

Fantasy of Flight by Joe A. Crabill

On 10 October 2013, members of the 485th Bomb Group Association boarded a bus for Polk City, Florida to visit The Fantasy of Flight. It seemed to me that The Fantasy of Flight was a pretty bold title to live up to; but as it turned out, they did that and more. This facility is a privately owned collection which houses in excess of one hundred aircraft. Many of these aircraft are on static display. There are also a great many that are operational and airworthy. For Fantasy of Flight founder, Kermit Weeks, the opening of this aviation-themed attraction has been a natural extension of a lifelong, unbounded passion for aviation and aircraft. Upon arrival, we entered the Fantasy of Flight immersion experience display. As you make your way through a B-17 Flying Fortress, you hear sounds that were recorded inside a genuine flying B-17.

Mr. Weeks employs a sizeable team of diverse technicians who possess many talents. These talents consist of, but are not limited to, entertainment upon your arrival, admin personnel, and technicians who are responsible for logistical support. The majority of the aircraft acquired are done so by working under the premise that, at some time, they could be restored to an airworthy condition. This is Mr. Weeks' intent for the 1944 Consolidated B-24J Liberator which our veteran crew members were allowed to view up close. Also in the mix are some technicians and mechanics who would have to be very talented given the diversity of

the collection. The airframe and power plant technicians must be extremely knowledgeable in the specifications and design of various aircraft produced by numerous manufacturers, both foreign and domestic. As another example of this diversity of craft, the pilot that gave us a flight demonstration with the 1937 Fieseler Fi-156 Storch (Stork) is also an instrumental contributor in the wood shop which fabricates and repairs early flight and WWI aircraft.



The flight demonstration of the 1937 Fieseler Fi-156 Storch had many of us in awe of the capabilities of this aircraft. Being a STOL (short takeoff and landing) aircraft, the pilot rotated in five seconds. The pilot told us that with the Stork's wing configuration a 20 mph head wind would allow the aircraft to remain aloft and stationary.

As we proceeded through the hangars, we were able to view this very diverse collection at a close range. This collection spans the years from early flight through WWI, the Golden Age of the 1920's and 1930's, WWII, Korean War and

Post WWII. Many of our crew members have experience in one or more of the aircraft on exhibit. One of these crew members is Bueford Cooper. My father and Bueford flew ten sorties and 12 missions in the Consolidated B-24J Liberator. As we approached the Martin B-26 Marauder, Bueford told me that he had not been next to a B-26 since he flew them in Texas prior to being assigned to a B-24 crew. Both the B-25 Mitchell and the B-26 Marauder are operational. Mr. Weeks flew the B-25 Mitchell to a reunion celebration of Doolittle's Raiders a few years back.

