July 2026

Corey J Beitler's

"Distelfink Airlines"

An Online Aviation Newsletter

Mid-Atlantic Air Museum's World War II Weekend



Embraer ERJ 145LR

Ertl "National Air Racer" Die-Cast Airplane Replica

Matchbox Collectibles 1:72 Scale Mikoyan-Gurevich MiG-15

Sopwith F.1 Camel

Lockheed 5C Vega "Winnie Mae"

Lovely Ladies, Red Dresses, And A Rare P-61 Black Widow

"Sentimental Journey", a restored World War II-era Boeing B-17G Flying Fortress operated by the Commemorative Air Force Airbase Arizona, in flight during the 2026 Mid-Atlantic Air Museum's World War II Weekend airshow and living history event held at the museum in Reading, Pennsylvania.

FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

WWII Weekend, Sopwith F.1 Camel, Embraer ERJ-145LR , P-61 Photo Shoot

Greetings Everyone:

Welcome to the July edition of "Distelfink Airlines"! I hope my readers in the United States had a wonderful July 4th holiday and took the time to enjoy some special events and spend time with family. I purposely held back publishing this edition until after the holiday as I know it is a busy vacation time for a lot of people. But now that the holiday has passed, here is the July edition, and at 52 pages, the longest edition of "Distelfink Airlines" ever published!

The featured content for this edition is photos showcasing the aircraft and airshow flying from the 35th annual Mid-Atlantic Air Museum's World War II Weekend held in early June. There are tons of photos in the feature highlighting many of the aircraft that were in attendance at this event. This was my sixth year covering this event as a member of the credentialed media, and once again the experience did not disappoint. In addition to covering the airshow and flying action during this event, there was also the opportunity to photograph three aircraft during a night-engine-run photo shoot and also a special sunrise shoot featuring World War II reenactors with one of the aircraft on the ramp. The night-engine-run photo shoot was featured in the previous edition of "Distelfink Airlines". If you would like to check that out, you can do so here: https://heyzine.com/flip-book/38d74960bd.html. I want to thank Nick Chismar, the World War II Weekend Media Coordinator, for the opportunity to cover the event as credentialed media and feature it in my newsletter. I also want to thank all the Mid-Atlantic Air Museum staff and volunteers, aircraft and vehicle owners, and reenactors for making this incredible event possible each year. World War II Weekend is an incredible living history event and airshow and an important event in the local community. I hope that World War II Weekend can continue for many years to come.

Also featured in this edition is a look at the Sopwith F.1 Camel. The Camel featured in this edition of "Distelfink Airlines" is on display in the National Air and Space Museum's National Mall location in Washington, D.C. The Camel is one of World War I's most famous fighter aircraft and downed more enemy aircraft than any other Allied fighter in the conflict.

The "Aviation Sightings" section for this edition of "Distelfink Airlines" features an Embraer ERJ-145LR operated by Victory Air. Victory Air is an airline that specializes in running charter flights to NASCAR races for NASCAR team personnel. The ERJ-145LR was one of several that visited my local airport, the Lehigh Valley International Airport in Allentown, Pennsylvania, during NASCAR's race weekend at Pocono Raceway back in June.

Finally, "One Last Thing" features a fun photo shoot from the Mid-Atlantic Air Museum's World War II Weekend featuring the America's Sweethearts girl group and the museum's rare Northrop P-61B Black Widow night fighter. I want to thank the wonderful women of the America's Sweethearts for agreeing to do a photo shoot for me, and the Mid-Atlantic Air Museum volunteers at the P-61 Black Widow for allowing us to do the photo shoot with the airplane.

Thank you again for supporting my aviation photojournalism efforts and "Distelfink Airlines" this year. Please feel free to share the newsletter with whoever you wish and invite them to join the newsletter's official social media pages listed below.

Regards,

-Corey

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What's Inside:

Aviation Sightings:

Embraer ERJ 145LR 4
A long-range variant of the successful ERJ family of twin-engine regional jets, noted for its excellent safety record, mechanical reliability, and unique 2+1 cabin seating arrangement, which offers every passenger a window or aisle seat.

Aviation Memorabilia:

Ertl "National Air Racer" Die-Cast Airplane Replica 6
This fun die-cast replica of a Travel Air Type R "Mystery Ship" racing aircraft from the late 1920s and early 1930s will brighten up a bookshelf or desk of any aviation enthusiast.

Aircraft Models:

Matchbox Collectibles 1:72 Scale Mikoyan-Gurevich MiG-15 8
An excellent, value-priced, die-cast model of the iconic swept-wing jet fighter operated by the Soviet Union and several Warsaw Pact countries during the early years of the Cold War.

Special Feature:

Mid-Atlantic Air Museum's World War II Weekend 12
For the 35th year, one of the nation's largest living history events and airshows dedicated to the World War II era was held at the museum located at the Reading Regional Airport near Reading, Pennsylvania.

Museum Aircraft Spotlight:

Sopwith F.1 Camel 44
An example of one of World War I's most well-known aircraft, which holds the distinction of downing more enemy aircraft than any other Allied fighter in the conflict.

Aircraft Of Special Interest:

Lockheed 5C Vega "Winnie Mae" 48
The aircraft flown by American aviation pioneer Wiley Post to several speed, distance, and altitude records during the early and mid-1930s.

One Last Thing:

Lovely Ladies, Red Dresses, And A Rare P-61 Black Widow 50
At the 2026 Mid-Atlantic Air Museum's World War II Weekend, the ladies of the America's Sweethearts girl group agreed to pose for a few photos next to the Mid-Atlantic Air Museum's rare Northrop P-61B Black Widow night fighter.



Embraer ERJ 145LR



An Embraer ERJ 145LR operated by Victory Air arrives at the Lehigh Valley International Airport after a charter flight from the Statesville Regional Airport in Statesville, North Carolina. Victory Air is a charter airline that operates chartered flights for NASCAR team personnel to NASCAR events. Although Victory Air is headquartered at Henderson Field in Las Vegas, Nevada, the airline bases its fleet of 10 ERJ 145LR aircraft at the Statesville Regional Airport in Statesville, North Carolina, to be closer to NASCAR team operations.

The ERJ 145LR is a variant of the Embraer ERJ (Embraer Regional Jet) family of twin-engine regional jets designed and produced by the Brazilian aerospace manufacturer Embraer. The ERJ family of regional jets includes the ERJ 145 (capable of seating 50 passengers), the shorter ERJ 140 (44 passengers), and the even shorter ERJ 135 (37 passengers). The ERJ family also includes the Legacy 600 business jet and the R-99 family of military aircraft. Nicknamed "the dart" for its sleek design, the ERJ family is known as a workhorse of regional and charter airline fleets, particularly in North America. The ERJ family is also praised for its excellent safety record, mechanical reliability, and unique 2+1 cabin seating arrangement, which offers every passenger a window or aisle seat.

Development of the ERJ family began in 1989 with the ERJ 145. Initially, its early design took the form of a turbofan-powered stretch of the existing turboprop-powered EMB 120 Brasilia regional aircraft. Design work on the aircraft was temporarily suspended in 1990 due to a lack of developmental and financial partners for the project. When work resumed on the project in the early 1990s, an entirely new design emerged for the aircraft. While retaining the three-abreast seating of the Brasilia, the aircraft now featured rear-mounted Rolls-Royce AE 3007 turbofan engines and a new swept wing. The ERJ 145 first flew in 1995, with the first production example entering service with ExpressJet Airlines in April 1997. Following the success of the ERJ 145, Embraer expanded the family, launching the shorter ERJ 135 and ERJ 140 in 1999. Long-range and extra-long-range variants of the ERJ 145 and 135 were also developed, offering upgraded engines and increased fuel capacity. The ERJ family was also adapted for military use, with variants being operated in the Airborne Early Warning (AEW), maritime patrol, and transport roles. Production of the ERJ family was terminated in 2020 after 1,231 aircraft had been built. In commercial service, the ERJ family is being replaced by the newer and more advanced Embraer E-Jet family of aircraft.

The ERJ 145LR seen here typically seats 50 passengers in a single-class layout and is powered by a pair of Rolls-Royce AE 3007A1 turbofan engines. In typical operations, the ERJ 145LR cruises at a ceiling of 37,000 feet (11,728 m) at a speed of 515 miles per hour (828 km/h, 447 kn). The ERJ 145LR has a range of 1,550 nautical miles (1,784 mi, 2,873 km) and a maximum takeoff weight (MTOW) of 48,501 pounds (22,000 kg).


N47VA


N47VA

Ertl "National Air Racer" Die-Cast Airplane Replica



Ertl released this die-cast replica of a Travel Air Type R "Mystery Ship" racing aircraft in 1999 as part of an "Aviation Classics" series of die-cast aircraft replicas. These aircraft replicas had generic names to avoid licensing fees for trademarked aircraft manufacturer names. Ertl called this replica of the Travel Air Type R "Mystery Ship" the "National Air Racer".

