



Airshow



CAF French Wing

Monthly Newsletter - Bulletin Mensuel

Volume 10 - N° 8 - August 2005

EDITORIAL

An extremely high number of members sent their warm congratulations for the July issue of our Newsletter, in a way that exceeded everything we experienced in the past. I thank you all for that, but one must admit that these few sheets of paper (or kilobites, according to the way you receive this bulletin) included subjects that could not have existed without those who were the heroes of these articles, and those who helped, at various degrees, the accomplishment of these projects. Without you all, nothing would have been possible. A big THANK YOU to you all!

This August issue allows me to take advantage of the quietness of this summer holidays period that many of you are enjoying, to sort out my mail, and to publish articles that were delayed by the permanent lack of space in our bulletin. I hope you will have as much pleasure to read them that I had to write or edit them.

I wish to warmly thank col. Christian Tournemine who, discreetly, silently, does an important work in his area, and represents the CAF during events that are directly linked to the goals of the CAF and the French Wing. The story of William Kalan is a perfect example of his work. A big THANK YOU Christian!

Finally, another big THANK YOU to Chantal and Gilles Avenel who, as it was announced in the June issue of our Newsletter, offered a dream week-end in Normandy to their guests on July 2 and 3. Chantal and Gilles would have loved to have many more of us, since they could have lodged 5 or 6 more members. These 8 guests have highly appreciated the care that was given to them by their hosts, and this outstanding week-end will remain in their memory as one of the key events for 2005!

Bernard

WEEK-END IN DIEPPE FOR THE FRENCH WING



Photo: Bernard Delfino

COLONEL GILLES AVENEL AND HIS WIFE CHANTAL GAVE OUR MEMBERS AN UNFORGETTABLE WEEK-END!

LIEUTENANT WILLIAM KALAN, PILOT OF THE B-24 LIBERATOR "LUCILLE": A VETERAN HONORED IN CHAMBORD.



Photo: Christian Tournemine

LUCILLE A B-24H IN CHAMBORD

*By colonel Christian Tournemine
Assisted by col. Jacques Leroux
and mister Christian Couppe*

On June 22, 1944 took place an exceptional event, and, above all, without any victim... This is so formidable that you should like this story!

On that day, the B-24 H-15-FO serial number 42-52759, named "Lucille", of the 493rd Bomb Group, 8th Air Force, takes off from the british base of Debach, Suffolk.

William Kalan, pilot, Kenneth Klemstine, co-pilot, and seven crew members took off from the south of England, to go and bomb Etampes-Mondésir in the Paris area (Number ten crew member, the Navigator, was aboard the leading B-24 to guide the entire group, a procedure rarely used, probably dictated by the short distance they had to fly).

Towards the end of the mission, the german flak or fighters hit the aircraft badly and put three of its engines out... The pilot William Kalan kept on flying on a single engine. Imagine how difficult it was to keep a B-24 afloat in these conditions !

William was hoping to reach Spain or Switzerland, but, of course, he lost his altitude inexorably, even though the plane was lighter after he had dropped the bombs on the target a few moments earlier.



Photo: C. Tournemine



Photo: C. Couppe

Lucille's crew: Standing, from left to right, Lt. Dan Schulman (Navigator), Lt. Kenneth Klemstine (Co-pilot), Lt. William Kalan (Pilot), Lt. James Smith (Bombardier), Sgt. Frontis Evans (Mechanic), kneeling, from left to right, Sgt. Robert Sexton (Assistant mechanic), Sgt. Roy Horrigan (Radio), Sgt. Robert Shockey (Gunner), Sgt. Charles Craig (Gunner), et Sgt. Stanley Paxton (Armorer).

Below, the B-24H, s/n 42-52759 "Lucille" gets ready to take-off for a bombardment mission in Europe.

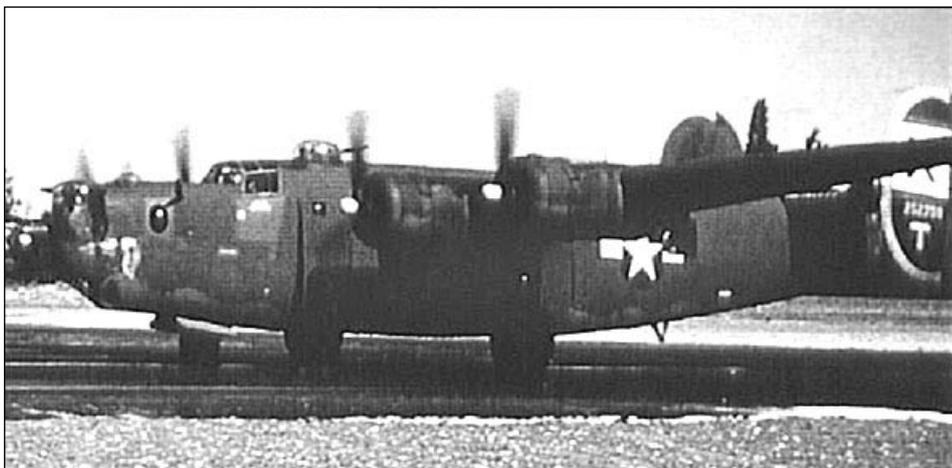


Photo: USAF

Above the countryside of Beauce, quiet and flat, he ordered the seven crew members to bail out. They did, and landed with no problem. Some time later, the plane flew over river Loire and a forest. It was time for the two pilots to evacuate the plane ! William and Kenneth, his co-pilot, jumped. William's dorsal parachute had been left at base for some maintenance...

He had time to grab the ventral one, to hook it on, jump, and pull on the handle to open the parachute.

