



Volume 14 - N° 11 - November 2009

## EDITORIAL

This version 2009 of **AIRSHO** was one of the most uncertain since the arrival of the CAF in Midland in 1991. Announced as beautiful and sunny at the beginning of the week, the week-end was the victim of a weather change towards the worse, which was confirmed on the windy and cold Friday. The Gods decided to let us have a reasonable Saturday, but the weather rapidly changed, as it often does in Texas, to fog and rain that stopped all flights on Sunday. Fortunately, this change was announced early enough so that the public was able to change plans and come on Saturday, hence, limiting the loss of the following day. This problem of the weather is common to all air shows, and despite everyone's good will, one cannot do anything about it. That is how only 300 tickets were bought at the gate on Sunday, to which must be added those who had purchased advance tickets. A rather sad assessment that the CAF did not need in that difficult economic situation... This annual event is about to see significant changes materialized. These are discussed elsewhere in this issue...

The sudden death of **Gary Austin**, the true "father" of the B-29 engine modification, and the B-24 as it appears today, added itself to the general moroseness of this month of October. He had left the CAF a few months ago, but his popularity was exceptional in the warbirds community. He was highly appreciated on all forums dealing with that subject. His loss, at the age of 39, started an avalanche of messages of sympathy which shows how badly he will be missed by everyone. One says that nobody is irreplaceable. Today, with the death of Gary Austin, I'm not so sure about that any more...

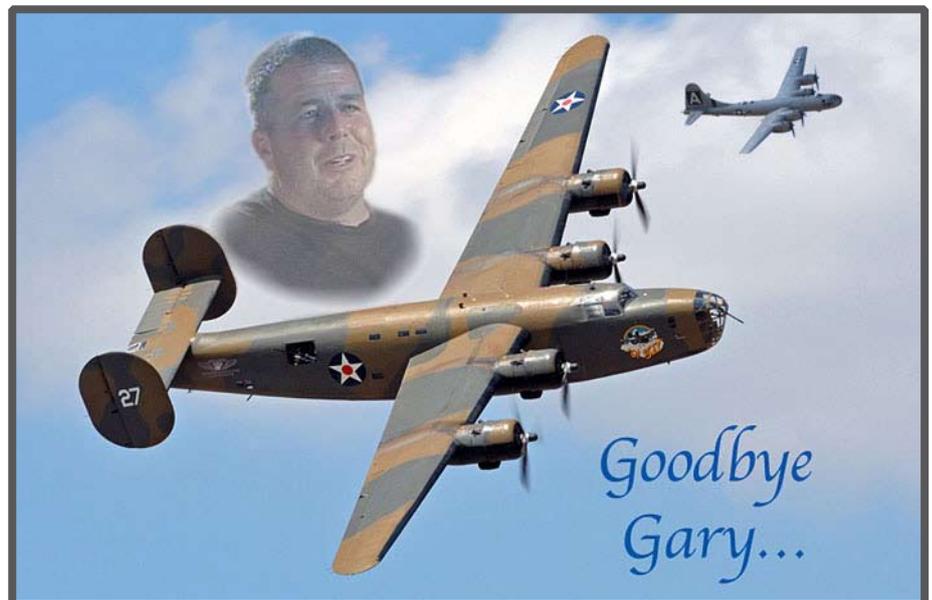
The French Wing General Assembly will take place in a few days in Ermenonville. Important decisions will be taken during this meeting. I hope to see many of you there!

Bernard

## WET AND COLD AIRSHO 2009



Photos: B. Dufino



## A NEW RECRUIT FOR THE CAF AND THE FRENCH WING: COL KEVIN LEONARD-KELLER FROM QUEBEC, CANADA

## NEW DATES FOR AIRSHO

As you have read in The Dispatch magazine, the CAF has decided that **AIRSHO will take place on the second week-end of October each year.**

The bad weather that prevailed in Midland this year is not a rule of course, but those who traveled to Midland immediately asked that this event should be moved forward into September for the future. Therefore, our Leader advised our director Steve Brown of this wish, who immediately rejected it, arguing that statistics show that October is dryer than September, and that the unanimous vote that had led to that decision, was irrevocable... This calls for a few remarks:

- 1) A dryer weather does not necessarily mean a better one.
- 2) The global weather changes all the time on this planet, and remains a mystery for the future.
- 3) Nice weather in Midland does not mean nice weather everywhere else, and the general bad weather that stopped many aircraft from reaching Midland in 2009 may well happen again and reduce the number of aircraft for future shows.
- 4) All these risks for those who travel over thousands of Miles to get to Midland and spend about \$2000 or more for this trip, may well think twice about their decision to go to Midland or not. This would be a real pity since the average number of French Wing members who traveled to AIRSHO since 1996, the year our Unit was formed, has been 15 each year!

Therefore, in future, it will be everyone's choice to select AIRSHO or another destination...

## THE WARBIRDS COMMUNITY IN MOURNING AFTER THE SUDDEN DISAPPEARANCE OF GARY AUSTIN

It only took a few hours after the news was revealed for an flow of messages of sympathy reached the CAF and on all the forums dedicated to warbirds. No one could believe it but it was, alas, quickly confirmed: **Gary Austin** had disappeared...

For the rare ones who are not familiar with this name and his unforgettable time with the CAF, let us say that he is the father of the B-29 **Fifi** engine modification and that he carry out the B-24 modification practically on his own. These two tasks alone summarize, in a few words, the immense know-how of this outstanding mechanic.



Having started very young by washing airplanes, Gary went up the ladder progressively, taking on each time more responsibilities and increasing his experience to reach what he considered the best part of his life as a mechanic: A job with Ezel Aviation, in Breckenridge (Texas). There, in this workshop which is a reference when it comes to warbird restoration, Gary accumulated, within a few years, so much experience and knowledge, that he was literally “pushed through the door”, with the advice to find a job worth his great qualities. The pupil had got better than the Master!... This is how he got to the CAF where he was employed as Director of Maintenance. He accomplished many important tasks which resulted in a definite improvement in the technical quality of all CAF airplanes, because Gary did not hesitate one second to ground an aircraft if he thought that it wasn't maintained according to the current rules and laws. His immense know-how was revealed with the conversion of the B-24 “Diamond Lil” into “Ol'927”, and by the sophisticated study of the B-29 engine modification which, today, is well under way. Alas, Gary took, a few months ago, the decision to leave the CAF for personal reasons. We now all know what happened next, and we can only express our sorrows and sadness which will be even greater for those who worked with him or even just met him, because Gary had a gift in communicating and sharing with others his passion, with the utmost kindness, an extraordinary generosity, and a modesty that we should all take as an example.

*Goodbye Gary!...*



## ROY GRINNELL HAS PRESENTED THE FRENCH WING WITH A SPLENDID PAINTING OF THE "SPIRIT OF LEWIS"

It was during our stay in Midland that Roy presented our Unit with this magnificent painting of the J-3, which he has done to express his enthusiasm for our Wing.

We have just started a process which will lead to the production of very high quality prints of this painting. That way, each of our members will be able to acquire one or several prints, either on paper or canvas. The details relative to these prints will be communicated as soon as they are decided precisely.



In the mean time, do not hesitate to tell us if you will buy one of these prints, specifying if you want it on paper or on canvas.

The printing process named "Digigraphy", better than quadrichromy, guarantees that the result will be the very best, be it in terms of quality or longevity.

## KEVIN LEONARD-KELLER NEW MEMBER

Kevin was born on December 28, 1987 in Le Chesnay, near Versailles. He lived in Dampiere (Yvelines district), until he left for Canada where he now resides.

When he was very young, he was afraid by airplanes, convinced that they could drop from the sky at any moment... Then he questioned that, met pilots, bombarded them with questions, and the answers and explanations he got made him think that his fears, after all, were not founded.