Ertl (formerly the Ertl Company) is a former American manufacturing company and a current toy brand. Founded in 1945 and based in Dyersville, Iowa, Ertl was best known for its die-cast metal collectible replicas and models of tractors and agricultural machinery. For over 60 years, the company has produced farm toys under license for agricultural industry brands John Deere, Case IH, and New Holland. The company has also produced die-cast vehicles, figurines, and model kits under license for brands including DC Comics, Looney Tunes, Garfield, Star Wars, and Thomas the Tank Engine. During its history, Ertl has also produced die-cast replicas of cars, trucks, and aircraft. Some of Ertl's products, such as its die-cast vehicles and collectible banks, were marketed toward corporate clients and could be ordered with custom paint schemes as promotional products. Some of the corporate clients that ordered these products included Texaco, Shell, Harley-Davidson, Coca-Cola, and Hershey's. In 1999, Ertl was purchased by Racing Champions. Today, Ertl remains a brand name owned by TOMY International.

The Type R "Mystery Ships" were a series of low-wing, wire-braced racing airplanes built by the Travel Air company in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Built in total secrecy, which led to them being called "Mystery Ships", the Type Rs were a monoplane configuration in an era when biplane designs were common. Combined with a NACA cowling for the powerful engine and featuring a streamlined fuselage and large wheel pants, the Type Rs were some of the most advanced and aerodynamic racing aircraft of their day. Doug Davis won the 1929 National Air Races with one of the Type Rs, beating all the military aircraft entered in the event. This victory was the first time in the history of air racing that a civilian aircraft had beaten military entries. Other Type Rs set numerous speed and distance records in pylon racing and cross-country flying. A Type R known as "Texaco 13" was purchased by the Texaco Company for company pilot Frank Hawks, who set numerous records with the aircraft. This Type R, one of only five built, survives and is on display in the Museum of Science and Industry in Chicago, Illinois.

This 1:30-scale die-cast airplane replica of a Type R "Mystery Ship" was manufactured by Ertl in 1999 as part of an "Aviation Classics" series of die-cast aircraft replicas. Called the "National Air Racer" by Ertl, the Type R "Mystery Ship" model features realistic details, including streamlined wheel pants and wire rigging. A fictional but attractive paint scheme that fits the aviation era the aircraft represents completes this fun and interesting die-cast replica, which would be at home on the desk of any aviation enthusiast with a passion for historic racing aircraft.



Ertl's replica of the Travel Air Type R "Mystery Ship" features a colorful paint scheme that fits the Golden Age of Aviation era. The replica also has an shape that accurately depicts the Travel Air Type R "Mystery Ship" racing aircraft. Other notable features of the replica include a rotating propeller and rolling wheels.



Before issuing this "National Air Racer" replica, Ertl had sold and marketed this item previously in other color schemes as a die-cast collectible coin bank. The center of the dark plastic canopy lifts off, revealing a coin slot. Coins would have been removed from the bank using a small door in the underside of the replica.

Matchbox Collectibles 1:72 Scale Mikoyan-Gurevich MiG-15



These excellent, value-priced, 1:72-scale die-cast models of the Mikoyan-Gurevich MiG-15 jet fighter were made by Matchbox Collectibles in 2004 as part of a series of die-cast military aircraft models that were sold in discount retail stores, supermarkets, and drug stores during the early 2000s. The MiG-15 model was released in two paint schemes, one aircraft decorated as a Soviet Air Force MiG-15 (left) and the other painted in a striking camouflage scheme representing a MiG-15 from the Chinese People's Liberation Army Air Force (right).

The Mikoyan-Gurevich MiG-15 (NATO reporting name: FAGOT) is a jet fighter developed by Mikoyan-Gurevich for the Soviet Union. The MiG-15 was one of the first jet fighters designed with swept wings to achieve high transonic speeds. During the Korean War, the MiG-15, sometimes flown by highly experienced Soviet pilots, outclassed straight-wing jet fighters operated by U.N. forces and shocked military officials in the West with its performance capabilities. Over 13,000 MiG-15s were built in the Soviet Union in several variants. An additional 4,600 MiG-15s were license-built in countries such as China, Poland, and the Czech Republic (formerly Czechoslovakia).

Design and development of the MiG-15 began in the late 1940s when Mikoyan-Gurevich designed the MiG-9 jet fighter. This fighter was powered by a turbojet engine reverse-engineered from the German BMW 003 engine. These engines were underpowered and unreliable. The MiG-9 also suffered from control problems. In 1946, Soviet jet engine design still lagged behind the West's. Soviet aviation minister Mikhail Khrunichev and aircraft designer A.S. Yakovlev suggested to Soviet Premier Joseph Stalin that the Soviet Union buy the reliable, fully developed Rolls-Royce Nene turbojet engine. Stalin was skeptical of the plan but consented, and Soviet officials traveled to the United Kingdom to arrange to purchase the engines. To Stalin's surprise, the British government, in the interest of improving United Kingdom-Soviet Union relations, was willing to provide technical information and a license to build the Rolls-Royce Nene engine. Sample engines were purchased, and blueprints were provided. After evaluation and some minor changes to adapt the engines to Russia's climate conditions, the Soviet Union began manufacturing these engines for its aircraft as the Klimov RD-45.

To take advantage of the new engine, the Council of Ministers ordered the Mikoyan-Gurevich OKB to design and build two prototypes of a new fighter. The purpose of this fighter would be the high-altitude interception of enemy bombers. Performance targets were a top speed of 620 miles per hour (1,000 km/h) and a range of 648 nautical miles (750 mi, 1,200 km).

The prototype that emerged from Mikoyan-Gurevich had a mid-mounted swept wing and a tailplane mounted on a swept tail. Although Mikoyan-Gurevich designers had access to German research on swept-wing aircraft from World War II, the MiG-15 was entirely Russian in design. Two wing fences were fitted to each wing to improve airflow over the wing. The Klimov RD-45 engine was at the rear of the aircraft and fed air by a split-forward air intake at the nose of the fighter. Ductwork carried the air around the cockpit and brought it back together ahead of the engine. As the MiG -15 was designed to intercept enemy bombers, the armament chosen was a pair of 23 mm (0.91 in) autocannons and a single 37 mm (1.46 in) autocannon installed in a removable weapons pack fitted to the bottom of the nose. These weapons were powerful against enemy bombers, but their slow rate of fire limited their effectiveness against enemy fighter aircraft.

The prototype MiG-15 flew for the first time on December 30, 1947. During flight testing, the MiG-15 hit a top speed of 647 miles per hour (1,042 km/h) at 9,800 feet (3,000 m). The MiG-15 was favored and ordered into mass production in March 1948, just three months after the first test flight. By the end of 1948, substantial numbers of MiG-15s were in service with both the Soviet Air Forces, the VVS (tactical air arm), and the IA-PVO (air defense arm).

Initial operations with the MiG-15 revealed some problems. Early production examples tended to roll left or right due to manufacturing variances. Aerodynamic trimmers were fitted to correct the problem, with ground crews adjusting them until the aircraft flew correctly. Engine failures were also common. In 1950, an improved variant, the MiG-15bis, entered service. This version of the fighter used a Klimov VK-1 engine built with higher-quality metals, which improved reliability. The MiG-15bis also gained horizontal upper-edge airbrakes and a headlight in the air intake separator.

The West got its first look at the MiG-15 in late 1950 when the fighter appeared in the skies over North Korea. The MiG-15's speed, excellent maneuverability, and high ceiling shocked and stunned the U.N. pilots flying in Korea. First-generation fighter jets, such as the Lockheed F-80 Shooting Star and Republic F-84 Thunderjet, were no match for the Soviet fighter. The MiG-15s caused high losses for B-29 and B-50 bombers flying daytime bombing missions, causing U.S. Air Force officials to switch to night bombing missions instead.



The Matchbox Collectibles 1:72-scale MiG-15 in the Chinese People's Liberation Army Air Force color scheme in its original packaging. Unfortunately, the packaging was designed such that when the model was opened, it was destroyed. This packaging style was a negative for many die-cast model aircraft collectors who prefer to save the original packaging for their models. The boxes for the models were also larger than those other die-cast toys came in at the time. This resulted in some retailers not stocking the models due to the limited space available on their store shelves.



The Matchbox Collectibles 1:72-scale Soviet Air Force MiG-15 on its display stand. The Matchbox Collectibles MiG-15s were value-priced models and, as a result, lack some features found on premium models such as interchangeable landing gear parts and opening cockpit canopies. Although the Matchbox Collectibles MiG-15 is an excellent model for what it is, one feature that could have been improved was its display stand. Made of thin, cheap plastic, the display stand can warp, flex, or even break over time due to the materials used for its design and construction.

To counter the MiG-15, the U.S. Air Force rushed squadrons of the new North American F-86 Sabre to Korea to reestablish air superiority. Although the two fighters were fairly evenly matched, U.S. F-86 pilots quickly realized that the MiG-15 had some serious flaws that could be exploited in combat. The Soviet fighter tended to roll at high speeds due to wing flexing, making it an unstable gun platform. U.S. and U.N. pilots also observed several MiG-15s crashing after they went into unrecoverable spins following an aerodynamic stall. Finally, combat observations revealed that the MiG-15 became almost uncontrollable at speeds approaching Mach 1. Observing these MiG-15 flight characteristics helped the U.S. Air Force develop effective flight training and tactics for F-86 pilots to use during combat with the MiG-15.

Although the combat records are inconclusive, it is estimated that the MiG-15 suffered a 10:1 loss ratio against the F-86 Sabre. MiG-15s also suffered losses during or after combat with Grumman F9F Panthers, Lockheed F-80 Shooting Stars, Republic F-84 Thunderjets, Gloster Meteors, and even propeller-driven Hawker Sea Furies and Vought F4U Corsairs. Several MiG-15s were also lost in crashes and other operational mishaps.

