Featured Aircraft

The early days of the Jet Age were a fascinating period in aviation. As in many other aspects of advanced-technology aircraft, German designers pointed the way to the future in the closing days of World War II with the Messerschmitt Me.262 *Schwalbe* ("Swallow"), a very-high-performance twin-jet aircraft that could handily outfly everything else in the air at the time. But German factories, dispersed around the diminishing *Reich* because of relentless Allied bombing raids, never made enough of the radical aircraft to affect the out-

Featured Aircraft (Continued on Page 2)

▲ North American Aviation's FJ-4 Fury resembles the F-86 Sabre, but the two were actually very different. This FJ-4 of Marine attack squadron VMA-212 shows the smooth, sleek lines of the final version of the Navy's first operational carrier-based jet fighter.

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From the Director

As the new Executive Director of War Eagles Air Museum, I want to sincerely thank everyone for making me feel welcome. I'd be stretching the truth if I said I was not at times overwhelmed. The good news is that I'm a little less overwhelmed every day.

My only regret in accepting this position is that I didn't have the opportunity to better know the late John MacGuire, who co-founded the Museum with his wife Betty. A quick look around reveals John's foresight, engineering competence and love of aviation. John and Betty wanted it to be a "fun" place, and we'll continue that tradition. We'll accomplish our mission with the teamwork concept that John built, and we'll spare no efforts to maintain War Eagles Air Museum as a true jewel of the desert Southwest.

We need increased visibility, more recognition and a greater presence in the community. I plan to reach out to the many business relationships I've built as an insurance agent over the last 31 years in our community to carry our message so it is heard loud and clear.

As we move forward together, I'll be constantly looking for new, more effective ways to put War Eagles Air Museum "on the map," and to gain recognition in the local area, and with aviation and automotive enthusiasts worldwide, of the unique aircraft, automobiles and other historic treasures that await them behind the hangar walls at 8012 Airport Road.

Bob Dockendorf ☛

Plane Talk

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Featured Aircraft (Continued from page 1)

come of the War. Also, Adolf Hitler's irrational insistence that the quintessential fighter be used as a fighter-bomber meant the Me.262 never lived up to its promise.

In America, both the U.S. Army Air Corps and the Navy hopped on the jet-engine bandwagon during the War, but, unlike the Me.262, none of the early American jets saw combat. The Bell XP-59 *Airacomet*, the Nation's first jet aircraft, first flew on October 1, 1942, but never went into production because of disappointing performance. Lockheed's P-80 *Shooting Star*, which went from concept to flying prototype in only 143 days and first flew on January 8, 1944, was a direct response to the Me.262, which had begun to show up in Allied aircrews' combat reports. Development problems, including several crashes, delayed its service entry until after the War was over.¹

In the meantime, the more-conservative Navy, not yet ready to depend on the new-fangled jet engines, ordered the Ryan FR-1 *Fireball* in February 1943. The FR-1 had both a conventional radial piston engine and a turbojet. First taking to the air sans jet engine on June 25, 1944, the FR-1 had poor longitudinal stability and lacked structural strength. The first three prototypes all crashed during flight testing. Even so, the Navy formed one operational squadron, VF-66, aboard the carrier *USS Ranger* in March 1945, but the Japanese surrendered before the *Ranger* sailed from the West Coast.

The next Navy jet fighter looked a lot like the *Fireball*, but rather than ending up as an aeronautical oddity, as did the Ryan design, it spawned a long-lived line of very successful air superiority and ground attack aircraft.

On September 5, 1944, the Navy's Bureau of Aeronautics (BuAer) issued a specification for a new single-seat, carrier-based jet fighter.

¹ Major Richard I. Bong, America's highest-scoring air ace, who had shot down 40 Japanese aircraft while flying a Lockheed P-38 *Lightning*, died on August 6, 1945, when he ejected from a P-80 at too low an altitude for his parachute to open. Ironically, on the same day the Martin-built Boeing B-29 *Superfortress* named *Enola Gay* dropped the first atomic bomb ever used in warfare on Hiroshima, Japan.