In 1944, the art collections of the Louvre Museum were in Chambord, brought there in 1939. The authorities thought

that they would be protected from any danger in the countryside, away from war and from any air attacks...

Lieutenant Kalan had the time to see the B-24 dive towards a clear area with, in the middle, a large white building: Chambord. He thought the plane would hit it, but at the last minute, it slid on its left wing and crashed along a small river.

Landing in Chambord (Its park is surrounded by a wall which is 26 miles long!) William wandered all night before he was found by a farmer of Huisseau-sur-Cosson, André Roussay. He stayed with him for two months, participating, "mute", to the works in the fields during the day, and, at night, taking delivery of the goods dropped for the FFI Resistance of which André was a member.

Kenneth landed in Maslives, outside the wall of Chambord, at about two

miles from the crash. He was protected by Mr and Mrs André Marcilhac who were soon denounced. Mrs Marcilhac was arrested, then liberated by the Resistance a few weeks later, during an attack on the jail in Blois. Kenneth was then sheltered in Montlivault, at Mademoiselle Marie-Thérèse Petit's home, the school teacher.

At the end of August 1944, William and Kenneth were guided across the river Loire in Muides, and they joined the US troops who were progressing through the country.

William kept in touch with his host family, especially Yvonne Roussay "his French Mother" who named her youngest son, born in 1945, "William". She died in 2003, at the age of 100.

All other actors and witnesses have also passed away: André Roussay, Mr and Mrs Marcilhac, and Miss Petit. William Kalan is almost 86 today. The recent death of his wife hit him badly. He is now retired in Boston. Kenneth his co-pilot, whom he lost sight of after a few years, died on June 9, 1999, in Columbus, Ohio.

The crew members could have been protected by the Resistance Group "Comète" which hid a total of 152 aviators in the forest of Fréteval. But their destiny was different: One of them managed to escape, but the others were made prisoners and taken to a stalag (An information given by our historian col. Jacques Leroux).

In July 1994, following an initiative of the France-USA Association, and



The pilot, William Kalan, poses before the superb monument which commemorates the accident of his B-24 "Lucille".

Photo: C. Tournemine

the Resistance Museum of Blois, William Kalan came to France with his wife and other veterans, to celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the Liberation of the city of Blois.

On September 4, 2004, Mr Christian Couppé, historian of the Resistance Museum of Blois, decided to get him back for the inauguration of a superb commemorative monument, thanks to the Museum, the



Photo: C. Tournemine



Photo: C. Tournemine

board of Directors of the Chambord Dominion, and the Association France-USA of the Loir et Cher district.

Under a bright sunshine, all official authorities gathered together to honor William Kalan: The Prefect, a member of the Parliament, the Armée de l'Air,

the representative of the Embassy, the Presidents of local Associations, and a large public, as shown on the printed photographs. WWII ambiance was given by the presence of several wartime US military vehicles and people dressed in US uniform.

I will not transcribe the official speeches, but I wish to say that William, in his reply, made sure that people could feel his emotion and discretion, which further demonstrates his human value.

It's a great feeling to be able to commemorate such events, in total unison with the goals of the Commemorative Air Force and its French Wing.

Sixty years later, it is our role to honor these living heroes in memory of those who died and are present for ever in our heart. And when, "cherry on the cake", such an adventure ends with no immediate victim - not forgetting the others of course! - our joy is even greater.

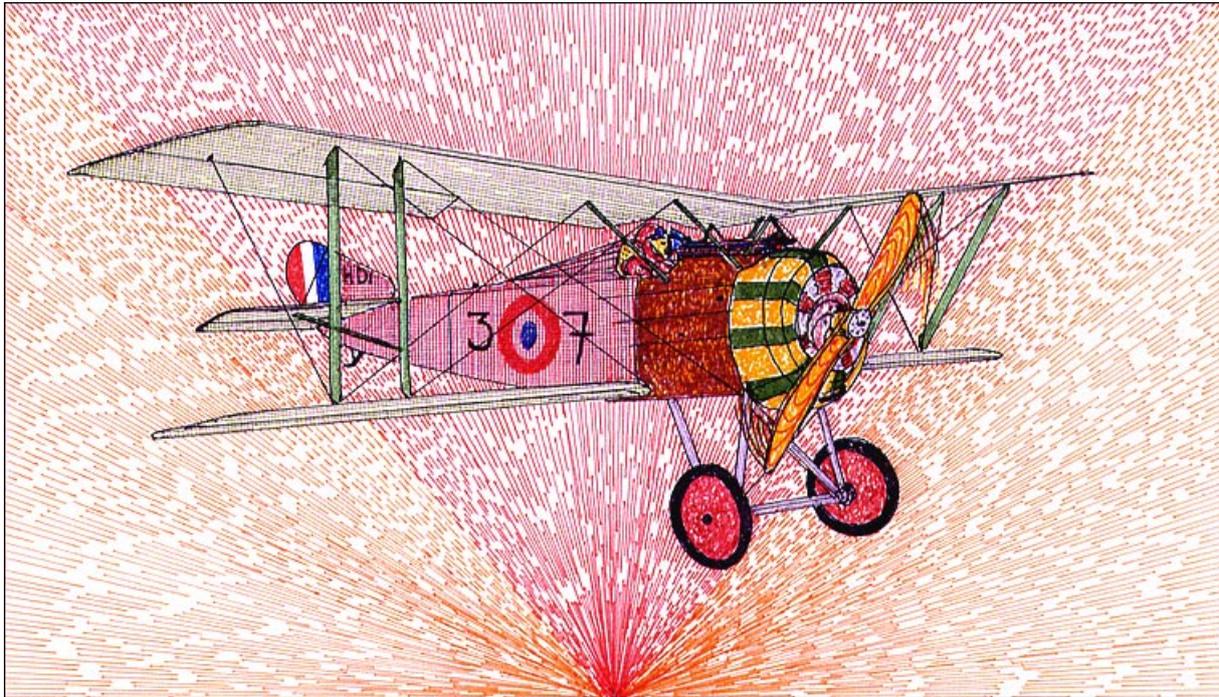
Today, the beautiful monument faces Chambord, at the exact place of the crash. It perpetuates the memory of this event, and draws the respect of the public visiting the park and the castle.