After the Korean War, the MiG-15 became the primary interceptor of many of the Soviet Union's Warsaw Pact allies. During its long service career, 35 countries operated the MiG-15 worldwide. The MiG-15 was built in 17 variants during its production run and was built under license in China, Poland, and Czechoslovakia. Improved versions of the MiG-15 could be equipped with rockets, air-to-air missiles, or external fuel tanks on underwing pylons. Two-seat trainer versions of the MiG-15 were also built. Today, nearly 80 years after its first flight, the Korean People's Army Air Force continues to operate a small number of MiG-15s in the advanced training role.

This 1:72 scale, die-cast model of a MiG-15 was manufactured by Matchbox Collectibles in 2004. The MiG-15 was part of a series of 1:48-scale and 1:72-scale die-cast military aircraft models produced by the company from 2000 to 2004 and often sold in the toy sections of discount retail stores, drug stores, and supermarkets. The series of models included aircraft from World War I, World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War. Unfortunately, the models sold poorly at mass retailers, and the series was discontinued after only a few years. Today, these models continue to be appreciated by collectors due to the incredible value and quality they offered when they were originally sold.

The Matchbox Collectibles MiG-15 was offered in two color schemes. One aircraft represents a 1950s Soviet Air Force MiG-15 in a natural metal finish, and the other represents a MiG-15 flown by the Chinese People's Liberation Army Air Force in a striking striped camouflage paint scheme. Of the two color schemes, the Chinese version of the model is much harder to find on the secondary market. Each model was molded in the "gear up" configuration and included a small plastic display stand.

The Matchbox Collectibles MiG-15 model is an excellent replica of the iconic Warsaw Pact fighter. The die-cast metal and plastic model features excellent details, such as the removable weapons pack with the autocannons under the nose, recessed rivets and panel lines, and a seated pilot figure in the cockpit with painted details. The model also features the correct style drop tanks mounted under the wings. These drop tanks are lightly glued to the wings and can be carefully removed if desired for a "clean" appearance to the MiG-15. The paint and markings applications on both models are excellent. Unlike most Soviet Air Force MiG-15s which had national insignias on both wings, references show this MiG -15 only had the insignia on the left or port wing.

The major shortcoming of the die-cast military aircraft models produced by Matchbox Collectibles was the plastic display stand that was included with each model. The display stand is made of plastic and comes in two pieces, which snap together to assemble the stand. The stand's base features the aircraft's name and the Matchbox Collectibles logo printed on it.

Unfortunately, the stand's arm is made of soft plastic, and the weight of some models in the Matchbox Collectibles series can cause the arm to flex or bend over time. The models also do not fit tightly on the stand, and bumping them can cause them to fall, possibly resulting in breakage. The Matchbox Collectibles die-cast military aircraft models were designed for mass retail sales; as a result, the simple stand is understandable, but it still should have been made of stronger plastic or metal.

The 1:72-scale MiG-15 die-cast model from Matchbox Collectibles is an excellent, value-priced replica of the famous Soviet jet fighter. Although the Chinese People's Liberation Army Air Force version of the model has become quite difficult to find on the secondary market, the Soviet Air Force version of the MiG-15 remains available at affordable prices. The model is also the perfect size for a small display space and will delight any aviation enthusiast who enjoys historic military aircraft.



The MiG-15 die-cast models from Matchbox Collectibles still represent incredible value despite being out of production for over 20 years. The models are still available on the secondary market, although the Chinese People's Liberation Army Air Force MiG-15 has become difficult to find in recent years. The Matchbox Collectibles MiG-15 models, with their small footprint and reasonable amount of detail, are an excellent choice for anyone looking for a simple model of the iconic Cold War Soviet and Warsaw Pact jet fighter to display on their desk or bookshelf.

Mid-Atlantic Air Museum's World War II Weekend



The 35th edition of one of the nation's largest living history events and airshows dedicated to the World War II era once again drew thousands of people to the museum located at the Reading Regional Airport near Reading, Pennsylvania.

The Curtiss SB2C-5 Helldiver operated by the Commemorative Air Force Helldiver Squadron departs on a warbird experience flight on Friday evening during the Mid-Atlantic Air Museum's World War II Weekend. Warbird experience flights take place throughout the weekend at the event, offering additional opportunities for event attendees to see rare aircraft such as the Helldiver in flight.



The 2026 Mid-Atlantic Air Museum's World War II Weekend was my sixth year covering the event as a credentialed member of the media. Here, I take a brief break from photographing the event to have my photo taken with the Douglas A-26B Invader "Silver Dragon", which attended the event for the first time in 2026. (Photo Courtesy: Marsha Harden)

The Mid-Atlantic Air Museum, based at the Reading Regional Airport in Reading, Pennsylvania, held its 35th annual World War II Weekend living history event and airshow on June 5, 6, and 7. World War II Weekend captures the essence of these pivotal years in world history with an event that has grown into one of the most popular airshows in the United States, showcasing restored World War II aircraft.

Well-known as one of the largest World War II-themed living history reenactments and airshows in the United States, and as an important event in the local community, the Mid-Atlantic Air Museum's World War II Weekend attracts over 20,000 visitors annually, with some coming from as far away as Europe. The event regularly features dozens of restored World War II military aircraft, hundreds of restored military vehicles, and over 1,500 reenactors portraying all aspects of life during the conflict. World War II Weekend also features live entertainment appropriate to the era, battle reenactments, military vehicle parades, special guest speakers, informational booths for organizations and museums dedicated to preserving World War II history and veterans' records and stories, vendor booths for authors and artists, a military collectors flea market, and World War II veterans as distinguished honored guests.

This year, World War II Weekend featured over 50 restored World War II-era fighters, bombers, trainers, and transports. Two aircraft that visited the event for the first time included the Douglas A-26B Invader "Silver Dragon" owned by Vincent Quadrani and the Douglas R4D "Ready 4 Duty" from the Dallas/Fort Worth Wing of the Commemorative Air Force. A crowd favorite, the North American P-51 Mustang "Red Nose" from the Commemorative Air Force's Airbase Georgia, made its annual trip to the event to fly in the daily airshow and give rides to paying aviation enthusiasts.

This photo feature highlights some of the aircraft and flying action from the 2026 Mid-Atlantic Air Museum's World War II Weekend. These photos were taken throughout the weekend of the event.



Aircraft attending the Mid-Atlantic Air Museum's World War II Weekend began to arrive on Wednesday, depending on how far they need to travel to get to the event and pilot availability. Some of the early arriving aircraft offer warbird experience flights starting on Thursday afternoon. These ride flights bring additional revenue to the museums that operate the aircraft for maintenance. Here is the Commemorative Air Force Airbase Georgia's P-51 Mustang "Red Nose" departing on one of these flights.





Another aircraft arriving early and offering Thursday afternoon warbird experience flights was the Commemorative Air Force Airbase Georgia's Douglas SBD-5 Dauntless dive bomber. This restored SBD Dauntless is one of less than ten airworthy examples remaining in existence. The SBD played an important role in the Pacific campaign throughout World War II. The SBD played a crucial role in defeating the Japanese during the Battle of Midway when SBD pilots sank four Japanese aircraft carriers.





For the first time in several years, the Mid-Atlantic Air Museum's World War II Weekend featured a Boeing B-17 Flying Fortress as part of the warbird lineup for the weekend. Visiting the event was the B-17G "Sentimental Journey" operated by the Commemorative Air Force Airbase Arizona. This B-17 offers warbird experience flights, and the seats were the hot ticket at World War II Weekend. The initially scheduled flights sold out early, and additional flights were added to meet demand.

After missing the 2025 Mid-Atlantic Air Museum's World War II Weekend due to mechanical problems, the Commemorative Air Force's Boeing B-29 Superfortress "Fifi" returned to the event in 2026. When it was introduced near the end of World War II, the B-29 Superfortress was one of the most advanced bombers in the world. Today, "Fifi" is one of only two B-29s that remain in airworthy condition. In this photo, "Fifi" is flying over the event after returning from a warbird experience flight.



In addition to the warbird experience flights, some aircraft took to the sky for flight demonstrations on Friday afternoon at World War II Weekend. One of those aircraft was the Bell P-63 Kingcobra from the Commemorative Air Force Airbase Georgia. Designed as a successor to Bell Aircraft's earlier P-39 Airacobra, the P-63 Kingcobra featured several improvements to its design. Most P-63s built were sent to the Soviet Union under Lend-Lease and used by the Soviet Air Force.





Operated by the Delaware Aviation Museum Foundation, the restored North American B-25 Mitchell "Panchito" is an annual visitor to the Mid-Atlantic Air Museum's World War II Weekend. In addition to World War II Weekend, "Panchito" visits many airshows and aviation events in the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic region of the United States. Here, "Panchito" is departing the Reading Regional Airport on Friday afternoon on one of its many warbird experience flights flown during the weekend.



One of the aircraft attending the 2026 Mid-Atlantic Air Museum's World War II Weekend, which drew a lot of interest, was the Douglas A-26B Invader "Silver Dragon" owned by Vincent Quadrani. The 2026 event was the first time that an A-26 Invader has appeared at World War II Weekend. It was also the first time that Quadrani flew this aircraft in an airshow. The A-26 was an aircraft introduced at the end of World War II and was capable of performing both bombing and attack missions.