▲ A flight of three FJ-1s of the NAS (Naval Air Station) Oakland Naval Air Reserve unit fly over their base in this circa 1950 photo.

er-based jet fighter. Two contracts came out of this specification. The Navy issued one to the Vought Aeronautics Company for the XF-6U *Pirate* (a dead-end design so underpowered that it bore the nickname "Groundhog"). The Navy also contracted with the North American Aviation, Inc. (NAA), of Downey, California, for its NA-134, even though the company had no experience with the wet, salty, hostile environment of carrier operations. The NA-134 was not only NAA's first jet—it was the first aircraft of any type that the company had ever designed for the Navy. Powered by a General Electric J-35 axial-flow turbojet, the NA-134 was a stubby, straight-winged aircraft, like the *Fireball* and the XF-6U, which the Navy thought was essential to good low-speed handling for carrier landings. Its wings, tail surfaces and canopy resembled those of the P-51 *Mustang*, arguably the most successful fighter of World War II. The Navy ordered three of the aircraft, designated XFJ-1 *Fury*, on May 28, 1945.

The first XFJ-1 roared into the air on September 11, 1946. The flight test program went so well that the Navy ordered 100 production FJ-1s (Model NA-141) before the tests finished, with deliveries starting in October 1947. But by then the Navy had cut its order to only 30 aircraft, at least partly because the continuing headlong rush of jet technology meant its current designs would quickly be obsolete. An FJ-1 of Squadron VF-5A (later designated VF-51) made the Navy's first operational jet carrier landing when it snagged the #1 arresting wire on the *USS*

Boxer at sea on March 10, 1948. In September, an FJ-1 won the Bendix Trophy Race in the Jet Class, flying from Van Nuys, California, to Cleveland, Ohio, in four hours 11 minutes, averaging 489.53 miles per hour. Still, despite briefly being the “fastest things in the sky,” the Navy’s first operational jets were outdated even as NAA was still delivering them. The FJ-1 had an operational lifetime of just 14 months before transfers of still-new aircraft to Naval Reserve units began. By 1953, no FJ-1s were flying anywhere. The Navy had something much better to replace them with.

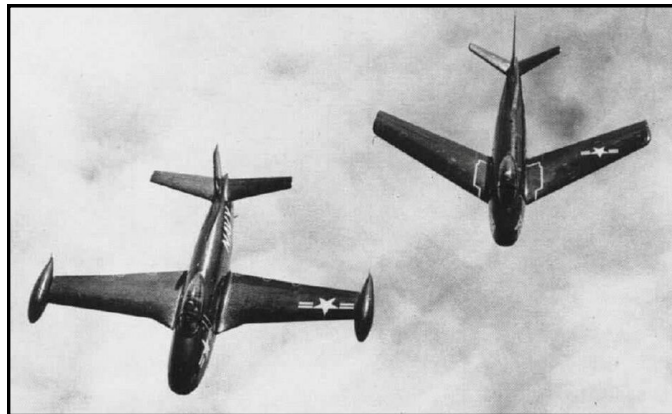
The next part of the convoluted story has a bit of a “chicken-or-the-egg” quality to it. Some sources say NAA’s FJ-2, the swept-wing FJ-1 follow-on, owed its design to the company’s F-86 *Sabre*. Other sources claim the FJ-2 came first. The account that makes the most sense is one the late Charles Darwin (1809-1882) would appreciate. In the same sense that humans did not directly “descend” from apes, but rather share a common ancestor with them, it seems that neither the FJ-2 nor the F-86 “descended” from the other. They simply shared a common ancestor.

That ancestor was the NA-140. Simultaneously with developing the FJ-1 for the Navy, NAA was also working on a different jet design for the U.S. Army Air Forces (which became the U.S. Air Force on September 18, 1947). Slender and streamlined, the NA-140’s most distinctive features were its sharply swept wings and tail surfaces. While the Navy had originally considered the NA-140 for

its first jet, it opted instead to buy the more conservative NA-134 because of its concern about swept wings and carriers.² But two factors soon set the stage for a new NAA fighter for the Navy that bore virtually no relation to its first. Since the FJ-1 was being phased out, its performance not up to modern standards, the Navy needed a replacement. Meanwhile, the NA-140 had transmogrified into the very successful Air Force F-86 *Sabre*. Data from F-86 flight tests showed that swept-wing aircraft could operate from aircraft carriers. So the Navy decided to proceed with the development of a “navalized” NA-140, and ordered three prototypes, designated XFJ-2s, on March 8, 1951³.