Should our friends in Midland be able to keep in touch with William Kalan (Mister Christian Couppé continues to do so), and find the other crew members, it would be an immense satisfaction for the French Wing, I believe.

To be continued, let's not forget, of course, deep in our hearts...



Article and painting by col. Louis-Jean Gioux



The prestige of the Nieuport and the Spad eclipsed the excellent qualities of the Hanriot HD1. This light fighter, very manoeuvrable, built in 1917 by the Société Anonyme des Appareils d'Aviation Hanriot, did not get the agreement of the french military aviation, but it became famous with other allied air forces. It was used extensively on the various italian and belgian front lines.



The aircraft was designed by engineer Pierre Dupont in 1916. Biplane, single-seater, powered by a rotating Le Rhône engine delivering 110 HP which gave it a speed of 183 km/h (98 mph), fitted with a Vickers machine-gun shooting through the propeller, it revealed itself as having a great manoeuvrability and excellent aerodynamic characteristics.

The plane had a wing span of 8,68 m (28,5 ft), a length of 5,85 m (19,2 ft), and a height of 2,55 m (8,4 ft). Its take-off

weight was 605 kg (1332 lb), its service ceiling was 6200 metres (20600 ft), and its range was 2 hours 30 minutes. Re-fused by the french authorities to serve in its operational units, it was accepted by the Navy which used it mainly fitted with floats (HD2).

It was accepted by the italian aviation which started by manufacturing under licence a first batch of 100 aircraft in the Macchi company plant. They started to be operational during the summer of 1917 and quickly proved their efficiency.

The Hanriot HD1, very agile despite its slow speed, when compared to the german fighter Albatros, was very sturdy and very reliable. It demonstrated its su-

periority during many air combats like, for example, on December 26, 1917, in the battle of Istrane, when the Hanriot's shot down 11 german observation air-planes without a single loss.



The Macchi company produced a total of 831 aircraft of the Hanriot HD1 type, which were flown by 16 squadrons, in 18 years of operation. These aircraft allowed some particularly valiant pilot to become Aces, like Scaroni who totalled 26 kills, or Baracchini with 21 enemy planes shot down.



Belgium was so satisfied by this airplane that it was kept in service until 1926!

It allowed belgian pilot Willy Coppens from Houthulet to become an Ace with 37 victories.

WEEKEND IN DIEPPE

Article and photos by Bernard Delfino

When colonel Gilles Avenel invited our members to spend an aeronautical week-end in Dieppe and its area, none of the candidates could imagine how much pleasure they would get from it!

Organized with the purpose of making our plane and our members fly, while enjoying the visit of this beautiful area, this stay did not, however, start in the best conditions. Two attempts to take-off with the Spirit of Lewis, on Friday afternoon and Saturday morning, were a total failure because of the very cloudy weather that prevailed on the Normandy coast. Since Gilles was there, the information he gave us was, alas, genuine. He suggested that we should put the Piper Cub back in its hangar, drive to Normandy, and he generously offered to put his own Jurca airplane at the service of the French Wing as a replacement for our Piper Cub. Therefore, we got on the road and joined Gilles and Chantal.

Finding the Normandy residence of the Avenel family is no small job for someone who is not familiar with the area or does not have a detailed map. Gilles had expected this difficulty and had sent us detailed and very efficient instructions.

At one P.M. all participants had reached their target and were warmly welcomed by Gilles and Chantal: Didier Cardinal, Bernard and Fumiko Delfino,



Philippe Duflot and his wife Danièle, Claude Gascon and his wife Annette, and Roger Gouzon.

As soon as we arrived we went from surprise to surprise.

The dimension of the Avenel family's home was the very first one: Of a more than respectable size, this majestic building, surrounded by an immense lands-

cape, has a history of its own that started several centuries ago, and a charm that was immediately felt by all participants.



After they took us to our respective rooms, Gilles and Chantal invited us to have lunch, a suggestion which was very welcome after a three hours road trip.

The tenacious morning clouds that had stopped our aircraft from reaching Dieppe had disappeared, so Gilles offered to start the sightseeing and historical part of our stay: The visit of the 1942 allied landing in Dieppe and its area.

As a true professional, Gilles had prepared for each one of us a leaflet that

Top, the impressive Normandy home of the Avenel family, Center, Gilles and his amazing Jurca. Left, one of the 1942 allied landing beaches. In the center of the picture is a Memorial dedicated to the Canadian troops that participated in this murderous operation.

described the story of the landing by troops which were essentially canadian, on this Normandy shore.

This operation was doomed from the beginning because of its small size and the accessibility of the chosen sites. It cost many human lives which, howe-

his plane can do all aerobatics, which I accepted with some apprehension... Gilles made sure that he did a barrel roll in order to always keep a posi-



ver, were not totally wasted since the acquired experience was of a capital importance for the success of the landing that took place two years later in Arromanches.

Unknown to the great majority of the public, this operation has a fascinating story that would be too long to print in these pages. We invite all our members who may happen to drive through this beautiful area to stop and visit each site to learn about their secrets. Several hundreds of young canadian soldiers lost their life during this landing, and the visit of a canadian cemetery allowed us to honor them and thank them for their sacrifice.