"Silver Dragon" performs a high-speed pass during a flight demonstration Friday afternoon at the 2026 Mid-Atlantic Air Museum's World War II Weekend. The early versions of the A-26 Invader were built in two distinct variants: the A-26B, which had a solid nose fitted with several configurations of armament and was designed for attack missions, and the A-26C, which had a glass nose, was equipped with a bombsight for precision bombing, and was intended to operate in the light bomber role.



The final flight demonstration on Friday afternoon at the 2026 Mid-Atlantic Air Museum's World War II Weekend was courtesy of the Curtiss SB2C-5 Helldiver from the Commemorative Air Force Helldiver Squadron. The Helldiver was introduced as a replacement for the Douglas SBD Dauntless dive bomber in late 1942. The Helldiver would play a key role in later campaigns in the Pacific theater, including battles over the Marianas, Philippines, Taiwan, Iwo Jima, Okinawa, and the Ryukyu Islands.





After the flight demonstrations on Friday, warbird experience flights continued well into the early evening, with warbird enthusiasts taking advantage of the great weather to get their flights on aircraft representing aviation history. For those enthusiasts who wanted a gentler and cheaper warbird flight experience, this Fairchild PT-19 Cornell was giving rides throughout the weekend. The PT-19 Cornell was one of many primary training aircraft used by the U.S. Army Air Forces during World War II.





There is nothing better than a ride in a classic biplane on a warm summer evening. At the 2026 Mid-Atlantic Air Museum's World War II Weekend, warbird and aviation enthusiasts had the incredible opportunity to purchase a ride in David W. Brown's award-winning 1941 PT-17 Stearman. The Stearman was one of World War II's most famous training aircraft. Over 10,000 Stearmans were built, and the biplanes were used by every branch of the U.S. Armed Forces as training aircraft during World War II.

The Boeing B-17G Flying Fortress "Sentimental Journey" operated by the Commemorative Air Force Airbase Arizona departs on a warbird experience flight Friday evening. "Sentimental Journey", visiting the 2026 Mid-Atlantic Air Museum's World War II Weekend, was the highlight of the event for many in attendance. Since "Sentimental Journey" is based in the western United States, visits to airshows in the eastern part of the nation are rare due to travel time and maintenance costs.





The Commemorative Air Force Helldiver Squadron's Curtiss SB2C-5 Helldiver was back in the skies on Friday evening to fly some warbird experience flights. When it was introduced in early 1943, the Helldiver was plagued by technical problems related to its electrical system and propeller. The aircraft was also chronically underpowered and difficult to fly. Later variants of the Helldiver, such as the SB2C-5, featured a more powerful engine, which solved most of the Helldiver's handling difficulties.





Joining the Helldiver in the skies on Friday evening for some warbird experience flights was the Commemorative Air Force Airbase Georgia's Douglas SBD-5 Dauntless. Despite it nearing obsolescence at the start of World War II, the SBD soldiered on in the dive-bomber role as the Helldiver was not ready until late 1942. Flight deck maintenance crews loved the SBD because it was easy to maintain and repair. Flight crews appreciated the SBD's ease of handling, stability in a dive, and maneuverability.





The Mid-Atlantic Air Museum's World War II Weekend features daily airshows on Saturday and Sunday featuring most of the aircraft attending the event. The daily airshows provide the public with the unique opportunity to see the aircraft in flight. This aircraft flying is a 1940 Aeronca 65-C Chief. The 65-C was part of the Aeronca Chief family of high-wing light touring and utility aircraft designed during the 1930s. Some Chiefs were used as training and liaison aircraft during World War II.

This restored PT-26 Cornell is a regular visitor at the Mid-Atlantic Air Museum's World War II Weekend, and again attended the event in 2026. The PT-26 Cornell was a development of the PT-19 Cornell, the major difference being that the PT-26 had an enclosed cockpit for flying in cold weather. Most of the PT-26s built were delivered to the Royal Canadian Air Force, which used them as primary training aircraft during the war in the British Commonwealth Training Plan.





For high visibility during training operations, PT-26 Cornells operated by the Royal Canadian Air Force were painted all-yellow with large "buzz" numbers on the fuselage and wings. These numbers identified who was flying each aircraft from the ground during training operations. In Royal Canadian Air Force Service, the PT-26 was known by its name "Cornell" and not by the PT-26 designation. This PT-26 is also an annual visitor to World War II Weekend and many other local aviation events.





The Ryan PT-22 Recruit was a military trainer developed from Ryan ST sport aircraft designed during the 1930s, and was the U.S. Army Air Corps' first monoplane trainer. Unlike the Ryan ST, which had landing gear fairings and wheel spats, the PT-22 Recruit had these deleted for ease of maintenance. The PT -22 Recruit also featured a five-cylinder radial engine built by Kinner. This engine has a distinctive "pop-pop" sound when it is running due to its unusual cylinder arrangement.



The classic Stearman remains a popular vintage aircraft in the United States, and thanks to the large numbers that have been restored and remain airworthy, Stearmans are still a common sight at vintage aircraft fly-ins throughout the country. Some Stearmans are still used for crop dusting and banner-towing duties. This year's Mid-Atlantic Air Museum's World War II Weekend had several Stearmans in attendance, including this PT-17, which flew in the training aircraft parade during the airshow.

The Civil Air Patrol and its contributions during World War II were represented in the airshow portion of World War II Weekend by this Stinson 10A Voyager. During World War II, this aircraft flew anti-coastal submarine patrol flights for the Civil Air Patrol from Lantana, Florida. In addition to flying patrols for German U-boats, Civil Air Patrol aircraft also flew search-and-rescue missions and escort missions for merchant ships such as oil tankers. The Civil Air Patrol aircraft were all flown by civilian volunteers.



There were only a few aircraft attending the Mid-Atlantic Air Museum's World War II Weekend wearing markings of other Allied countries. This replica of a Stampe-Vertongen SV.4C wearing French markings was one of them. The SV.4 was a two-seat biplane designed in Belgium and used as a touring and training aircraft. The SV.4C was a version of the aircraft license -built in France. Over 900 examples of the SV.4C were built in France and used as a primary training aircraft during and after World War II.





The Cessna T-50 Bobcat was built as a trainer and light utility aircraft and was Cessna's first twin-engine aircraft design. "Bamboo Betty" is a UC-78 Bobcat. The UC-78 was a military variant of the T-50 used by the U.S. Army Air Forces as a light transport and utility aircraft. The type was also used as an advanced trainer designated the AT-8 or AT-17. The civilian version of the Bobcat was designated the T -50. This restored example is operated by the Wings of War Museum in Palmyra, Pennsylvania.



A nice surprise to see in the skies at the 2026 Mid-Atlantic Air Museum's World War II Weekend was the rare Grumman J4F Widgeon amphibious aircraft. The G-44 Widgeon was designed by Grumman as a five-person amphibious aircraft for the civilian market and was intended as a smaller alternative for operators than the company's G-21 Goose. Unlike the Goose, which was powered by radial engines, the smaller Widgeon was powered by a pair of Ranger inline engines.

During World War II, the Widgeon was operated as a small patrol and anti-submarine aircraft by the U.S. Navy, U.S. Coast Guard, the U.S. Army Air Corps, the Civil Air Patrol, the Royal Navy's Fleet Air Arm, and the Royal Air Force. In U.S. Navy and U.S. Coast Guard service, the Widgeon was designated the J4F. A total of 276 Widgeons were built by Grumman, with most of them going to the U.S. military. Post-war, many Widgeons were sold as surplus and modified for civilian transport use.



The Vultee Valiant was a basic training aircraft built during World War II. The aircraft was known as the BT-13 or BT-15, depending on the engine installed, in U.S. Army Air Forces service and the SNV in U.S. Navy and Marine Corps service. American pilots learned to fly the Valiant during basic-level (category between primary and advanced) flight training. The Valiant was used to teach pilots skills such as using a radio and operating flaps. Almost 10,000 Valiants were built during the war.





The Pratt & Whitney R-985 radial engine that powered the BT-13 Valiant was used in several other aircraft. Fearing that shortages of the Pratt & Whitney engine would slow deliveries of the Valiants needed for flight training, some Valiants built in 1941 and 1942 were equipped with a Wright radial engine of similar size and horsepower output. These Valiants were designated BT-15s due to the different engine. The Valiant shown here and the one pictured above are both restored BT-15 variants.



The North American T-6 Texan was a single-engine advanced training aircraft used from World War II into the 1970s. During its long career, the aircraft was known by many designations in service, including the AT-6 in U.S. Army Air Forces service, the T-6 in U.S. Air Force service, the SNJ in U.S. Navy service, and the Harvard when in service with the British Commonwealth countries. Over 15,000 T-6s were built, and restored examples remain popular as warbirds and airshow aerobatic aircraft.

The Jersey Jerks Airshow Team battled breezy conditions throughout the weekend to perform their flight demonstrations at World War II Weekend. This picture shows the team showcasing their formation flying skills during the Sunday afternoon airshow. The team flies examples of the North American Texan/SNJ advanced training aircraft from World War II. Over 15,000 of these advanced training aircraft were manufactured during the war, with about 500 surviving in airworthy condition today.



An interesting aircraft at this year's Mid-Atlantic Air Museum's World War II Weekend was this replica of a Nakajima B5N "Kate" torpedo bomber. This aircraft, owned by Alan Armstrong, is actually a 1943 North American SNJ-4. This airplane was built and flown for the 20th Century Fox film "Tora! Tora! Tora!". When the movie was being filmed, the producers needed Japanese torpedo bombers for aerial scenes, but none existed. The real B5N "Kates" had all been destroyed during or after the war.





