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AVIATION CONNECTIONS: NEWSLETTER

FALL 2023

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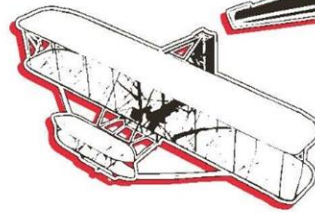
Eastern Carolina Aviation Heritage Foundation

OCTOBER 2023

9th Annual Partnership Event

GO THE DISTANCE

*It is possible to
fly without motors,*



*...but not without
knowledge and skill.*

— Wilbur Wright

What a fun night filled with delicious food, tasty spirits and wonderful fellowship. Guests, members and sponsors experienced food samplings from five terrific caterers. These included The Flame, Havelock Tourist & Event Center, Moore's Olde Time Barbeque, Mucho Bueno, and Sagebrush. There was so much delicious food which included shrimp bisque, ribs, pork sliders, tamales, mini quiche, not to mention the apple cobbler, brownies, fresh baked cookies and cheesecake.

Shortway Brewing Company was on hand to provide a sampling of tasty adult beverages. All this and an opportunity to compete in the First Annual ECAHF Air Show, flying paper airplanes, of course. The competition for the plane traveling most distance was fierce, but friendly. Navy CAPT Belmont, CO of FRC-East, was the winner with a flight of over 55 feet! Congratulations, sir!!



Competitors preparing for the Show.

9th Annual Partnership Event

October 17, 2023

The Fall Partnership is held to celebrate our members and sponsors.
Thanks to these sponsors for their support of this free event.
Please remember to patronize these fine businesses.



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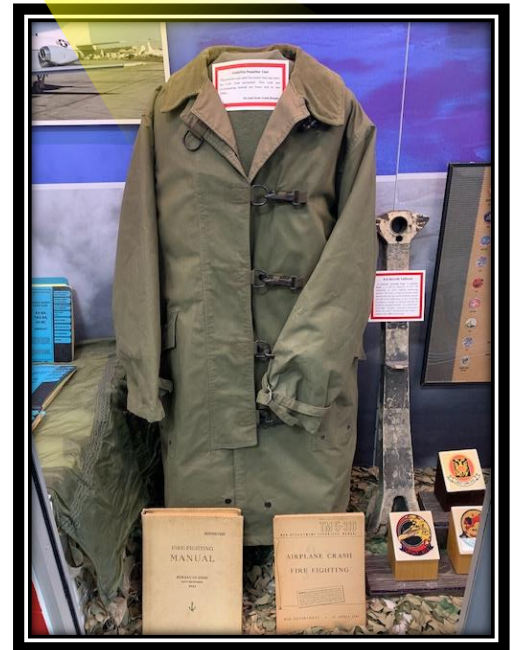
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Spotlight an Exhibit



A new US Marine Corps Crash Crew/Fire Fighter exhibit has been opened to honor the men and women who serve in this capacity.

The highlight of the exhibit is a late 1940's Crash Crew/Fire Fighter Coat. This protective coat with fire resistant lining was worn by Crash Crew personnel. Firefighting equipment has progressed over the years to offer equipment and clothing which adds more protection for the firefighter.

In addition, a restricted 1943 Fire-Fighting Manual published in 1943 by the Bureau of Ships – Navy Department is displayed. Along side this rare find, is the TM5-316: Airplane Crash Fire Fighting Manual developed by the War Department and published on April 17, 1944.

Visit the Aviation Exhibits today at the Havelock Tourist & Event Center. The hours of operation are Monday-Friday, 8am-5pm and Saturday, 10am-5pm.



Norman Fetzer: Navy Blue

By Barry Fetzer, ECAHF Historian

Fall 2023 ECAHF Newsletter

This is the third and final column in a three-column series about my Uncle Norman Fetzer (Aug 1920-Dec 2004), my dad's elder brother, who was a Navy pilot during WWII.

While serving as an advanced flight instructor at NAS Pensacola, Florida (an assignment he hoped to continue until released from active duty after the end of WWII), Norman crash landed a Navy aircraft into one of his family's farm fields near his boyhood home of Bedford, Ohio. He had exhausted the fuel in his aircraft, or so went the hushed family story. That unforgivable mistake led to his naval aviator wings being "clipped", meaning he was withdrawn from flight status, and reassigned overseas to an ACORN unit. He was permitted to continue wearing his wings while in uniform but never flew a Navy aircraft again.

It was mostly photographic evidence that led to my determining the type of unit Norman served in overseas during the final stages of WWII and early in the allied occupation of Japan following Victory over Japan (VJ) Day. I have no written records (like military orders) nor did I have detailed conversations with him about this phase of his service with the US Navy.