The day carried on with a visit to the airfield of Dieppe. Gilles suggested that we should take advantage of the nice weather to do at least one flight with the Jurca, especially since the sun was setting down and the light was so good that it would allow us to take a few pictures, of which two are printed here.

After a very nice photo flight, I asked Gilles to fly over the canadian cemetery that we had visited a few moments before, then we reached the airfield of Dieppe. Rather than land directly, he suggested that we should do a roll, since



tive acceleration, and I must admit that this manoeuvre was very pleasant. A high speed pass over the field followed, and a left break put us in a perfect approach

and landing position. I must admit that I was pleasantly surprized by Gilles' Jurca,

which, paradoxically, has impressed me a lot more than the T-6 or the Pilatus P-3 with which I did similar flights before.

Time was flying away fast and we had to go back to Gilles' home, since an excellent dinner was waiting for us in a reknown local restaurant.

The following day started with a breakfast which was typical of summer holi-



Top to bottom, the beautiful canadian cemetery, preparing the barbecue with Philippe Duflot and Chantal and Gilles Avenel, in the hall of the Dieppe aeroclub where Claude and Annette Gascon, Danièle Duflot, Fumiko Delfino, Roger Gouzon, and Didier Cardinal get some rest, and finally, the city of Dieppe seen from Gilles' Jurca.

days, followed by a few flights aboard the Jurca by several of the participants. A very nice barbecue came at the right time. It was followed by a few more flights, and, far too soon, we had to leave and drive back home. We warmly thanked Gilles and Chantal for this wonderful week-end and the friendship that had turned our stay into a dream!

BACK FROM THE FRONT.....

FROM THE BOARD OF ADMINISTRATION

The Board of Administration will hold its next meeting on August 17, at Bernard and Fumiko's home, in Aulnay sous Bois.

The results of our recent and intense activities since May will be the main subjects of this monthly meeting. Other current items were examined on a day to day basis, like:

- **Spirit of Lewis:** Our airplane will be moved to the airfield of Plessis-Belleville where a brand new hangar will soon be ready to welcome the *Spirit of Lewis* for a reasonable monthly rent. In principle, this move will take place on October 01, 2005. This change represents numerous improvements: Easier and quicker access for most of us, lower costs of our trips to the hangar, and a concrete floor causing less dust and making aircraft movements a lot easier. Leaving Persan-Beaumont will not make us happy though, since the team that welcomed us three years ago in its hangar has always been very sympathetic and helpful.

- **Van of the French Wing:** This vehicle just got two new front tyres, and the adjustment of the parallelism has corrected the bad tendency it had to pull to one side. Thanks to Bernard and Fumiko who paid for these operations and donated the amount of this reimbursement to the hangar project.

- **Annual dues 2005:** Those who haven't paid their dues do not receive the Newsletter since last month. This decision was a sad one to take, you can believe it, but these members must understand that this bulletin has a cost, and that to keep sending them this Newsletter would create an unacceptable lack of justice for those who did pay their participation in due time. Should these members want to receive our Newsletter again, they only need to pay their annual dues.

- **Airshow in Marville,** on September 02, 03, and 04: Located about 40 km North-East of Verdun, this former NATO base will host the airshow that will celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the arrival of the Royal Canadian Air Force on this airfield.

The Armée de l'Air who is organizing this important event, will welcome us at no cost, with our booth and our Piper Cub which will be presented to the public in the static area and in flight during the air display. Many Warbirds will be there, as well as a contingent of about 150 canadian veterans who have been invited.

The static display will be open to the public Friday afternoon and Saturday morning. The air display will take place on Saturday afternoon. The Sunday will be reserved for the veterans but we hope to be able to use the base for local sight-seeing flights because the area is simply beautiful.

Towards the end of the afternoon, our airplane will fly back to Persan, and our van containing the PX will go back to Aulnay sous Bois.

Should you wish to participate in this event, please contact col. Claude Gascon as soon as possible at 03 29 86 71 00 (email: gascon.claude@neuf.fr), so that he can deal with your hotel booking and spotter badge.



- **Project of a hangar:** We received more gifts for this hangar acquisition project. A big THANK YOU to these generous donors!

We have to continue on this path which is the only logic one if we want, like all other CAF Units, develop and extend our Wing.

FROM THE FINANCE OFFICER PHILIPPE DUFLLOT

MEMBERS UP TO DATE WITH THEIR FRENCH WING ANNUAL DUES YEAR 2005/2006

Gilles Avenel, Bob Ayars, Lilian Ayars, Paul Barland, Christophe Bastide, Bunty Bateman, Frédéric Baudin, Guy Bortolus, Damien Bourgaux, Henri Bourrassier, Bertrand Boussert, Claude Cardinal, Didier Cardinal, Ernest Cartigny, Jean Chatel, William Davies, Jean-Christophe Debuissou, Dominique Deudon, Bernard Delfino, Fumiko Delfino, Claude De Marco, Jacques Delorme, Yves Donjon, Stéphane Duchemin, Philippe Duflot, Eric Ducreau, Patrick Ferré, John Francis, Marcel Francisci, Christian Frézard, Guillaume Frézard, Claude Gascon, Louis-Jean Gioux, Lucien Goubard, Roger Gouzon, Patrick Gremez, Roy Grinnell, Irène Grinnell, Aubrey Hair, Barbara Hair, Yves Houssin, Rick Hudlow, Louise Hudlow, Alain Jimenez, William Katsones, David Kelly, Marcel Ledoux, Julien Lepelletier, Jacques Leroux, George Lodge, Jim Lux, Cédric Malhaire, Georges Marcelin, Jean-Claude Miniggio, Guy Perrin, Michel Perrin, Jean-Claude Petit, Betty Piland, Patrick Pierre-Pierre, Frédéric Pollicella, David Price, Hervé Quefféléant, Claude Requi, Guy Robert, John P. Roeder, Marcel Ruppert, Sandy Sansing, Serge Séguret, Semaan Soueid, Fraye Stokes, Haruo Tanaka, Alphonse Thiry, Christian Tournemine, Gilles Troussart, Roger Vaucamp, Jean-Jacques Vaucher, Bernard Violette, Orhan Wichman, Stella Wilkes.