To build the replica B5N "Kate", the team building the airplanes for the movie combined a 1943 SNJ-4 with the tail section of a Vultee BT-13 Valiant. The airplane's 600-horsepower engine gives it performance very comparable to the original B5N "Kate". In addition to its role in "Tora! Tora! Tora!", this replica "Kate" torpedo bomber has appeared in several other Hollywood productions, including "The Battle of Midway", "The Flying Misfits", and "War and Remembrance".



The Warbird Factory/Prescott Foundation's General Motos TBM-3E Avenger "Ida Red" flying in the airshow on Sunday. The Avenger was one of the finest torpedo bombers built during World War II, serving with distinction in the last years of the war. Because of its large size and ungainly appearance, the Avenger was nicknamed "Turkey" by its crews. Although designed by Grumman, most of the over 9,800 Avengers built were manufactured by the Eastern Aircraft division of General Motors.

The weather for the airshow portion of World War II Weekend was much better on Sunday than it was on Saturday. Saturday featured high winds and hazy skies, whereas Sunday had partly cloudy skies with more manageable wind conditions for the pilots. In this photo from the Sunday afternoon airshow, the Douglas SBD-5 Dauntless from the Commemorative Air Force Airbase Georgia looks great against some blue sky during the naval aircraft review portion of the airshow program.



The Commemorative Air Force Helldiver Squadron's Curtiss SB2C-5 Helldiver flies overhead during the naval aircraft review portion of the Sunday airshow program. This photo of the Helldiver's underside highlights the evolution of dive bomber design during World War II. While the Douglas SBD Dauntless carried all its ordnance externally under its fuselage or wings, the Helldiver carried most of its ordnance in an internal weapons bay to reduce drag and improve the performance and range of the aircraft.





A last-minute surprise at the Mid-Atlantic Air Museum's World War II Weekend was the late addition of the Douglas AD-4 Skyraider from the Military Aviation Museum in Virginia Beach, Virginia, to the airshow lineup. The Skyraider was a single-seat attack aircraft developed near the end of World War II. First flying in March 1945, the Skyraider missed serving in World War II, entering service in 1946. The Skyraider would serve with distinction in both the Korean War and the Vietnam War.



Lessons learned in combat during World War II were incorporated into the Skyraider's design. The result was a heavily armored airframe capable of carrying large amounts of ordnance, including bombs, rockets, and other external stores. The Skyraider was designed for close air support and earned a reputation during the Korean and Vietnam Wars for being able to absorb considerable damage from enemy fire. Seven versions of the Skyraider were produced during its production run.

The Skyraider was operated by the U.S. Navy, the U.S. Air Force, and the U.S. Marine Corps. Foreign operators included the Royal Navy, the French Air Force, and the South Vietnamese Air Force. The Skyraider had an unusually long career, remaining in service into the early 1970s. The Skyraider's large airframe was ideal for specialized variants designed to carry multiple crew members and equipment for performing airborne early warning, electronic warfare, and night-attack missions.





The appearance of the A-26B Invader "Silver Dragon" at the 2026 Mid-Atlantic Air Museum's World War II Weekend was the highlight of the event for many of the aviation and warbird enthusiasts in attendance. Unlike most restored A-26s, "Silver Dragon" retains much of its combat equipment on board, and most of it is in working condition. During the Saturday airshow, the flight demonstration of "Silver Dragon" showed that the A-26's bomb bay doors remain operational.





Unlike most aircraft that served in World War II, the A-26 Invader had a long career after the war. The A-26 flew in combat in the Korean War, flying night interdiction missions against enemy communication lines and supply dumps. Highly modified and rebuilt A-26s were employed as counterinsurgency aircraft during the Vietnam War. Several retired A-26 Invaders were sold as surplus to civilian operators, who converted them into fast corporate transports or fire fighting aircraft.



Bombers are always a favorite during the airshow portion of the Mid-Atlantic Air Museum's World War II Weekend. The North American B-25 Mitchell was one of the most widely used medium bombers of World War II. The B-25 was used in every theater of World War II and operated by many of the Allied air forces. Produced in numerous variants, nearly 10,000 B-25s were built during World War II. "Take-Off Time" is a restored B-25J variant of the Mitchell and is seen here taking off during the Saturday airshow.

"Panchito" had a busy World War II Weekend, flying with the bomber aircraft flight for the Saturday and Sunday airshows and also offering warbird experience flights throughout the weekend. The B-25 Mitchell was one of World War II's most versatile aircraft designs. Although designed as a medium bomber, the B-25 was used for several other roles during World War II, such as aerial reconnaissance, transport, anti-submarine and shipping, maritime patrol, and VIP transport.





"Sentimental Journey" was built by Douglas Aircraft as a B-17G in late 1944. The B-17 did not see service in World War II but saw service postwar as an air-sea rescue aircraft and as a mother ship for drone aircraft during atmospheric nuclear weapons testing in the 1950s. After being sold as surplus, the B-17 flew for several years as an aerial fire-fighting aircraft. The Commemorative Air Force acquired the B-17 in 1978 and spent several years restoring the bomber to its original wartime configuration.





The Boeing B-17 Flying Fortress was one of World War II's most famous heavy bombers. Developed in the 1930s to meet a U.S. Army Air Corps' requirement for a fast and high-flying heavy bomber, the B-17 went through numerous design changes throughout the war, particularly to increase its armor protection and defensive armament. Heavily used during the Eighth Air Force's daylight bombing raids over Germany, the B-17 dropped more bombs than any other bomber during World War II.



Another newcomer to World War II Weekend in 2026 was the Douglas R4D -6 "Ready 4 Duty" operated by the Commemorative Air Force's Dallas/Fort Worth Wing. The R4D was the U.S. Navy designation for the military version of the DC-3 commercial airliner. This military transport aircraft was also known as the C-47 Skytrain in U.S. Army Air Forces service and the Dakota in Royal Air Force service. This military transport was used extensively by the Allies throughout World War II.

The R4D and C-47 differed from the DC-3 commercial airliner in several ways. The R4D/C-47 featured an astrodome in the cabin roof. The R4D/C-47 also featured a hoist attachment, a reinforced floor, and a hoist attachment for loading cargo. The aircraft also featured beefier landing gear and a shortened tailcone so shackles could be attached for towing gliders. Over 15,000 R4Ds/C-47s/Dakotas were built during World War II. "Ready 4 Duty" was built in 1944 and served with the U.S. Navy from 1946 to 1959.



The airshow portion of the Mid-Atlantic Air Museum's World War II Weekend ended each day with a demonstration of the fighter aircraft, which are always popular with the airshow and warbird enthusiasts in attendance. Unfortunately, due to some unplanned mechanical issues for some aircraft, which prevented their attendance, the fighter aircraft roster was a little light at this year's event. Here, the Commemorative Air Force Airbase Georgia's Bell P-63 Kingcobra takes to the sky.





The Bell P-63 Kingcobra was joined in the sky for the fighter aircraft demonstrations by the North American P-51D "Red Nose", also operated by the Commemorative Air Force Airbase Georgia. Entering service in mid-1944, the P-51D variant of the Mustang finally provided the U.S. Army Air Forces with a fighter capable of escorting bomber formations all the way to Germany and back. Late in the war, P-51Ds were also used on ground-attack and aerial reconnaissance missions.



A nice formation flight of the CAF Airbase Georgia's North American P-51D Mustang and Bell P-63A Kingcobra near the end of the Sunday airshow. The P-51 is one of the most famous fighter aircraft of World War II and of all time. The P-63 was not accepted for service with the U.S. Army Air Force, and almost all the examples built went to the Soviet Union under Lend-Lease. In service with the Soviet Air Force, the P-63 Kingcobra was used as a ground-attack aircraft against enemy tanks and armor.

Despite the only two aircraft to fly in the fighter demonstrations during the airshow, the pilots of the Commemorative Air Base Georgia's P-51D Mustang and P-63 Kingcobra did their best to put on a display for the crowd. The pilots flew several excellent formation passes with the fighters, staying close enough for excellent photo opportunities. Each pilot also performed an aerobatic demonstration with their fighters, showcasing the performance and handling capabilities of both aircraft.



Shortly after the air-show portion of World War II Weekend ends on Sunday afternoon, airplanes that were attending the event begin departing for home. For aviation photographers, the hour or two after the Sunday airshow is a great opportunity to get some final photos of the warbirds that attended the event. This airplane is a Fairchild PT-19 Cornell departing the Reading Regional Airport for home on Sunday afternoon. The PT-19 was used as a primary training aircraft during World War II.





A Taylorcraft L-2 Grasshopper departs the Reading Regional Airport on Sunday afternoon following the Mid-Atlantic Air Museum's World War II Weekend. The L-2 was one of several small light aircraft employed by the U.S. Army Air Forces during World War II for liaison roles, such as artillery spotting, light transport, and short-range reconnaissance. Almost 2,000 L-2s were built by Taylorcraft for the U.S. Army Air Forces, with most being kept stateside and used for training during the war.



The Boeing Stearman was built as a primary trainer before and during World War II. During the war, the Stearman was used by the U.S. Navy, U.S. Army Air Forces, U.S. Marine Corps, the U.S. Coast Guard, and several Allied air arms. This Stearman heading for home late Sunday afternoon is a restored U.S. Navy N2S-3 variant. This particular Stearman visits the Mid-Atlantic Air Museum's World War II Weekend every year, being flown to the event by its owner from the Long Island, New York, area.