His aunt (And recruiter for that occasion) **Marie-Françoise Le Cornec**, offered him, one day, to go up in a glider. Not too reassured but gathering all the courage he could, climbed aboard. He liked it so much that a passion was



born on that occasion! Some time later, Marie-Françoise offered him some flying lessons in the South of France, in Vinon, where he discovered the joys of flying. This is when he decided that he would not stop flying and make a liv-

ing from his passion. A few years later, Kevin had a chance to go and live in Canada to follow his ambitions, and, as soon as he could afford it, he took lessons in a flying school where he soon obtained his Canadian PPL, CPL, and Multi IFR. Very grateful to Marie-Françoise and his great grand-

mother, without whom he could not have become a pilot at his age, Kevin hopes to progress fast and become a professional pilot in a near future.

We met Kevin during AIRSHO when he joined our group in Midland.

Living with him for two weeks was a true pleasure, full of kindness and good spirit.

Kevin is also fond of photography, and his favorite warbird is the P-51 Mustang.

Welcome aboard Kevin!

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CANADA (QC)

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## A NEW PAINTING BY ROY GRINNELL

### “...AND THE OSCAR GOES TO “FLORIDA CRACKER”

Since the return to the Philippines, the U.S. invasion forces were under constant attack by air. 1st Lt. Joseph M. Forster has moved to the Tacloban Airbase, Leyte Island in the Philippines along with his group, the 475th FG, 432nd FS, on November 2, 1944, the same day Forster made Ace.

On November 8, Forster and his wingman Lt. Walter Freeman were in the air at dawn from a mat strip in poor weather with towering clouds that rose from the deck as far as anyone could see.

Almost immediately, Lt. Forster noted flak bursts near Dulag. Investigating, he spotted a lone Nakajima Ki.43 Oscar and gave chase.

Just as the Oscar entered the clouds over the Catmon Mountains, Forster fired in deflection and scored hits. Following the Oscar into the clouds, he scored additional hits. As he and Lt. Freeman rolled out of the cloud base, on each side of the mountain, they observed the Oscar falling out, engulfed in flames and slamming into the jungle. Lt. Forster had just scored victory number 6 in dismal weather conditions! He finished the war with 9 victories, 3 probables, and 1 damaged.



## NEW POSTAL ADDRESS FOR COL REGIS URSCHLER

Please make a note of our friend Regis Urschler's new postal address (His phone and email are unchanged):

Regis Urschler  
911 Zinsmaster Court  
Bellevue, NE 68005  
USA

*Thanks for amending your copy of the phone-book until the new issue.*

## LATEST FROM GAËTAN MARIE

Here's the superb P-51C Mustang "Tuskegee Airmen" of the CAF produced by Gaëtan. Should you be interested by a print, please contact him at:

< [webmaster@gaetanmarie.com](mailto:webmaster@gaetanmarie.com) >



# AIRSHO 2009

Article : B. Delfino - Photos : B. Delfino et C. Gascon for the Albany article

Ten of our members who reside in Europe went to Texas to participate in AIRSHO. There, they were reunited with several members of the French Wing who live in the USA. That's how the French Wing contingent reached the honorable, and quite amazing figure in these times of economy crisis, of 21!

Among these members, we were amazed to see several of them come to Midland only to take part in the French Wing annual dinner on the Thursday evening! These members are: **Barbara and Aubrey Hair** who came from Dallas, and **Sandy Sansing, Lilian Ayars, and Jim and Nancy Lux** who came from the area of Austin. They all traveled more than 600 Miles to take part in this dinner!... An extraordinary proof of their enthusiasm towards our Unit. A very big Thank You on behalf of all members of the French Wing!



*The new colors of the CAF P-40 could be a lot better, but it is still a beautiful plane...*

ful that they literally enlighten its walls.

The French Wing dinner was scheduled for 7 PM in the usual "Asian Buffet" restaurant, so we went back to our hotel at about 4 PM to get

to us by the AAHM museum. This presentation, illustrated by about one hundred photographs that everyone seemed to enjoy, gave a summary of the French Wing activities during the past year. Let us thank our local member, **Jim Adams** and his lovely wife **Terry** for their invaluable help which made sure that this evening was another success, and turned it, this year again, into one of the stars of AIRSHO.