Two of these were basically F-86Es with catapult fittings, arresting hook and longer nosewheel strut. The third was an F-86E with four 20mm cannons instead of the standard six .50-calibre machine guns. It was an armament testbed only, with no other navalized features. Since the modifications were simpler, it was the first to fly, on December 27, 1951. Carrier compatibility tests went reasonably well, so the Navy ordered 300 FJ-2s. But by the time the 200th one got to the fleet in September 1954, the Korean War had ended, and thus the pressing need for more combat aircraft had declined.

As much of an improvement as the FJ-2 was over the FJ-1, it still left a lot to be desired. Its J47-GE-27 engine was not powerful enough for efficient carrier operations. In March 1952, just months after the FJ-2 first flew, NAA started work on the FJ-3, with a 7,720-pound-thrust Wright J-65-W-4 engine—a license-built version of the British Armstrong-Siddley *Sapphire* turbojet. The Navy awarded the company a contract for 389 FJ-3s the next month, even though the first prototype did not fly until July 3, 1953. NAA delivered 538 of them to 12 Navy squadrons from 1954 through the end of 1956.



▲ If the FJ-1 (l.) and FJ-2 (r.) look like two fundamentally different aircraft, it’s because they are. Despite the similarity in designations, there was very little commonality between the designs.

Production FJ-3s resembled FJ-2s except for a slightly bigger air intake to feed the more-powerful engine. The main difference visible to the naked eye was the FJ-3’s gray-over-white paint scheme rather than the FJ-2’s overall gloss blue. FJ-3s also had larger fuel tanks, wing “fences,” a detachable in-flight refueling probe and six underwing pylons for fuel tanks, bombs or rockets. The last 80 FJ-3s built, designated FJ-3Ms, could carry two *Sidewinder* heat-seeking air-to-air missiles on the inboard pylons.

The most-numerous variants of the *Fury*, FJ-3s and -3Ms equipped 19 Navy and four Marine squadrons. An FJ-3 of VF-21 made Naval aviation history as the first aircraft to land aboard the *USS Forrestal*, the Navy’s first supercarrier, and *Furies* helped pioneer the mirror landing system for use on angled-deck carriers.

Featured Aircraft (Continued on page 7)

North American FJ-4 Fury General Characteristics	
Powerplant	One 7,700-pound-thrust Wright J65-W-16A axial-flow turbojet
Maximum speed	680 miles per hour
Service Ceiling	46,800 feet
Length	36 feet 4 inches
Wingspan	39 feet 1 inch
Range	2,020 miles
Weight (empty)	13,210 pounds
Weight (max.)	23,700 pounds

2 Actually, it’s a lot more complicated. The original NA-140 had straight wings, just like the NA-134. When NAA realized the design (by then designated XP-86) would not meet the Air Force’s 600-mph speed requirement, it decided to sweep the wings at a 35-degree angle to get better performance, based on German World War II data. The NA-140 was the first U.S. aircraft to take advantage of those data.

3 There are some indications that the Navy kept the “FJ” designation for an entirely different aircraft so the program would easily slip through a Congress whose members probably wouldn’t have known a *Fury* from a *Spad*. After all, that strategy had worked just a year before for Republic with the F-84F *Thunderstreak* (see *Plane Talk*, Third Quarter 2008).

The Story of the “Cornfield Bomber”

The weather near Malmstrom Air Force Base, Montana, was clear, calm and cold on February 2, 1970. Light snow showers had ended just after midnight, adding little to the few inches of white stuff that blanketed the surrounding fields and farms. Flying conditions were excellent that morning when three Convair F-106A *Delta Dart* interceptors of the 71st FIS (Fighter Interceptor Squadron) roared into the air, afterburners blazing, on a routine training operation to practice air combat maneuvers. Only two of them returned to base. What happened to the third? Read on...

Air Force Captain Tom Curtiss, an Instructor Pilot on the flight, saw the whole thing. “[First Lieutenant] Gary Foust was leading, with [Major] Jim Lowe in the chase position. We split up; I went to one end of the training airspace and they went to the other. When we were about 20 miles apart, the [ground] controllers turned us into each other so we would pass head-on with a thousand-foot separation. After we passed, the fight was on. The object was for us to gain a tactical advantage on our opponent and maneuver into firing position. After landing, we would review the gun-camera film and reconstruct the engagement.”