The Naval Aircraft Factory N3N was a primary training aircraft with some interesting innovations. The N3N could be fitted with either floats or conventional landing gear for operations off water and also on land. Constructed of aluminum for strength, the N3N also featured removable access panels on the fuselage for easier maintenance and inspection access. The N3N was built in far fewer numbers than the iconic Stearman; fewer than 1,000 N3Ns were built in two main production variants.





The pilot of the SBD-5 Dauntless operated by the Commemorative Air Force Airbase Georgia was a busy person at the Mid-Atlantic Air Museum World War II Weekend. Many warbird and aviation enthusiasts took advantage of the dive bomber visiting the event to book a ride in one of the iconic aircraft of the Pacific theater during the war. The SBD was also flown in the airshows held at the event on Saturday and Sunday. Here, the SBD is departing on one last warbird experience flight late on Sunday afternoon.





The Military Aviation Museum's Douglas AD-4 Skyraider departs for home on Sunday afternoon at the Mid-Atlantic Air Museum's World War II Weekend after being a last-minute addition to the airshow roster for the event. The Skyraider was developed near the end of World War II as an attack aircraft. This Skyraider is an AD-4 variant built by Douglas Aircraft in 1949. This Skyraider is a Korean War veteran and was deployed aboard aircraft carriers three times during that conflict.





One of the highlights of watching departures from the Mid-Atlantic Air Museum's World War II Weekend on Sunday afternoon is the opportunity to see some of the aircraft in flight that attend the event but do not fly in the daily airshows, such as this 1940 Stinson 10. The Stinson 10 was one of the primary aircraft utilized by the Civil Air Patrol (CAP) during World War II. These small planes were used to patrol the U.S. coasts, spot German U-boats, and direct bombers to protect Allied shipping.

As soon as the Sunday airshow ends, many vintage aircraft, such as this Piper L-4 Grasshopper, begin their journey home from the Mid-Atlantic Air Museum's World War II Weekend. Some of the pilots have far to travel, and others like to make it home before darkness with their vintage aircraft. The L-4 was the military version of the civilian Piper J-3 Cub light aircraft. During World War II, the L-4 Grasshopper was used for liaison duties, such as artillery spotting, reconnaissance, and medical evacuation.



Placid Lassie", a Douglas C-47 Skytrain transport operated by the Tunison Foundation, departs for home following the event late Sunday afternoon. "Placid Lassie" is noteworthy as being a D-Day veteran, having flown missions during the operation in support of Allied forces. "Placid Lassie" later flew missions in support of Allied forces as they liberated Europe. The C-47 was one of the workhorses of World War II, moving people and supplies for the Allies in all theaters of operation.





The Commemorative Air Force Airbase Georgia's North American P-51D Mustang "Red Nose" departs the Reading Regional Airport late Sunday afternoon. "Red Nose" was a busy aircraft throughout the 2026 Mid-Atlantic Air Museum's World War II Weekend. Warbird experience flights in the aircraft were sold out, with more flights scheduled onsite to meet demand at the event. In addition to the warbird experience flights, "Red Nose" also flew in the airshow portion of the event each day.



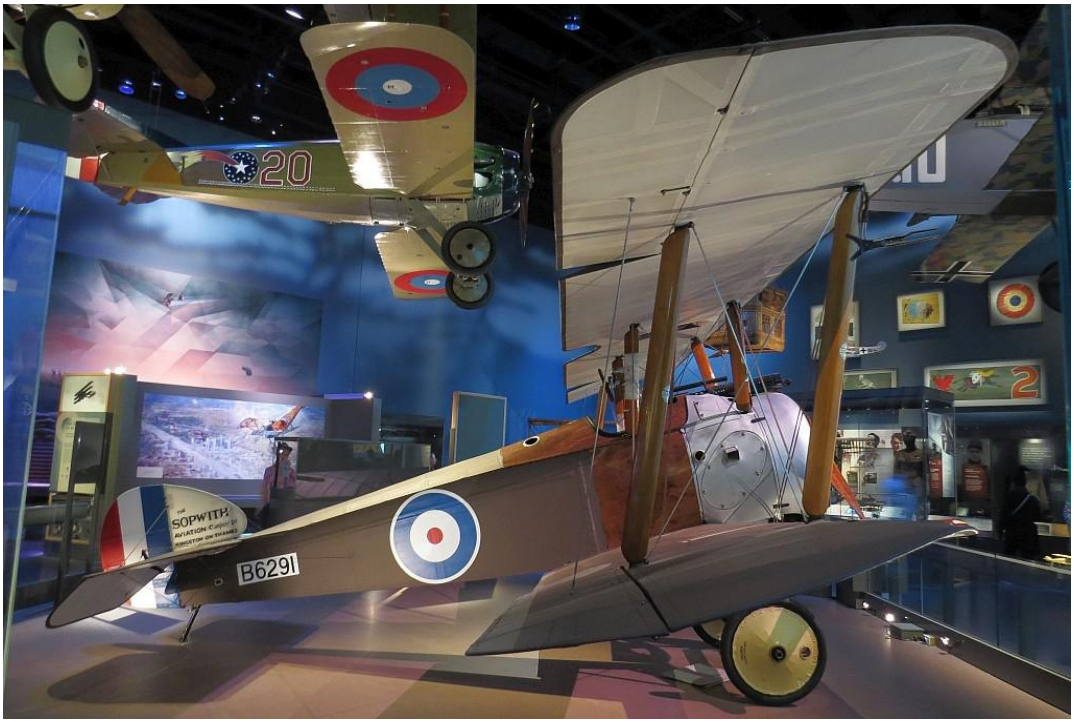
For the first time in several years at World War II Weekend, a Ryan PT-22 Recruit training aircraft was part of the airshow flying at the event. Built in far fewer numbers than aircraft like the PT-19 Cornell and the Stearman, the PT-22 is a much rarer warbird to see at airshows, fly-ins, and other aviation events. This PT-22 is a beautifully restored example, and it was a pleasure to see it flying at World War II Weekend this year. Here, the pilot departs for home on late Sunday afternoon.

The Air Heritage Aviation Museum has been a long-time supporter of the Mid-Atlantic Air Museum's World War II Weekend event. Located in Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania, the museum usually sends its Douglas C-47B Skytrain "Luck of the Irish" to the event for static display each year. "Luck of the Irish" also visits other local airshows and aviation events during the summer months. Here, "Luck of the Irish" departs the Reading Regional Airport for the trip home on late Sunday afternoon.





Sopwith F.1 Camel



A Sopwith F.1 Camel on floor display inside the National Air and Space Museum's flagship location on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. The Camel is one of World War I's most well-known fighter aircraft and has the distinction of shooting down more enemy aircraft than any other Allied fighter during the war.

The Sopwith F.1 Camel is a British World War I single-seat biplane fighter aircraft that was introduced on the Western Front in 1917. Developed by the Sopwith Aviation Company as a successor to the Sopwith Pup, the Camel became one of the best-known fighter aircraft from World War I. Pilots flying Camels were credited with downing 1,294 enemy aircraft, more than any other Allied fighter that flew in the conflict. After it became obsolete as a fighter late in the war, Camels switched to ground-attack missions, attacking enemy troop positions and supply dumps.

When it became clear that the Sopwith Pup was no match for newer German fighters, such as the Albatros D.III, which entered service in 1916, the Camel was developed to replace it. As an interim measure, the British government purchased Nieuport 17s from the French to give the Sopwith Aviation Company time to develop the Camel. The Sopwith Aviation Company realized the new fighter needed to be faster and have heavier armament. Sopwith's chief designer, Herbert Smith, headed the effort to produce the Camel.

Early in its development, the Camel was referred to as the "Big Pup". The new fighter was designed with a metal fairing over the breeches of the machine guns, intended to prevent them from freezing at altitude. This fairing created a "hump", leading pilots to call the new Sopwith fighter the "Camel". Although this name has stuck with the fighter through history, it was never officially used. On December 22, 1916, Sopwith chief test pilot Harry Hawker flew the prototype Camel for the first time. In May 1917, the British War Office issued a production contract for 250 examples of the new fighter. Throughout 1917, a total of 1,325 Camels were produced. Almost all these Camels were the initial F.1 variant. By the time production of the Camel came to an end, over 5,400 examples of the fighter had been built.

The Camel was a conventional design for the era, with a wire-braced wooden box-girder fuselage structure, an aluminum engine cowling, plywood panels around the cockpit, and a fabric-covered fuselage, wings, and tail. Although similar in design to the Pup that preceded it, the Camel had a noticeably bulkier fuselage.

The bottom wing of the Camel was rigged with 5° of dihedral, while the top wing lacked any dihedral. This dihedral meant the gap at the wingtips was less than at the roots. This change was made at the suggestion of Sopwith works manager Fred Sigrist to simplify production of the aircraft. An unusual design feature of the Camel was that the top wing had a central section cutout to improve upward visibility for the pilot.

The Camel was also the first British fighter aircraft to feature twin machine guns as armament. Two 0.303-inch (7.7 mm) Vickers machine guns were mounted in front of the cockpit and synchronized to fire through the propeller. Initially, the Sopwith-Kauper mechanical-linkage synchronizer of the firm's own design was used on the Camel. In service, these units wore out quickly, and from November 1917 onward, the more accurate and easier-to-maintain hydraulic-link Constantinesco-Colley synchronizer system was used instead. In addition to the machine guns, four 20-pound (9kg) Cooper bombs could be carried for ground attack missions.