It was also a chance to present to all our members the new recruits for the year. The very latest, done by Marie-Françoise Le Cornec, is none other than her nephew, le col Kevin Leonard-Keller who is studying to become a professional pilot. Let us wish him good luck in this project!

The dinner, as usual, was excellent, and ended this memorable evening.



*Roy and Sandy before the painting of the attack on Château-Thierry railworks in June 1944 by Sandy*

Thursday October 8 was spent at the CAF for our annual visit to the splendid AAHM museum, with a very special stop in our friend Roy Grinnell's art gallery. These original paintings share the room of the library, and they are all so beauti-

everything ready for a smooth evening.

Like he had done last year, Bernard had prepared a video presentation which was shown on the wall, thanks to a projector that was kindly lent

The following day, Friday October 9, started with the Special Show for Special People. The weather was dry, but with low clouds and very windy, so much that the relative ambient temperature was very low, and forced the organizers to end it early.

This event was followed by the CAF General Assembly which honored the most senior members of our organization.

The traditional Awards ceremony for the most deserving CAF members saw several French Wing members receive one of these distinctions as per the following list:

#### SILVER MAGNOLIA BLOSSOM

Col Gaël Darquet  
Col. Marcel Francisci  
Col Aubrey Hair

#### UNIT SERVICE AWARD

Col. Jacqueline Clerc

#### INDIVIDUAL MAINTENANCE AWARD

Col Bernard Delfino  
Col Roger Gouzon  
Col Michel Perrin

#### CAF LETTER OF COMMENDATION

Cadet Eva Bancel  
Cadet Julien Lepelletier

#### NON-MEMBER LETTER OF COMMENDATION

Ms. Émilie Hochet

A big Bravo to all these hard-working members whose help and dedication allowed our Unit and the CAF to progress further towards the fundamental goals of our organization!

On the evening of this Friday took place the ACAHOF banquet attended by several of our members, and the others ended the day in one of Midland restaurants.

Saturday morning was gray and cold, but the weather forecast expected an improvement around noon, which did take place and allowed the show to start, unfortunately amputated of the trainers air display since the organizers did not want to get behind schedule.



*One of the actors of Tora! Tora! Tora!*

The bad weather that prevailed on the East side of Texas and the surrounding states stooped many aircraft from reaching Midland. That's how our **Tora! Tora! Tora!** friends did miracles with only 5 airplanes.

The rest of the show was made of the traditional fighters and bombers who gave us the very best as usual.

The new airplanes were limited to the P-51C *Tuskegee Airmen*, the B-25 *Maid in the Shade* which, unfortunately, was not presented in flight, and a few other planes which also stayed

on the ground since they should have flown in the morning, among which a very nice Me108 painted metallic blue.

The Vietnam sequence was longer than before and included a very rare airplane: The Caribou belonging to the **Cavanaugh Flight Museum**, impressive with his size and its spectacular approaches! There too, one missed a Skyraider so typical of this conflict.

Modern planes were the usual F-16, F-18, B-1B, and, for the first time a rather impressive C-17 cargo plane.



*The large Caribou of the Cavanaugh Flight Museum*



that this brevity is the materialization of the current economic crisis, but may be also other factors that we don't know anything about.

A USO show, equivalent to the French Army Theatre, had been organized inside and in front of the Commemorative Center hangar.

Curiously, the stage had been set perpendicular to the hangar when all the spectators were sitting inside it... This did not stop the show which was made of various attractions similar of those given to the troops during WWII.

The weather was nice, even though it was often obscured by high altitude clouds. This stopped any chances of sun burns, but it did not allow the temperature to go very high either.

Although the show was full, the program gave the spectators the impression that it was a lot shorter than usual, the explosions were rather scarce, and, at around 3:30 PM, we were all surprised to hear that it was all over when a formation of four T-6 flew the moving *Missing Man* formation, concluding the show...