We warmly thank all these members who allow our Unit to continue the accomplishment of the goals and objectives that have been adopted.

FRENCH WING
GENERAL ASSEMBLY
Saturday 19 November 2005
at 14 : 30 sharp
TREMBLAY EN FRANCE

FRENCH WING ANNUAL GENERAL ASSEMBLY

19 NOVEMBER 2005 AT 14:30

On November 19 will take place our annual general assembly, in Hotel ACADIE in Tremblay en France, at 14:30 sharp. (Any change in this place, according to the availability of the hotel meeting rooms will be announced in these pages).

It will include the election of the **President** of our Association. Any eligible member wishing to be elected at this position will need to send his application, in writing, no later than **04 November 2005**. Are eligible all CAF **colonels** who have paid their CAF and French Wing annual dues, and fulfil the following conditions extracted from our Internal Rules:

"The minimum conditions required include at least one (1) year seniority as a Regular Member of the Commemorative Air Force Inc. and the French Wing, an ability to manage the Association affairs, a perfect knowledge of the Constitution and the rules of the Commemorative Air Force Inc. and the law of the land, a good appearance, be able to talk in public, a perfect morality, a good knowledge of the English language, and, if possible, have an aeronautical background".

AIRSHO 2005 ANNUAL DINNER OF OUR UNIT IN MIDLAND 29 SEPTEMBER 2005 AT 19:30

As usual, the French Wing, assisted by colonel Jim Adams and his spouse Terry, will organize the traditional dinner of our Unit in the "Taste of China" restaurant on Thursday 29 September from 19:30 onwards.

We ask all our members who haven't advised us of their intention to participate to this dinner, to write to col. Jim Adams (email: SlatsJacobs@aol.com) and to our Leader (email: bdelfino26@aol.com - Telephone: 01 48 69 04 57).

We need this information as soon as possible in order to organize this event with the restaurant. Thank you all in advance.

THE MORANE-SAULNIER 760 "PARIS" PRINTS ARE AVAILABLE

The French Wing has 25 lithographs of the painting that Roy Grinnell did for the Naval Base of Dugny-Le Bourget, all signed by the artist and several former Base Commanders.

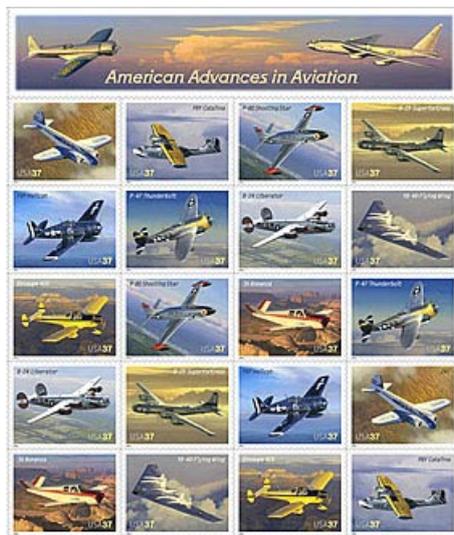


We also have ten leaflets retracing the history of this base of Dugny, designed by Commander Alain Quentric who just retired from the Navy, and published by the ARDHAN Association. The first ten orders of this lithograph will come with one sample of this leaflet.

These prints are available from the French Wing at a price of 20,00 Euros + 10 Euros P&P.

NEW EDITION OF POSTAGE STAMPS PICTURING US AVIATION

The US postal services have put on the market a new series of 10 stamps concerning the following aircraft: Boeing 247, PBX Catalina, B-29 Superfortress, P-80 Shooting Star, B-24 Liberator, F8-F Hellcat, P-47 Thunderbolt, Beechcraft Bonanza, Northrop Flying Wing, and Ercoupe.



Should some of our members who collect stamps be interested, we can bring back the number of sheets they want.

Each sheet has two stamps of each type. Considering that each stamp value is \$0.37, the cost per sheet will be \$7,40 + the change rate and commission which are still unknown, which should result in a cost per sheet around \$10.00.

OSHKOSH 2005 A GREAT SUCCESS

Col. Aubrey Hair has just come back from the airshow in Oshkosh, and has sent us a few pictures taken during this great event.



He notably met the members of the french raid who went to Oshkosh by air with several planes, among which two Dassault 315 Flamant.