Several different rotary engines powered production examples of the Sopwith Camel. The two most common engines installed on the fighter were the 130-horsepower Clerget 9B on Camels operated by the Royal Flying Corps and the 150-horsepower Bentley BR1 on Camels operated by the Royal Naval Air Service.

Unlike the Pup that preceded it, the Sopwith Camel was considered a difficult aircraft to fly. The Camel had light and sensitive controls, and its difficult handling was attributed to the close placement of the pilot, fuel tank, engines, and guns (90% of the aircraft's weight) in the first seven feet (2.1m) of the aircraft and to the strong gyroscopic effects of the rotating mass of cylinders, which was common with rotary engines of the time. When taking off with a full load of fuel, the aircraft's center of gravity was often pushed beyond the rearmost safe limit. Many inexperienced pilots crashed when trying to take off with a full load of fuel. The Camel was also tail-heavy, and pilots had to apply constant forward pressure on the control stick to maintain level flight. Any stall with the Camel usually resulted in a dangerous spin, which was often unrecoverable.





The torque generated by the Camel's rotary engine also gave it some unusual flight characteristics. The engine's torque caused the Camel to turn more slowly to the left with a nose-up attitude, but it also allowed the Camel to turn much more quickly to the right, with a nose-down attitude instead.

The Sopwith Camel entered service on the Western Front in June 1917 with the No. 4 Squadron of the Royal Naval Air Service. By February 1918, 13 British squadrons had the Camel as their primary equipment. In service, the Camel performed better than the German Albatros D.III and D.V fighters. Together with the Royal Aircraft Factory S.E. 5a and the SPAD S.XIII, the Camel helped the Allies establish air superiority over the Western Front for a time.

Another important role for the Camel was home defense and night fighting. Beginning in July 1917, Camels were assigned to home defense squadrons to intercept German bombers flying daylight raids over Great Britain. When the Germans switched to night bombing, the Camel proved capable of flying night operations and was used throughout 1918 to intercept and shoot down German bombers on evening raids. Aircraft assigned to home defense duties were quickly modified with navigation lights to serve as night fighters. A small number of Camels were more extensively modified with the Vickers guns replaced by Lewis guns mounted on the top wing, and the cockpit moved rearward so the pilot could reload the guns. This modification, which became known as the "Sopwith Comic", allowed the guns to be fired without affecting the pilot's night vision and the use of incendiary ammunition, which was unsafe to fire from the Vickers guns.

The Royal Naval Air Service used a variant of the Sopwith Camel as a shipboard and parasite fighter. These aircraft were suitable for launching from platforms mounted on the turrets of major battleships and also operated from the earliest British aircraft carriers. The Camels were also deployed from "aircraft lighters", special barges positioned in the English Channel, which were towed fast enough so the Camels could take off. These Camels were often used against enemy air raids.

By mid-1918, the Camel was obsolete as a fighter aircraft, as its performance in speed and altitude was outclassed by newer German fighters such as the Fokker D.VII. However, the Camel remained viable as a ground-attack aircraft and was used extensively as an infantry support aircraft, dropping bombs and strafing enemy troop positions and supply dumps. The Camel played an important role in helping the British Army contain the German spring offensive of March 1918 by strafing and bombing enemy troop positions.

The Sopwith Camel proved to be one of World War I's best fighter aircraft. Despite being difficult to fly, its agility and maneuverability were valued by experienced pilots. In addition to the British Royal Flying Corps and Royal Naval Air Service, the Camel was used extensively by Allied squadrons. Belgian, American, Canadian, and Australian squadrons all flew the Sopwith Camel in combat operations. Postwar, the Camel was operated in small numbers by the air arms of several European nations. Postwar, some British Camel squadrons saw action as part of the Allied intervention into the Russian Civil War in 1919 and 1920. These squadrons performed ground-attack, reconnaissance, and escort missions in support of White Russian forces and Royal Navy warships operating in the Caspian Sea region.

The National Air and Space Museum's Sopwith F.1 Camel is one of eight original Sopwith Camel aircraft known to exist. This aircraft was discovered in the 1960s by Desmond St. Cyrien. The Camel was then restored through the 1980s, with the restoration work completed by Tony Ditheridge at AJD Engineering in the United Kingdom. Restored to airworthy condition, the Camel flew for the first time after this work was completed in 1992. After 2005, the Camel became part of the Javier Arango Collection in Paso Robles, California. After Arango died in 2017, the Camel was donated to the National Air and Space Museum. From 2017 to 2024, the Camel was on display in the Steven F. Udvar-Hazy Center in Chantilly, Virginia. The Sopwith F.1 Camel is now the centerpiece of the new *WWI: The Birth of Military Aviation* gallery in the National Air and Space Museum's National Mall location in Washington, D.C.



Lockheed 5C Vega "Winnie Mae" (1930)



The "Winnie Mae" is a modified Lockheed 5C Vega flown by American aviator Wiley Post to several speed, distance, and altitude records in the 1930s. The Vega was built as a 5B model and purchased by oil baron Florence C. Hall in June 1930. The "Winnie Mae" was intended for Hall's personal use, and Post was his personal pilot. With Hall's permission, Post entered the "Winnie Mae" in and won the cross-country event during the 1930 National Air Races, and in 1931, set a new record for the fastest around-the-world flight. After acquiring the "Winnie Mae" from Hall, Post converted the Vega to a 5C model and made several other engine and airframe modifications to the aircraft. Post set speed and altitude records with the "Winnie Mae" and conducted high-altitude research flights with the aircraft before he died in a plane crash in Alaska in 1935.

Lockheed 5C Vega "Winnie Mae"

Crew: 1 or 2 (Pilot or Pilot & Navigator)

Length: 27 ft 6 in (8.38 m)

Wingspan: 41 ft (12 m)

Height: 8 ft 2 in (2.49 m)

Wing Area: 275 sq ft (25.5 m^2)

Powerplant: Pratt & Whitney Wasp R-1340 nine-cylinder air-cooled radial engine (x 1)

Propeller: Smith 450-SI two-bladed variable-pitch propeller

Range: 630 nmi (725 mi, 1,167 km) (Normal); 4,349 nmi (5,000 mi, 8,047 km) (w/Auxiliary Fuel Tanks)

Cruise Speed: 165 mph (266 km/h, 143 kn)

Maximum Speed: 185 mph (298 km/h, 161 kn) (Normal); 340 mph (550 km/h, 300 kn) at 55,000 ft (16,764 m)

Empty/Gross Weights: 2,595 lb/4,500 lb (1,177 kg/2,041 kg)

Service Ceiling: 15,000 ft (4,570 m) standard configuration; 50,000 ft (15,000 m) with Post's modifications

Record-Breaking Vega

Record-Breaking Flights

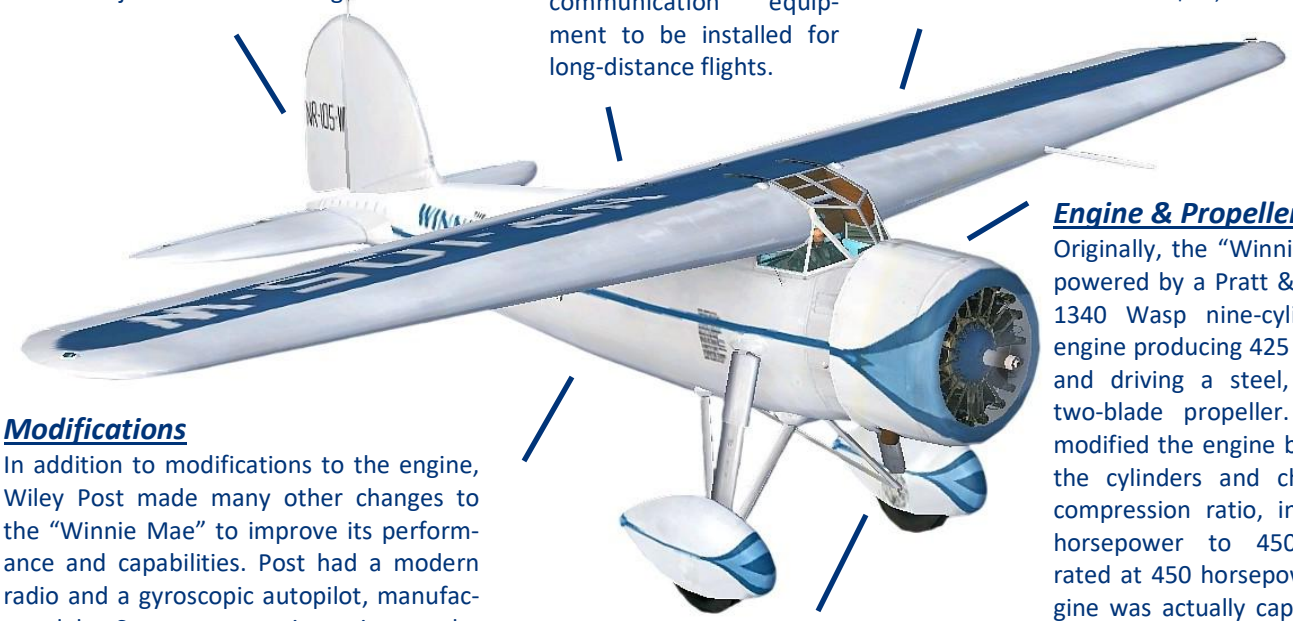
Wiley Post flew the "Winnie Mae" on several record-breaking flights during the early and mid-1930s. Post won the cross-country portion of the 1930 National Air Races, completing the distance in a record time of 9 hours, 9 minutes, and 4 seconds. Post also set a record for the fastest around-the-world flight in 1931, when he and navigator Harold Gatty completed the flight in 8 days, 15 hours, and 51 minutes. Post also completed the first solo-around-the-world flight in 1933. In 1934, while wearing the world's first pressure suit that he helped design with Russell S. Colley of the B.F. Goodrich Company, Post set a flight altitude record, reaching 50,000 feet (15,000 m). Post also discovered that aircraft could fly faster within the jet stream and at high altitudes.