Never before did we have such a short AIRSHO!... One can only believe

*Top: A Kate of Tora! Tora! Tora!*

*Above: The C-17 in action.*

*Below: The real Mitsubishi Zero.*



The members of the French Wing spent the rest of the afternoon either flying aboard the planes for which rides could be bought, or simply go back to the hotel and take a rest before enjoying an improvised meal in the breakfast room.

As we all feared, the Sunday was cold, gray, and wet, with fog and drizzle.

Our members did not rush unnecessarily and arrived at the airport at about 10 AM, to learn that no improvement was expected for the whole day, and that, consequently, there would not be any flight. A long and sad Sunday was ahead of us!...

Everyone compensated this lack of animation with passionate discussions with friends.

At about noon, we went to the deserted and cold chalet for lunch. Then the preferred meeting place for the French Wing members was Roy's Art Gallery where prevailed a friendly and quiet atmosphere.

At about 5 PM our members returned to their hotel to get warm and take some rest before going to the restaurant for a last meal as a group.

### HOUSTON AND GALVESTON OR DAYTON AND NEW YORK ?

The group of French Wing members split in two the following day.

Marie-Françoise, Kevin, Fumiko, and Bernard got on the road to reach Houston, with a stop-over in San Antonio. They were reunited with some nice weather and heat which were lacking in Midland, a lot more favorable for sight-seeing and visits of NASA, the Lone Star Flight Museum, and the Railroad Museum of Galveston.

The second group, composed of



*Le SB2C Helldiver, toujours unique exemplaire en état de vol au monde*

Jacqueline, Maurice, Claude, Roger, Claude, and Patrick, took off towards Dayton where they visited the US Air Force museum. Then, they drove to Newark and New York. Unfortunately, they were followed by cold and rain because Fall is not the best season for this kind of tour.

### HOUSTON AND GALVESTON

After a one day stop in San Antonio to visit the Alamo and the River Walk, and to enjoy some Imax movies, the "Group of 4" drove to Houston where they spent the three days that were left before returning home.

The complete visit of NASA took them a full day. They found many changes since their last visit, with a museum part greatly developed and very well made (*Below*).

The restaurant gave them a chance to enjoy a break, and the gift shop let them purchase the indispensable souvenirs.

The following day, they drove to Galveston and the Lone Star Flight Museum badly hit by hurricane *Ike* last year. In a year's time, the two hangars have been repaired, as well as the aircraft that were less damaged. The second





Before



During



After

hangar is now sheltering a number of seriously damaged airplanes. We were not allowed to visit it, even quickly, despite a special request. Too bad...

The visit of Galveston went on with the fine sand beach, the highly picturesque centre part of the town, and the Railroad Museum.

The museum was submerged under 9 feet of water and mud which destroyed everything. We invite you to see that on the museum's web site at the following address:

<http://www.galvestonrrmuseum.com>

There you will see a large collection of photos showing the damaged museum. And for those who could wonder what trains do in this Newsletter, they should examine closely the photo on the left and they will find an evident link with aviation!

Charmed by such an exceptional welcome, and stunned by the amount of work that still has to be accomplished, our Group of 4 could only get their hands to their pockets and make a modest donation of \$100.00 to the museum. This small gift really pleased our hosts, which we did not understand until they explained that FEMA (*Federal Emergency Management Agency*, an organization that deals with natural and human catastrophes in the USA), gives them a significant help. Thus, for every Dollar found by the museum, FEMA gives the museum \$10.00, and, in this case, our \$100.00 will become \$1000.00. A sort of very efficient and modern "*God helps those who help themselves*"!

This ended quite positively the "Group of 4" stay in Texas.

Let us now allow **Claude Gascon** tell us about his reunion with a ship aboard which he served in the French navy some 50 years ago...



Our visit was rather short but compensated by a long stop at the gift shop which is a lot better than the CAF gift shop in Midland. On the other hand, the LSFM has practically no museum, except for a few paintings displayed in the entrance hall and, of course, the airplanes of the collection.

The latter is still closed after the effects of hurricane *Ike* last year. However, we were greeted very warmly by **Morris Gould** (*Executive Director*) and **George Williamson** (*Vice-Chairman*) who, thanks to their kindness, allowed us to see and photograph the main part of the locos and cars on display.