Curtiss flew head-on toward the other two aircraft in full afterburner at Mach 1.90, then broke vertically and zoomed straight up to 38,000 feet, with Foust and Lowe on his tail in a vertical rolling scissors. Topping out, Curtiss kicked the rudder right, then left, in a high-G rudder reversal. “He [Foust] tried to stay with me, and that’s when he lost it,” Curtiss said. “He stalled and then got into a post-stall gyration, the aircraft rolling violently and swapping ends. His recovery attempt was unsuccessful. The aircraft got into a flat spin, which is usually unrecoverable.”

Curtiss said Foust’s aircraft looked like it was spinning around its pitot tube. “Very flat and rotating quite slowly,” he observed. “Gary rode it down to about 15,000 feet. All this time Jimmy Lowe

was radioing him the spin recovery procedures. Part of the procedure is to push the takeoff trim button, which moves all the control surfaces to takeoff settings, which are about the same as for landing. So when Gary ejected, the aircraft was wings-level, engine at idle and trimmed for about 175 knots.”

When Foust squeezed the handgrips on the armrests and triggered his rocket-powered Weber zero-zero ejection seat (meaning it could be used safely at zero altitude and zero airspeed—*i.e.*, with the aircraft sitting on the runway), he may not have known that the first 12 pilots who ejected from F-106As had not survived. But those fatalities had involved earlier-model seats, and, in any event, he had no choice. In a thunderous flash of flame and smoke, the canopy blew off and Foust blasted out of the spinning aircraft’s cockpit on a trail of rocket fire.

That’s when the story gets bizarre. As soon as Foust punched out, the pilotless F-106A stopped spinning, straightened out and started gliding in smooth, stable flight. Apparently the weight loss and center of gravity shift brought on by Foust, his seat and the canopy leaving the scene altered the dynamics of the situation enough that the aircraft successfully recovered by itself. Curtiss and Lowe were watching the drama from a safe distance. “Gary, you’d better get back in!” Lowe radioed—one of the funniest lines in the annals of aviation. Of course, Foust didn’t hear the call, since he was descending under his parachute at the time. He landed in rough terrain. Some snowmobiling Native Americans (okay, “Indians” in the original report) soon picked him up, none the worse for wear.

In the meantime, the F-106A, also none the worse for wear, flew on serenely in a gentle descent. It eventually made a near-perfect belly landing, aided by the “ground effect” of the big delta wing as it neared the ground, in a farmer’s snow-covered cornfield near Big Sandy, Montana. When a Highway Patrolman arrived soon afterwards, the aircraft was sitting motionless in the field on a few inches of snow, gear up, engine running and nose radar dish sweeping. The Patrolman noticed the name “Major Wolford” sten-



The F-106A was America’s primary all-weather interceptor from the 1960s through the late 1980s, and was the *last* dedicated interceptor in Air Force service to date. Originally an advanced derivative of Convair’s F-102 *Delta Dagger*, the aircraft that was then designated “F-102B” featured so many improvements and modifications that, on June 17, 1956, it got a new number and a new name. But no one called it the *Delta Dart*. Its pilots and crews called it simply “the Six.”

The first prototype F-106 flew on December 26, 1956. The flight test program did not go very well. The aircraft suffered from poor performance, an unreliable engine and nagging avionics problems. Its Hughes MA-1 integrated fire control system was especially troublesome—it eventually got more than 60 upgrades. Electronically interfacing with the SAGE system (Semi-Automatic Ground Environment), the MA-1 theoretically allowed controllers on the ground to steer interceptors to their targets—inbound Soviet bombers. F-106s would shoot down the bombers using conventional or nuclear-tipped *Falcon* or *Genie* missiles. Flight-test problems and delays almost led the Air Force to cancel the program, and the Service cut its order from 1,000 planes to only 350. Considerable redesign at Convair and Hughes eventually resolved the issues. Deliveries of the aircraft, now called F-106A, to 15 squadrons in the mainland U.S., Alaska, Germany, Iceland and South Korea, started in October 1959. A couple of months later, on December 15, Air Force Major Joseph W. Rogers set a world speed record of 1,525.96 miles per hour at an altitude of 40,500 feet in an F-106A. ★



▲ *This photo puts the pilotless landing into a good geographic perspective. Note the buildings very near in the background, and the trail of melted snow behind the aircraft's jet engine exhaust.*

ciled on the canopy sill. Wolford was the Chief of Maintenance at the 71st FIS, but Foust had flown his aircraft that day. The Patrolman called Malmstrom, although exactly how he did so in those pre-cell-phone days is unclear. He managed to get Wolford on the phone and asked him for instructions on what to do. Wolford advised the Patrolman to "just let it sit there until it runs out of fuel."