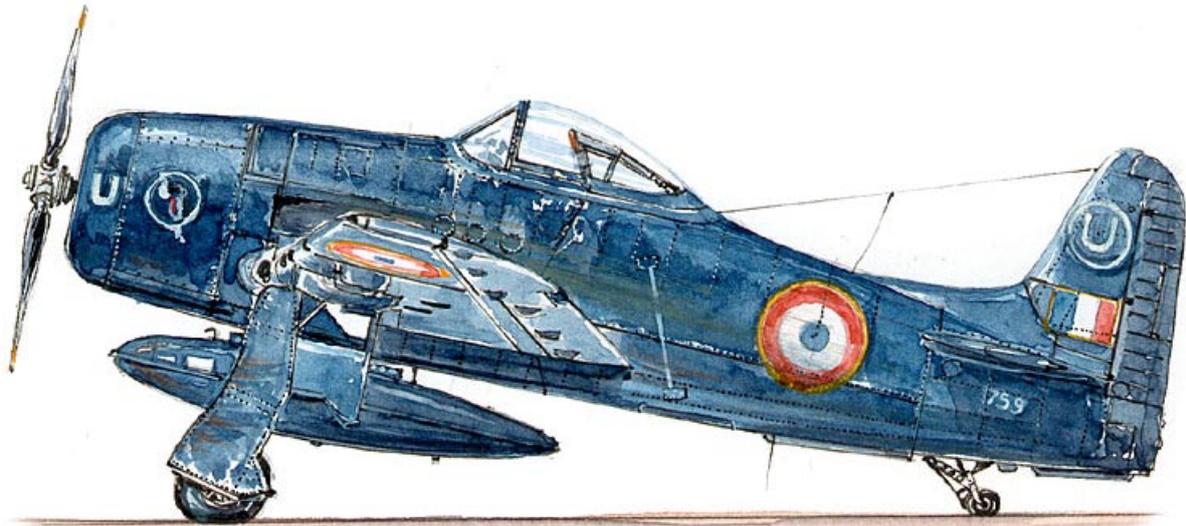
Another great star of this event was the Lockheed P-38 Lightning "Glacier Girl" which was extracted from the ice, a few years ago, and was restored to flying conditions. Here is an airplane that every one of us would love to see in Midland during AIRSHO.





GRUMMAN F-8F BEARCAT

By Colonels John P. Roeder and Michel Perrin - Painting by Jean Bellist



The Bearcat was the last in a line of Grumman shipboard fighters which had started in 1936 with the G-36 (alias Wildcat).

Development of the G-58 as the new aircraft was designated by the manufacturer was launched in 1943. It became the last piston engine fighter designed in the US.

The objective was to create a high performance machine around the powerful Pratt & Whitney R-2800 Double Wasp as a replacement for the Hellcat, capable of operating from the smallest carriers primarily in an interceptor role. The accent was laid on low altitude performance, high climb rate and manoeuvrability, while range was considered of lesser importance.

The result was a machine smaller than the Wildcat that achieved an initial climb rate of 4,570 ft/min (23.2 m/s) compared to 2,980 ft/min (15.1 m/s) for the Hellcat.

From the above it is clear that this fighter was particularly suited to intercept kamikaze attacks which would have to be expected sooner or later.

The first of two prototypes which were ordered as XF8F-1s by the Navy in

November 1943 flew in August 1944. Its striking features were an enormous four-bladed propeller, a long legged landing gear and a full "bubble canopy", the latter being a first for fighters designed for the US Navy.

Prototype testing revealed only minor design deficiencies requiring few changes and the first of 2,032 production F8F-1s could be delivered in February 1945.



Photo: Pierre Lebrun

The F8F-1 differed from the prototype in having a small dorsal fin, a 23 % increase in fuel capacity and improved armor production.

Armament consisted of four .50 cal guns in the wing. Racks underneath the wing could serve to carry two 1,000 lb (467 kg) bombs or drop tanks. The aircraft was powered by a 2,100 hp P&W R-2800-34 W, which could be boosted to 2,400 hp with water injection.

Navy squadrons began to re-equip with the Bearcat in May 1945, which was too late for the new fighter to see combat service in WWII. After V-J Day the F8F-1 contracts were cut to 770 aircraft. Subsequently however the company received an order for an additional 100 F8F-1 Bs with four 20 mm cannon and 26 F8F-1Ns, equipped as night fighters with a radar pod under the right hand wing.

In 1948 Grumman also produced the F8F-2 powered by the 2,250 hp R-2800-30W with a sophisticated engine control system providing automatically variable boost from the super charger. To counteract the increased torque of the new engine and improve directional stability with external loads, the vertical tail surface was raised by 12 in (0.30 m). 293 F4F-2s plus 12 F8F-2 night fighters and 60 F8F-2P photo reconnaissance planes with three fuselage mounted cameras, but only two guns, were built until production ceased definitely in May 1949. Only months later the Navy declared the Bearcat as surplus and began to withdraw its F8F-1s from front-line units. The last of the F8F-2s were phased out in 1955 and put into storage.

The Bearcat was an aircraft with exceptional performance below 25,000 ft



Photo: Pierre Lebrun

(6,700 m) and a unique ability of rapid acceleration. For a period it held the world record for the fastest climb to 10,000 ft (3,048 m). Above 25,000 ft (7,600 m) performance dropped markedly. This was due to the fact that the aircraft had not been designed for high altitude work and supercharging of the engine had been kept at a low level.

The emergence of the jets in the early 50s made piston engined fighters rapidly obsolete, which was also the case for the Corsair. While the latter saw however intensive combat service in Korea, the Bearcat – except for a few F8F-2P photoplanes – did not. The reason could be that the Task Force 77 carriers in place in Korean waters were equipped with Corsairs, and introducing an additional piston engined type would have caused operational and logistic complications without offering any tangible advantaged. Also the Corsair was still in production in 1952.

The Bearcat was however to get its chance to fight. It was not for the US Navy but for the French Air Force. When in 1950 the US decided to support France in its war against the



Photo: Grumman

Communist Viet-minh in Indo-China, the Bearcat although not yet proven in combat, appeared to the Armée de l'Air as an ideal replacement for its war weary Kingcobras and Hellcats.

The Bearcats were also little used aircraft with a good remaining operational life potential. In addition there existed no direct constraints on behalf of the

US for supplying the type in the early 50s, as it was not needed in Korea.

A first batch of 44 F8F-1s arrived at Saigon in February 1951 followed by a second one of 46 aircraft in March.