Norman mentioned one time to me that he worked in a unit that had a role in the disposal of enemy aircraft. This is the reason for the many aircraft-related war trophies he brought home from Japan and also my assumption as I mention below that the ACORN unit to which Norman was attached had a secondary mission to dispose of war material.

But between online resources, the limited conversations I had with my uncle, and the photographic evidence, we have formed a picture of Norman's service in occupied Japan with an ACORN unit.

(From an on-line WWII chat site), "An ACORN was a tailored unit designed to carry out the rapid construction and subsequent operation of a landplane and seaplane advance base. Each ACORN had a construction battalion attached to it, as well as trained personnel to operate the control tower, field lighting, areological unit, transportation, medical, berthing, and messing facilities. A Construction Battalion Maintenance Unit (CBMU) also accompanied each ACORN to maintain the base after the initial construction was completed and the construction battalion had been withdrawn. During the war, ACORNs were established in such places as Guadalcanal, Espiritu Santo, Green Island, Rendova, Treasury Island and Majuro as well as others.

The specific duties of an ACORN were to maintain the runways, hangars, and all other allied airfield facilities in operating condition, operate the control tower, field lighting, areological unit, transportation pool, communications, and medical facilities. It also provided berthing and messing accommodations both for itself and for transient aircraft squadrons, which may arrive on very short notice. In the early stages of its

operation, following the initial landing, the ACORN was operated in close conjunction with a Naval Construction Battalion, familiarly known as the “Seabees”. The Seabee unit built the airstrips, docks, roads, and also set up the buildings which replace the tents pitched by the ACORN the first day ashore. Once past this construction stage the ACORN was firmly established and the need for the Seabees ended. Meanwhile, the ACORN carried out its function as an operating airfield, often utilizing temporary runways or those converted from captured enemy airstrips. The actual maintenance, repair and servicing of the planes was handled by a CASU-Combat Aircraft Service Unit—which either landed with the ACORN, or arrived after the strip had been completed. The CASU readies new planes for delivery to carriers or land-based combat duty and handles service jobs which would tie up carrier operation if attempted on shipboard. Thus, we see that the ACORN unit, plus the Seabees and the CASUs form a team whose sole purpose is to provide a speedy, efficient, airfield management and whose end product is more naval planes in the air than would be possible through carrier operation alone. In short, the history of the ACORN is the history of a ‘*stationary carrier*’.



**Japanese Zero piston “liberated” by Norman while serving with an ACORN unit in occupied Japan converted to an ashtray and now in the possession of my son.
Fetzer family photo.**

As is sometimes said of war, “Amateurs focus on operations, experts on logistics”. The “sleeping giant” that Japanese Admiral Yamamoto, mastermind of the 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor, allegedly wrote he was afraid he had awakened in the attack, was the massive and unstoppable logistics effort the US initiated following the attack, a logistics effort that would eventually overwhelm the Japanese Empire.

So, ACORNS were about the enormous logistics efforts necessary to prosecute the War across tens of thousands of miles of Pacific Ocean, ending eventually in defeat of the Empire of Japan. In planning before and throughout the years of WWII, war planners, including those in the Office of Naval Operations, had envisioned the need for advanced bases to enable allied military forces to leap frog across the vast Pacific Ocean. One of these advanced base concepts—in this case advanced *airbase* concepts—was an

“ACORN” unit (an acronym for Aviation Construction-Ordnance-Repair-Navy), a smaller component of a larger group of advanced bases called “OAKs”.

According to the website <https://www.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/USN/Admin-Hist/O21-AdvanceBases/AdvanceBases-6.html> in a piece called “The Logistics of Advanced Bases”, WWII naval operations orders directed that “[Larger advanced bases] are the backbone of advance bases. They do not, however, constitute a complete structure. Lighter and more flexible elements were wanting, the equivalent of arms and legs, eyes and ears, fingers and toes. By June 1942, plans were being made for the first limited offensive which was initiated in August by the landings on Guadalcanal and Tulagi. The experience of the war had already demonstrated the prominent importance of air power both for purely naval and for amphibious operations. Complementary smaller and more specialized units were a manifest necessity.

Perhaps the most important of the new units were called ACORNS. The first directive, dated 4 July 1942, explained succinctly the concept and purpose.

1. The increasing importance and land-based aircraft in operations in the Pacific area and the necessity for additional aviation operational facilities to provide for new airplanes being delivered at an increasing rate makes it mandatory that a large-scale program of procurement and assembly of airfield materials and plane servicing facilities be undertaken. These assemblies will be designed to facilitate the rapid construction and operation of mutually supporting island air bases, or in conjunction with amphibious operations, the quick repair and operation of captured enemy airfields.