Fuselage

The Vega was designed as a high-speed airliner and corporate aircraft featuring a streamlined wooden fuselage with a cabin capable of accommodating six passengers. Record-breaking pilots such as Wiley Post and Amelia Earhart loved the Vega because the cabin windows and seating were easily removable, and its large fuselage allowed extra fuel tanks and additional navigational and communication equipment to be installed for long-distance flights.

Background

The "Winnie Mae" was built in 1930 by the Lockheed Corporation at its Burbank, California, factory. The Vega was serial number 122 and built as a 5B model. In June 1930, the Vega was purchased for $22,000 by Florence C. Hall, an oil baron from Chickasha, Oklahoma. The "Winnie Mae" was purchased by Hall for personal use and named after his daughter. After Wiley Post's success with the "Winnie Mae" during the 1930 National Air Races and the 1931 around-the-world flight, Post acquired the "Winnie Mae" from Hall. Post converted the Vega to a 5C model, then continued to modify and fly the "Winnie Mae", setting speed and altitude records with the aircraft until he died in the crash of another aircraft in 1935. After his death, Post's widow sold the "Winnie Mae" to the Smithsonian Institution for $25,000.



Modifications

In addition to modifications to the engine, Wiley Post made many other changes to the "Winnie Mae" to improve its performance and capabilities. Post had a modern radio and a gyroscopic autopilot, manufactured by Sperry, a new invention at the time, installed in the "Winnie Mae" in 1933. Post also decreased the wing's angle of incidence by 10° to increase the "Winnie Mae's" top speed. Finally, Post added six auxiliary fuel tanks to the "Winnie Mae" for long-distance flights. These fuel tanks gave the aircraft a total fuel capacity of 645 gallons (2,442 L) and a range of nearly 5,000 miles (8,047 km). This illustration shows the "Winnie Mae" in its mostly stock configuration. The picture on the previous page shows the "Winnie Mae" after it was extensively modified for high altitude flight.

Landing Gear

In its stock configuration, the Lockheed Vega featured fixed landing gear with wheels covered by streamlined pants. These pants were removable if the Vega was operating from rough or unprepared airstrips where mud or debris could get trapped in them during takeoff or landing. In 1934, Wiley Post worked with Lockheed to develop landing gear that could be jettisoned after takeoff and an aluminum skid for landing that bolted to the underside of the fuselage of the "Winnie Mae" to reduce drag and streamline the aircraft.

Engine & Propeller

Originally, the "Winnie Mae" was powered by a Pratt & Whitney R-1340 Wasp nine-cylinder radial engine producing 425 horsepower and driving a steel, fixed-pitch, two-blade propeller. Post later modified the engine by upgrading the cylinders and changing the compression ratio, increasing its horsepower to 450. Although rated at 450 horsepower, the engine was actually capable of producing up to 500 horsepower on takeoff. Later modifications to the engine included installing a geared supercharger for increased performance at high altitudes and individual exhaust stacks for each cylinder to facilitate purging. Post also changed the propeller on the "Winnie Mae" to improve the aircraft's performance, adding a two-blade Smith 450-SI controllable-pitch propeller featuring hollow steel blades.



Lovely Ladies, Red Dresses, And A Rare P-61 Black Widow



America's Sweethearts girl group members pose with the Mid-Atlantic Air Museum's rare Northrop P-61B Black Widow night fighter during a photo shoot at the museum's 2026 World War II Weekend living history event and airshow. The museum's P-61B Black Widow is one of only four surviving examples of the first U.S. operational warplane designed exclusively as a night fighter.

A highlight at the Mid-Atlantic Air Museum's World War II Weekend every year is to see the museum's rare Northrop P-61B Black Widow night fighter on display and check out the progress of the restoration. The P-61B crashed in 1945 in Indonesia and was recovered by museum staff in 1989. Since then, museum volunteers have been restoring the Black Widow, locating rare parts for the aircraft, and raising funds toward the project with the intention of returning the P-61B to flying condition. In 2024, the P-61B was named "Moonbeam Dream" by the Mid-Atlantic Air Museum and received pin-up girl nose art painted by Jennifer "Hot Rod Jen" Thomas, an artist who specializes in automotive pinstriping and aircraft nose art.

The unusual-looking and large Northrop P-61 Black Widow was the first U.S. operational warplane designated as a night fighter. A complex aircraft, the P-61B Black Widow was an all-metal, twin-engine, twin-boom design equipped with radar and armed with four 20 mm (.79 in) cannon in the lower fuselage and four .50 in (12.7mm) machine guns in a dorsal turret. Despite its size, the P-61B was fast, with a top speed of 366 miles per hour (589 km/h, 318 kn) and had a service ceiling of 33,100 feet (10,100 m). The Black Widow was crewed by a pilot, radar operator, and gunner. Introduced in 1944, the Black Widow was used successfully as a night fighter in the European Theater, Pacific Theater, China-Burma-India Theater, and the Mediterranean Theater. Today, only four of the 744 P-61 Black Widows built survive in museums.

The America's Sweethearts are a girl group based in New York City and are one of the annual entertainment groups to perform at the Mid-Atlantic Air Museum's World War II Weekend. The group brings the style of 1940s swing music to audiences at events throughout the United States. Musical pieces originally composed and sung by The Andrews Sisters are favorites of the group to perform. The girl group's Retro-style outfits complement their musical performances and pay tribute to the history and style of the musical pieces they perform.

On Saturday morning at the 2026 Mid-Atlantic Air Museum's World War II Weekend, the members of the America's Sweethearts agreed to do a brief photo shoot with "Moonbeam Dream". The ladies in their red dresses looked fantastic next to the colorful nose art featuring a pin-up girl wearing a similar style dress. The photo shoot was an excellent opportunity for photos with the girl group and the museum's rare Northrop P-61B Black Widow.


MOONBEAM DREAM
AIRCRAFT COMMANDER
LT LOGAN SOUTHFIELD


MOONBEAM


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Distelfink Airlines

Est. 2013





ABOUT DISTELFINK AIRLINES



My late grandfather, John Brey, and I at the 2007 Geneseo Airshow. This was one of the few times that we had our photo taken together at an airshow.

The story of "Distelfink Airlines" begins in the early 1990s when my late grandfather, John Brey, began building and flying remote-controlled model aircraft in his retirement. He enjoyed the hobby and quickly amassed a large fleet of model airplanes, which filled his garage and woodworking shop. He gave a name to his fleet of aircraft, "Distelfink Airlines". For the symbol of his fleet, he chose the Pennsylvania Dutch/German hex sign featuring the "Distelfink", a colorful bird that is a symbol of good luck and happiness. This hex sign and symbol is very common on Pennsylvania Dutch/German barns in Eastern Pennsylvania and an important part of our local culture. He had custom "Distelfink" decals made for all his airplanes and had T-shirts made with "Distelfink Airlines" printed on them. It wasn't long before curious people began asking about "Distelfink Airlines" and what it was. My grandfather told anyone who asked that "Distelfink Airlines" was a new startup airline that was going to offer service between Lehigh Valley International Airport and Philadelphia International Airport, with more routes to come soon.

In addition to flying his model airplanes, my grandfather enjoyed attending airshows, and we traveled to airshows together for almost 20 years. My grandfather enjoyed collecting aviation memorabilia and focused on collecting items related to Charles Lindbergh and his airplane, the "Spirit of St. Louis", and Hubley and Wyandotte metal toy airplanes. He also enjoyed local aviation history and often talked about the time when famous aviator Amelia Earhart visited the Lehigh Valley in the early 1930s to raise funds for her failed attempt to become the first woman to fly around the world.

Established in 2013 in memory of my grandfather, "Distelfink Airlines" is an online aviation newsletter that carries on a tradition of sharing a love for aviation that my grandfather shared with me. This newsletter features photographs and writings on a variety of aviation topics. The logo chosen for "Distelfink Airlines" is the same hex sign that my grandfather selected for his fleet of remote-controlled model aircraft many years ago. This proud symbol of local Pennsylvania Dutch/German culture is joined by a pair of Consolidated TBY Sea Wolf torpedo bombers, the aircraft built locally in Allentown during World War II, which is such an important part of our local aviation history. Thank you for reading "Distelfink Airlines" and sharing in the passion for aviation that my grandfather shared with me.

"Distelfink Airlines" is an online newsletter featuring the aviation photography and writings of Corey J. Beitler. Contributions from guest photographers and writers are sometimes featured and are used only with prior permission. Public domain and/or copyright free images are utilized for some articles. All text and images are copyright to the original owners and may not be reproduced or reused without permission.