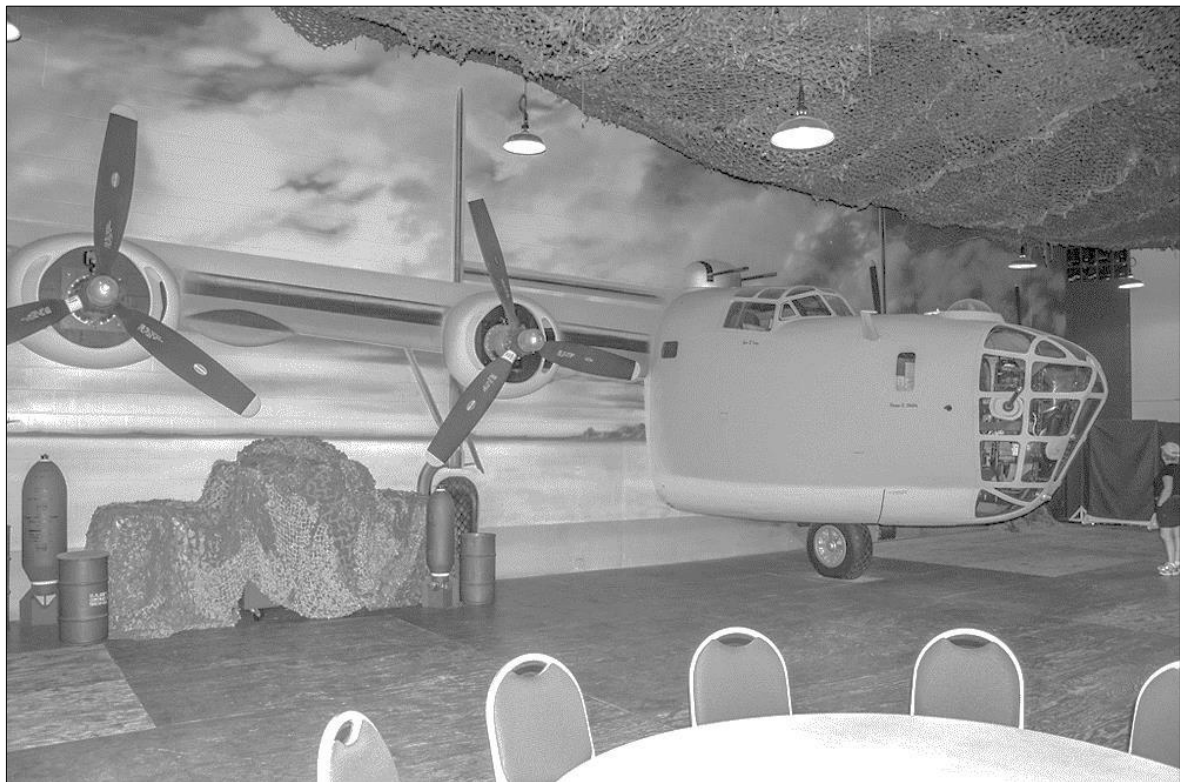
It is not possible to comment on every aircraft in the collection. I would like to add Mr. Weeks and his team's attention to detail and their demand for excellence can be seen in the 1944 North American P-51C Mustang. It is my hope that we may return to The Fantasy of Flight when the

Consolidated B-24J Liberator is restored.

As I observed the faces of our group during our visit, I don't think I'm alone in saying that we had an extraordinary visit to this wonderful facility. This is a one of a kind collection and I would like to thank Mr. Weeks and his team for their hospitality. I would also like to thank those responsible for organizing this tour. Also thanks to Jerry Whiting and Mark Leslie for getting us into the B-24 hangar.



Bob Hanson, George Chaplin, Bueford Cooper, Alex Gilbert & Jack Yates



B24 Nose in the room where the 485th attendees enjoyed lunch

Lunch Cruise Onboard, the StarShip

by Lynn & Frances Fundling

It was a beautiful sunny day when we boarded the bus for our Lunch Cruise. On the way, our tour guide, Alex Charehjo, told us that he had served with the Israeli Commandos and how much he enjoyed being a tour guide for military groups. After boarding the beautiful yacht, StarShip, we were invited into the dining room where we were offered a wonderful lunch which included several entree options. We were cruising on Hillsborough Bay which leads to Tampa Bay. From the dining area we could view million dollar homes, dry docks, Citgo storage tanks, and the Victory Ship, SS American Victory. This ship, built during WW II, was

due to be scrapped when rescued in 1998, and upgraded to a floating Museum and Memorial. It is still seaworthy. This is the largest ship of its type docked on the East Coast! But, we were all anxious to go up on deck where we could get a better view and enjoy some of “our” kind of music provided by the Star Ship. The highpoint of being out on the deck was taking a photo of all of the veterans on board (all 8 of them)! Everyone was enjoying themselves and it felt like the cruise ended all too soon! We arrived back at the hotel at the appointed time so we could grab a bite to eat and get ready for the Friday evening historical program.



Left to Right: Bueford Cooper, Alexander Gilbert, Charlie Taylor, Henry Williams, Jack Behunin, Cliff Studaker, Wayne Smith, & Red Kempffer