Inanimate objects, do you have a soul, said the poet?... As far as planes and boats are concerned, which, in fact are not inanimate, I know that the answer is YES.

After we saw many magnificent airplanes in flying condition and others, just as magnificent but stuck to the ground in Dayton, I had an idea of visiting an American Destroyer, the SLATER, moored in Albany.

563 ships of this type were built by the USA from 1942, and the SLATER is the only survivor. All the others have been disarmed and scrapped. The association who maintains this survivor in a good state is somewhat similar to what the CAF does with the aircraft.



It was on a ship of this type that was in service in the French Navy that I was employed as a quarter master, 2nd class, radio operator, in 1959 in Algeria. When I suggested that I wished to be reunited with my younger years, Roger, Maurice and Claude, were pleased to come along in my pilgrimage.

So there were four of us in our powerful Chevrolet Impala to reach Albany from Newark. We headed North for about 90 minutes.

There was some bright sunshine on that day over the Albany area, and the Indian Summer greeted us with its wonderful colors either side of the



Interstate. Around noon, we were on board where I found everything, with the emotion one can imagine:

The radio station of course, with its little room for encoding messages, the various crew stations, the cafeteria where we used to project movies, a job I was responsible for, the twin 20mm guns for which I was also responsible when the “Man your stations” siren would blow. We had a guide for that visit of course,

but no one really listened to him since I had a lot more to tell than him about this ship and its armament.

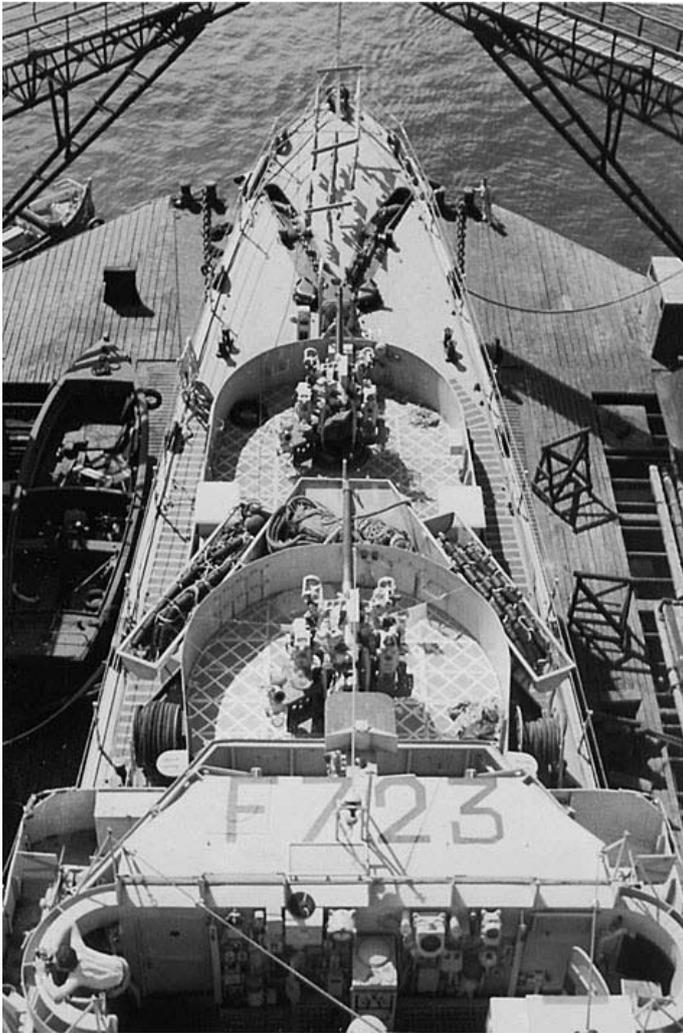
“*I remember*”. This is the lovely motto of our friends in Quebec, a motto that I like very much, and which finds his full meaning in the CAF French Wing and the SLATER association.

I remember the Berbère, the Kabyle, the Sakalave, three DE that I sailed on.