That advice would have been great if the snow-covered cornfield hadn't had a slight downhill slope. As the heat radiated by the idling engine melted the snow it was sitting on, the aircraft crept ahead a bit, then stopped. It moved forward a few feet more, then stopped. Then forward a bit more. The Patrolman was get-



▲ *The open doors of the drag parachute compartment above the engine tailpipe prove that Lieutenant Foust deployed the 'chute, as called for by recovery procedures, in his vain attempts to stop his aircraft's flat spin.*

ting a little concerned by this time as he nervously eyeballed the decreasing distance from the aircraft to the fence bounding the field. Records do not state whether other law enforcement, emergency or Air Force personnel showed up to watch as the F-106A scooted slowly but inexorably across the field. When its engine finally quit after an hour and 45 minutes, it had moved about 400 feet and ended up very near a paved

County road. We can imagine the watchers breathing sighs of relief as the big rumbling Pratt & Whitney J75-17 turbo-jet wound down to a stop.

A team of technicians from the Sacramento Air Logistics Center at McClellan Air Force Base, California, showed up a day or so later. When they lifted the aircraft with a crane, they found the damage to its underside was more serious than they had thought at first. The wings were in virtually perfect shape, but the belly landing had ripped open a gash several yards long in the lower fuselage and the armament bay doors. After removing the wings and partially disassembling the aircraft, the techs trucked the pieces to a nearby railroad line, loaded them onto a flatcar and shipped the whole thing to McClellan. After repairs, the now-infamous F-106A, which had rolled off Convair's assembly line in 1958, went back into active service. It eventually ended up at Griffiss Air Force Base in Rome, New York, with the 49th FIS—the last Air Force unit that flew F-106s. In 1972, new McDonnell Douglas F-15 Eagles began replacing the aging Delta Darts, which the

Air Force then passed to Air National Guard units. The Air Force struck the last F-106A from its inventory in 1988. After that, many of Convair's beautiful *Delta Darts* went to their flaming deaths as radio-controlled QF-106A target drones. The last one plunged to earth after a missile test in January 1998.

And the fate of the one laboriously pulled from the snow and mud of a Montana cornfield after its ignominious but spectacular unpiloted landing? It is at the National Museum of the United States Air Force in Dayton, Ohio. It has been on proud display in the Cold War Gallery since August 1986, along with a sign that relates its unique historical significance.

One mystery remains about the pilotless landing of this high-performance jet. Accounts written at the time, as well as those appearing recently on-line, refer to the incident as "the Cornfield Bomber." But the F-106A was not a bomber. Perhaps local reporters who covered the story more than 40 years ago didn't know the difference between a "bomber" and a "fighter." Perhaps some newspaper editor thought "bomber" was a more menacing word than "fighter." Or maybe "bomber" rolled more mellifluously off the tongue. For whatever reason, the name the original chroniclers came up with stuck. Being aviation purists, we think "Cornfield Fighter," or even "Cornfield Interceptor," would be a lot more accurate. But regardless of what it's called, we hope you enjoyed the story. ◀



▲ *Looking lonely and forlorn, the F-106A sits in the cornfield before technicians started to disassemble it for removal.*

Historical Perspectives

by Robert Haynes



Many civilians in World War II suffered or died just because they were in the wrong place at the wrong time. But some civilians got caught in the right place and at the right time to contribute to the hard-won Allied victory. A small group of mostly Australian citizens who lived and worked in the Solomon Islands, near Papua New Guinea in the South Pacific, found themselves trapped behind enemy lines when the Japanese invaded in 1941. These extraordinary men soon become renowned as “the Coastwatchers.”

Australia had had administrative responsibility for the Solomons, which had been German territory, since World War I. Many Australian planters and traders lived there, mainly for the coconut business. With excellent foresight, the Australian government drew up evacuation plans for its citizens in the Solomons in the event of a future war, and also figured out what to do with those who did not, or could not, evacuate. Thus, immediately after the Japanese attack, the previously selected members of the Coastwatchers received commissions in the Royal Australian Navy and went right to work. Their orders were to report on Japanese troop concentrations and naval and air activities, help evacuate non-combatants, prevent collaboration between the native Solomon Islanders and the Japanese, assist downed or shipwrecked Allied personnel and provide on-the-spot intelligence to support the development of Allied plans to retake the Solomons.