GC.I/9 Limousin and GC.III/6

Roussillon were to receive the new type respectively in March and April 1951. Transition from the very different Kingcobra and the docile Hellcat proved however delicate.

The Bearcat required skillful handling and since pilot manuals in French were not available, familiarization with the new type became very much an experimental exercise. Due to frequent taxiing and landing accidents the Bearcat was soon in bad reputation with the pilots, but due to the pressures of war it had to be rushed into combat quickly.

By early spring Bearcats took part in operations in Tonkin and Central Annam. In June GC.I/6 Corse began transitioning from F6Fs to F8Fs at Saigon. After 149 missions it was relieved by I/22 Saintonge, which was almost exclusively operating over the Tonkin.

II/21Auvergne which had been formed in early May at Saigon remained in Cochinchina, fighting against Viet-Minh infiltration in the Mekong delta area. In February of 1952 GC.III/6 Roussillon after having flown 7,700 missions in the Tonkin sector was relieved by II/22 Languedoc. The last fighter group to be equipped with F8F-1s was GC.I/21 Artois which was based in Central Annam from June 1952.

By then the Bearcat in spite of requiring careful handling had been more and more in favor with the pilots. Its capability to rapidly accelerate, its outstanding manoeuvrability and its good short field performance were highly appreciated. In combination with a powerful arma-

ment these made the fighter in fact a very effective ground attack weapon whenever the penetration radius did not exceed say 200 mls (320 km).

Another unit which operated Bearcats was photo reconnaissance squadron EROM 80, which had received 12 F8F-1Bs in 1951. The number of aircraft available for operations however never exceeded six. The unit suffered from an ongoing shortage of qualified pilots and base maintenance appears to have been poor. In spite of the difficult conditions in which the squadron had to operate 1,400 sorties were flown in 1952 with more than 40,000 photos taken.

The maintenance problems that the Armée de l'Air was faced with in Indo-China in fact affected all types. Due to high utilization increasing numbers of airplanes spent their time in maintenance, repair and overhaul. In the central repair station at Biên Hoa 225



Photo: SHAA

aircraft piled up in 1951. The facility was always seriously understaffed, its infrastructure was insufficient, its spare part depots undersupplied and maintenance manuals in French were missing. In the case of the Bearcat this resulted that of the 90 aircraft received in early 1951 only 34 were available for operations later in the year.

The USAF helped by overhauling aircraft in its facilities at Manila and in Japan. Under the pressures of the Korean war however the French aircraft did not always get the required attention and upon returning they often needed further servicing by the Armée de l'Air.

Maintenance improved however in 1952 and from July an additional 30 Bearcats were supplied by the US. Finally at the end of 1952 each of the four operational fighter groups (I/21, I/22, II/21, II/22) had 16 active Bearcats plus 4 reserve aircraft on strength.

To compensate for losses and write-offs another 60 Bearcats were scheduled for delivery from July 1953, but by 1954 in total 209 seem to have been supplied. More appear to have followed, increasing the total to possibly 237, of which a number may well have been put in storage after reception in the first half of 1954.

From 1951 to 1954 the Armée de l'Air lost 130 Bearcats of which 84 were destroyed and 46 for whatever reason declared unfit for service after incidents. This translates into a loss rate of more than 62 %, the highest suffered by any type used by the French in Indo-China.

This certainly had to do with the very high utilization that was made of the aircraft, its long combat career which ended on 1 August 1954 and its delicate handling characteristics.

Since mid 1951 the Bearcat was omnipresent wherever the hardest fighting took place, providing close air support to ground troops, but also when it came to attack hidden targets, enemy troop concentrations and supply columns.

Among the operational highlights of the Bearcats combat career four examples have been selected as being of particular interest.

After Việt-minh forces had invaded Laos in early 1953, together with Invaders and Hellcats a Bearcat detachment deployed to Seno contributed substantially in defeating the enemy, which resulted in his withdrawal toward the Tonkin border. In another round of fighting in Laos in late 1953/early 1954 the Việt-minh reached the border of Thailand in central Laos capturing the town of Thakhiet, barely 45 mls (70 km) north of Seno. Up to 15 Bearcats and 6 Invaders again deployed to Seno supported a French counter attack, by which the Việt-minh offensive could be successfully contained.

Six months before, in July 1953 some 50 Bearcats together with 10 Invaders had cleared the drop zones for two French paratroop battalions to be parachuted at Lan Son, a major transshipments point for supplies delivered by the Chinese to the Việt-minh. Most if not all of the depots could be destroyed by the ground force.

On 20 November 1953 some 3,000 French paratroops jumped into the Diên

Biên Phủ basin with the objective to recapture the area and make it an offensive base. With the support of Invaders and Bearcats the region could rapidly be cleared of the Việt-minh forces, but the Bearcats flying from airfields in the Red River delta had to use drop tanks to reach the area. This prevented them from carrying underwing ordnance which significantly reduced their effectiveness.

This changed after the Diên Biên Phủ airstrip had been repaired in early December. From then, 10 to 12 Bearcats of GC.I/22 were permanently based there. From there they could operate very effectively, but losses due to Việt-minh flak, which became increasingly dangerous, were heavy.

By late December the Việt-minh had encircled Diên Biên Phủ in force and it was not long before their artillery shelled French positions from the hills dominating the valley with the airstrip being an important target.

On 13 March the Việt-minh launched their attack against the Diên Biên Phủ perimeter which made the airfield untenable as an advanced base. On 14 March the three remaining aircraft of the detachment were ordered back to their home base in the Delta. French aircraft continued to attack massively the Việt-minh running against the perimeter, but 75 % of the missions were flown by Invaders and Aéronavale aircraft because of their better operational radius.