I remember the quai “La Moune” at the foot of the Santa Cruz Hill in Oran.

I remember this friend, a radio operator like me, who had a leg crushed by the explosion of a cartridge of his 20mm.



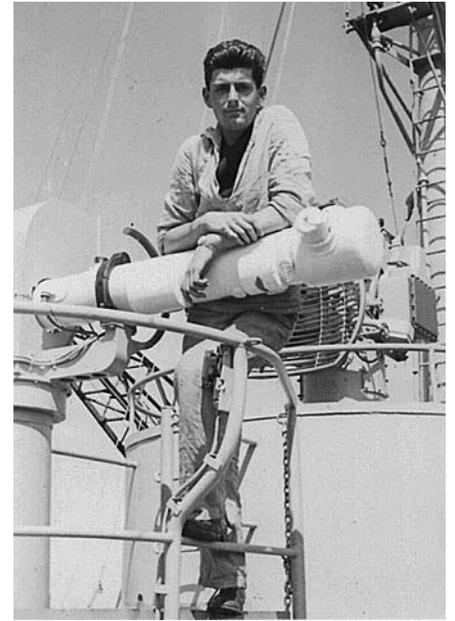


I remember Mers el Kebir and its enormous reservoirs and underground shelters accessible to submarines.

I remember the Arzew street in Oran, the Isly street in Algiers, the Cours Bertania in Bône, the Stora beach in Philippeville.

I remember this tanker broke in two by a storm some distance from Philippeville that we were asked to sing the front part of it with our 76mm guns.

I also remember swimming at a lovely little beach west of the port of Bougie, a beach that was only accessible



from the sea with an LCM Landing Barge.

Thanks to the SLATER and all its American volunteers for letting me revive all these memories, and for being able to share them with my friends of the French Wing.

Eric Rivet, responsible for association SLATER sent me the names of the American DE's.

The Berbère was called "USS Clarence L. Evans DE113", and was donated to France in 1952, and scrapped in 1960.

*So long Eric and SLATER, be sure I'll come back aboard some day...*

## FRENCH WING P.X.

The following articles are available with a payment by cheque to the CAF French Wing. (+ P & P).

- Wing patch: € 9,00.
- Norvige patch: € 6,00.
- French Wing pin: € 10,00.
- Various pins "cloisonné": € 5,00.
- 100 A4 sheets with the Wing logo and your personal address: € 10,00.
- Warbirds photographs 30x45cm: € 10,00.
- T shirt Piper CUB, 170 grammes, Hanes, L or XL: € 15,00.
- T shirt cartoon P40, 170 grammes, Hanes, L or XL: € 15,00.
- T shirts other sizes on order.
- T shirt illustrated with the picture of your choice (Maximum size A5 - Warning! Only send pictures that are free from any copyrights!): € 15,00.
- Aircraft profiles 15 cm x 20 cm ready for framing: Various types: € 4,00 each.
- Vidéo filmed in Midland (55mn) VHS PAL: € 16,00 ©.
- Eric Besançon large size paintings: F4U Corsair and Messerschmitt 262 night fighter: € 30,00 P & P included ©.
- Poster N°1 Avions de la seconde guerre mondiale peint by Jean Bellis, 61x81cm: € 9,00 (FW Members), € 10,00 (Non Members) © + P & P.
- Greeting cards with Jean Bellis' profiles: € 4,00 each (P & P according to quantity) ©.
- Roy Grinnell prints - Normandie Niemen, F4U7, and B26 Marauder - Unsigned: € 30,00 + P & P € 10,00. Signed by veterans: € 50,00 + P & P € 10,00 ©.
- Roy Grinnell print of the Piper Cub: € 10 + P & P (FW Members), € 15 + P & P (Non members).
- Post Cards based on the same paintings (B26 Marauder and Neuneu): € 0,50 each (P & P according to quantity) ©.
- CD Rom of all FW Newsletters since January 2000, French and English, and 200 photos of warbirds taken during Airsho in Midland, by B. Delfino: € 10,00 P & P included ©.

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