The Coastwatchers sent their coded reports to Lieutenant Commander Eric Feldt, of Australian Naval Intelligence, using 10-pound Type 208 backpack-portable radios. Each Coastwatching station had its own call sign, which it kept re-

gardless of how often the station’s physical location changed—the Coastwatchers were always on the move, not only to evade capture, but also to gain better views of Japanese installations and activities. LCDR Feldt forwarded the reports to the Allied Intelligence Bureau, which planned the Allies’ strategy in the Pacific. Native Solomon Islanders served as scouts, and provided food and shelter for the Coastwatchers, for rescued fliers and sailors and for the Australian Commandos who operated throughout the Islands. While the units were largely self-sufficient, some items, such as spare parts for the radios, had to come in from outside. Sometimes Consolidated PBY *Catalinas* dropped supplies by parachute. At other times, submarines lying in shallow waters off secluded beaches rendezvoused with canoes paddled out to meet them.

Aircraft and submarines also carried evacuees to safety. At first, the evacuations involved mostly civilians, such as a group of nuns trapped on Bougainville, Chinese citizens who the Japanese would probably have slaughtered, and Germans who were still there from the pre-World-War-I days, for fear they would collaborate with their Axis partner. Planes and subs also rotated personnel and evacuated the sick or injured. After the Allies landed on Guadalcanal in August 1942, the number of downed pilots and shipwrecked sailors increased enormously. Extracting civilians via submarine led to some humorous moments. For example, imagine how submariners reacted when, having been told they would be rescuing “women from the islands,” they saw a group of nuns climb aboard!

Missionaries of several Christian denominations worked throughout the Solomons, and many of them also helped the Coastwatchers. For example, Methodist missionary A.W.E. Silvester aided sailors from the *U.S.S. Helena*, which sunk in the Kula Gulf on July 6, 1943. Missionaries also helped to maintain good relations between the Coastwatchers and the

native Solomon Islanders. Methodist natives were more likely to help the Coastwatchers than Catholic natives, who followed the neutrality policy promoted by the Catholic Church. Some native communities were so isolated that neither the Japanese nor the Allies relied on them, because they had no understanding of the War and almost no contact with outsiders of any kind. Other villages tried to exist as best they could, and assisted whichever side had troops in their vicinity.

The Coastwatchers’ greatest contribution to the Allied war effort was the intelligence they provided during the Guadalcanal Campaign. Admiral William F. “Bull” Halsey, Jr., South Pacific Area commander, had high praise: “The Coastwatchers saved Guadalcanal, and Guadalcanal saved the Pacific.” With perfect vantage points to observe Japanese aircraft and ships *en route* to Guadalcanal from their base on Rabaul, Coastwatchers’ reports aided the Allies in disrupting the Japanese convoys. By derailing this “Tokyo Express,” the Allies gained a big advantage over the Japanese forces on Guadalcanal that were desperately trying to push the Allied troops back into the sea. The Japanese eventually withdrew from the island altogether. Even then, the Coastwatchers reported the movements of the evacuation ships, which became “sitting ducks” for Allied air attacks.

The Coastwatchers and their native scouts performed other well-known operations, such as the rescue of Lieutenant (JG) John F Kennedy, Jr., and the rest of the crew of motor torpedo boat PT-109. The accomplishments of the Coastwatchers became so legendary that they even sometimes got credit for operations they had nothing to do with, such as the shoot-down of Japanese Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto over Bougainville on April 18, 1943. Not until years later was it revealed that the intelligence that led to the successful American intercept of the Admiral’s airplane came from high-level code breakers rather than the Coastwatchers. But the fact that the Coastwatchers immediately got the credit testifies to the almost mystical faith in their abilities by nearly everyone who had contact with or had even heard of them. ☼

Membership Application War Eagles Air Museum

War Eagles Air Museum memberships are tax-deductible to the extent provided by law, and 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 Member.
- ➔ 10% discount on all Member purchases in the Gift Shop.