Diên Biên Phủ finally fell to the Viets on 7 May 1954, which marked the defeat of the French in Indo-China. Relatively few missions were flown between then and the signing of the Geneva Accords on 21 July, which was followed by an armistice on 1 August 1954. Worthy of mentions is in particular the participation of Bearcats in the massive bombings of Phat Diem on the Tonkin coast in late June to enable an orderly withdrawal of French troops in the face of the Việt-minh in the delta.

The Geneva treaty gave the French two years to evacuate the northern



Photo: B. Delfino

region of Indo-China, which became communist ruled North Vietnam, while the Southern part became the Republic of Vietnam, sympathizing with the US.

During the two year transition period the French gradually diminished their military presence in their former colony. The four Bearcat groups were disbanded between April 1955 and March 1956 and the last flight of a French Bearcat was made in early July. Most of the surviving aircraft were handed over to South Vietnam, some to Thailand and 19 appear to have been restituted to the US.

DATA TABLE F8F-1 BEARCAT

Description	Single-seat interceptor and fighter-bomber.
Propulsion	One 2100 HP P&W R2800-34W
Wing span	10,9 m (35 ft 10 in.)
Gross Weight	5873 kg (12947 lb)
Maximum speed	677 km/h (421 mph)
Cruise speed	262 km/h (163 mph)
Range	1778 km (1105 mls) 3162 km (1965 mls) with drop tanks)
Service ceiling	11796 m (38700 ft)
Armament	4 x 12,7 mm (.50 cal) guns, 2 x 454 kg (1000 lb) bombs, or 4 x 125 mm (5 in) rockets.

The FW P.X.

The following articles are available against a payment by cheque to the **CAF French Wing**. (Note: **Postage is extra** unless stated otherwise).

- Official Wing patch: € 9,20.
- "Gioux" type patch: € 6,10.
- Pins epoxy, various: € 5,50.
- Pins cloisonné, various: € 7.60.
- Painting "Lloyd's Dream" 50x76cm: € 40,00.
- Painting "Lloyd's Dream" 50x76cm. framed: € 55,00.
- 100 sheets of paper with your letter head: € 8,00.
- Color Photos (B17, B25, etc...) 30x45cm: € 9,00.
- T shirt Piper CUB, 170 grams, L or XL € 16,00.
- T shirt cartoon P40, 170 grams, L or XL: € 16,00.
- T shirts: Other sizes available on order.
- T shirts illustrated with the picture of your choice (Maximum size A5): Send in your picture and we will make the Tshirt of your dreams (Warning! Only send pictures that are totally free from any copyrights): € 12,00.
- Color aircraft profiles 15 x 20 cm. pre-framed: *Various*: € 4,00 each.
- Warbird cards by painter Jean Bellis: € 4,00 each.
- Video cassette of sequences filmed in Midland (55mm) VHS PAL: € 16,00 ©
- Large format paintings by Col. Eric Besançon: F4U Corsair and Messerschmitt 262 night fighter: € 31,00 ©
- Poster N°1 of WWII airplanes and N°2 of post-war era, painted by artist Jean Bellis, 61x81cm: € 9,00 (Members) € 10,00 (Non Members) ©
- Prints of the Roy Grinnell paintings - Normandie Niemen, Corsair F4U7, and B26 Marauder - Unsigned: € 40,00 + P&P € 10,00. Signed by veterans: € 60,00 + P&P € 10,00. ©
- Post Cards based on the same paintings (B26 Marauder, Corsair, and Neuneu): € 0,50 each ©
- CD Rom of 36 FSS Newsletters since January 2000, French and English, compatible PC and Macintosh, <.pdf> format readable with Adobe Acrobat Reader: € 10,00 P & P inclusive ©
- CD Rom of 200 warbird photos taken during Airsho in Midland, by B. Delfino: € 10,00 P & P inclusive ©.

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Unit Leader: Col. Bernard DELFINO
Tel: 0148690457 - email: bdelfino26@aol.com
Executive Officer: Col. Eric DUCREAU
tél: 0148616735 - email: edducreau@aol.com
Finance Officer: Col. Philippe DUFLOT
Tel: 0134078634 - email: skyrunner@wanadoo.fr
Adjutant: Col. Didier CARDINAL
Tel: 0148616735 - email: edducreau@aol.com

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HANGAR

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GIFTS TO THE HANGAR ACQUISITION PROJECT

We sincerely thank the following members and friends for their generosity and the help they gave to this hangar acquisition project during the past month:

Frédéric Baudin, William Davies, Bernard et Fumiko Delfino, Mr. et Mme. Gillion, Mr. et Mme. Villefroy, et Mme. Catherine Hingant.

Thank you all for your kindness and generosity!

THE SPIRIT OF LEWIS IS MOVING

The agreement we have made with mister Philippe Nonat, owner of a new hangar which is built on the airfield of Le Plessis-Belleville will allow those who look after our airplane to reduce their traveling costs by an average of 30%.

Le Plessis-Belleville is not only closer to Paris than Persan, but the Soissons motorway is rarely subject to traffic jams, and very fast.

This improvement may not seem important to our members who do not directly deal with the *Spirit of Lewis*, but they only need to know that already, thousands of miles have been driven by our mechanics, pilots, and friends, to understand the benefits of this change.

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	22000
	20000
	18000
	16000
	14000
	12000
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	6000
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William DAVIES	10,00
Catherine HINGANT	10,00
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Roger GOUZON	8,25
Aubrey & Barbara HAIR	75,00
Georges MARCELIN	125,00
Bunty BATEMAN	113,16
SKY RUNNER	615,00
Michel DUFLOT	150,00
Événements French Wing	1488,50
DIFFUSION SERVICE	150,00
Intérêts Bancaires Annuels	246,72
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