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:

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Membership Categories

☐ Individual	\$15
☐ Family	\$25
☐ Participating	\$50
☐ Supporting	\$100
☐ Benefactor	\$1,000
☐ Life	\$5,000

Featured Aircraft (Continued from page 3)

NAA’s main objective for the final *Fury* variant, the FJ-4, was to increase the aircraft’s range without sacrificing performance. Although it looked much like the -3, the FJ-4 was actually a completely new design, with a shorter but fatter fuselage, a thinner but larger wing, a taller rudder, an “all-flying” tail and, most importantly, 50% more fuel capacity. The prototype flew for the first time at NAA’s Columbus, Ohio, facility on October 28, 1954. By May 1958, when the last aircraft rolled off the line, NAA had produced 147 FJ-4s and 217 FJ-4Bs (a slightly modified FJ-4 that could deliver nuclear weapons). Meanwhile, FJ-3s continued in service, overlapping considerably with the new FJ-4 deliveries. Most FJ-3s ended up in Naval and Marine Reserve units by 1959. FJ-4Bs reportedly flew a few air strikes in Laos in 1962, but other than that unconfirmed report, none of the *Fury* versions ever saw combat. By



▲ *The Museum’s FJ-2, seen here before restoration, was delivered in April 1954. It flew for a total of 744 hours at Marine Corps Air Station Kaneohe, Hawaii, from November 1954 through November 1956. The Navy struck it from the inventory in July 1958. It remained in storage until Museum founder John MacGuire acquired it in 1989.*

the end of 1962, the Navy had relegated all of them to Reserve units. They were completely retired by the mid-1960s.

War Eagles Air Museum volunteer Gene Dawson, a retired Marine Corps Lieutenant Colonel and Korea/Vietnam War veteran, flew FJ-4s and FJ-4Bs for about six months while he was stationed

in a Marine Reserve unit at Dobbins Air Force Base, near Atlanta, Georgia, in late 1961. He remembers the aircraft fondly: “It was very agile, quick and responsive,” he recalls. “And it had a great cockpit—very comfortable and pilot-oriented.”

In the final analysis, no other aircraft better illustrates the development of early American jet fighters than the *Fury*. Beginning life as a simple, conservative design with marginal performance, the FJ series morphed, in a series of measured, deliberate steps driven by the pace of increasing technical knowledge of jet engines and improved aerodynamics, into a powerful, successful air superiority and ground attack aircraft that served in Navy and Marine squadrons for many years. *Furies* served as testbeds for jet operations on carriers and helped develop gun and missile armament systems, advanced electronics and nuclear weapons delivery capabilities for the Navy. All in all, the lasting legacy of North American Aviation’s first carrier-based Navy fighter is a very impressive one. ☺



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Republic F-84F Restoration Milestone

War Eagles Air Museum's venerable Republic F-84F *Thunderstreak* was in pretty bad shape. The Cold-War-era fighter-bomber had sat forlornly outside the Museum for many years, exposed to the Chihuahua Desert's intense, merciless sunlight and howling, dust-laden winds. Its once-shiny aluminum skin was dull and scratched, its tires were shredding and its canopy was sandblasted to opacity. Bird droppings marred its surface, and small creatures occasionally nested in its innards.

The aircraft's condition, as well as the fact that it was a non-flyable "hybrid" made up of parts from at least four separate airframes, did not deter the dedicated volunteers who signed on for the restoration project that turned out to be far bigger than anyone expected. The decision was made to paint the *Thunderstreak* in

an authentic Southeast Asia camouflage color scheme, circa 1968. The first step was to pressure-wash and sand the sun-faded surfaces down to bare metal—a process that literally took months. After that came the priming and painting inside the restoration hangar, using acrylic paints carefully selected to match color chips in the Air Force Tech Manuals. The aircraft was then ready to be moved outside, but the project was not finished yet. Still to come were stenciling, data panels, warning placards and other markings. When the finishing touches are done, the aircraft will be put on prominent display for visitors to admire.

Team lead Cliff Bossie documented the project photographically each step of



▲ *The Thunderstreak poses on the Museum ramp with the volunteers who worked on it: (l. to r.) Ed Bird, Cliff Bossie (Team Lead), George Guerra and Chuck Faison. Photo by Kathy Barnicoat.*

the way. He also wrote a short article that appeared in the February 2012 issue of the British aviation magazine *Aeroplane*.

Thanks to all the project volunteers for a job well done. It was a lot of work, and you should be very proud of what you accomplished. *It looks great!* ✪