2. Each airfield assembly will include the minimum amount of material and equipment consistent with rapid construction of airfields and efficient servicing of the operating planes under combat conditions. Due consideration should be given to the possibility that it may be desirable to transport an advance echelon of the subject assemblies by air.

3. Facilities of each airfield will be designed to service one carrier group.

This plan ordered the shipment of the first eight ACORNS as soon as possible and set a schedule of dates of readiness for shipment running from 25 August to 30 September. Their schedule required the earmarking of nearly the total landing field mat which could be secured. Diversion of both material and personnel [from larger non-air and larger advanced bases] was authorized. The Director, Naval Transportation Service, was requested to make the necessary shipping available, and the Bureaus were instructed to furnish the requisite data with regard to tonnage, cubage, and heavy lifts to the Loading Officer of the Twelfth Naval District.”

Norman regretfully left his bride, Cecelia, and deployed overseas as an officer with an ACORN unit, where in addition to duties engaged in establishing and operating advanced allied air bases, (in this case more often than not resurrecting, repairing, and restocking airbases abandoned by the Japanese military), his ACORN likely had the additional responsibilities (although not specifically stated as a mission in the documentation I could find) for disposal of enemy equipment abandoned during their defeats.

This enemy war equipment disposal mission could be the reason Norman brought home Japanese aircraft equipment and other naval equipment as war trophies

including aircraft gauges, navigation equipment, engine components, and optical equipment.



A telescope hacksawed from a Japanese warship of some type by Norman during his time in Occupied Japan. Fetzer Family Photo.



Norman peering through the liberated Japanese telescope with his mother, Mary Fetzer. Note the unidentified lighthouse in the background between them, circa 1947. Fetzer Family Photo.

Norman did his own “leap frogging” across the Pacific on his way to his final destination—the main islands of Japan—in his role as an ACORN officer. Photographic evidence of his journey includes arriving in Okinawa shortly after it was declared secure and possibly before VJ Day on September 2, 1945.

No wonder Norman’s first stop was Okinawa, site of the bloodiest battle of the Pacific and an island with multiple airfields that needed repair and resurrection for use by the allies in their plan to assault the main islands of Japan and thereby end WWII. Okinawa was bolstered with one of the largest advanced base efforts ever conceived, including (according to Wikipedia) four Seabee brigades “establishing ‘Naval Base Okinawa’ following the battle. The Navy repaired and did expansion of the airfields and deep-water ports on Okinawa. putting the United States Armed Forces only 350 miles from Japan's home islands.”



Norman Fetzer in Okinawa posing with a Japanese narrow-gauge railroad locomotive, circa August 1945, marked with the words “Tokyo Express”. Fetzer Family photo.



Norman Fetzer at an expansive US graveyard on Okinawa, circa August 1945. Fetzer Family photo.

From Okinawa, and the establishment of advanced bases and war material disposal efforts there, the photographic evidence shows that Norman ended up on the Japanese main island of Honshu with an ACORN unit, putting Japanese Naval Airbase Ominato in northern Honshu back in operation as a US Navy airbase.

While in northern Honshu, it was not “all work and no play” for Norman and his men, as the following photo shows. While I don’t know for certain, knowing my Uncle Norman as I did (and his wife, my Aunt Cecelia, who would not stand for such

foolishness), I doubt Norman took advantage of the prostitutes, licensed or not, and regardless of the below photo.



**Norman mugging for the camera next to a “licensed prostitute quarters” sign in occupied Japan, circa late 1945, likely taken in the northern Honshu city of Mutsu.
Fetzer Family photo.**



**Norman Fetzer posing with a Hellcat “Hot Lips”, circa 1945, in Japan after VJ Day, likely a carrier-based aircraft at US Navy Airbase Ominato, northern Honshu, Japan.
Fetzer Family photo.**

My dad was a paperwork packrat and saved so many papers and so many photographs from his youth. And it’s a good thing he was, at least from the perspective of eventually knowing some details about his brother Norman’s duties in occupied Japan. It was the two following photos I located amongst my grandmother’s things that my father had retained after his mother’s death that confirmed the few things I heard from Norman himself about his service with an ACORN.



Norman (top left) at Naval Airbase Ominato, Japan, circa 1946, pictured with his ACORN unit. From Wikipedia: “The Ōminato Guard District was the major navy base for the Imperial Japanese Navy in northern Honshu before and during World War II. Located in Mutsu Bay (at the present-day city of Mutsu), Aomori Prefecture, the Ōminato Guard District (including Ominato naval airbase where this photo of Norman was taken) was responsible for control of the strategic Tsugaru Strait between Honshu and Hokkaidō.” Fetzer Family Photo.



Ensign Norman Fetzer, USN (R), circa late in 1945, Ominato Naval Airbase, Japan with 54 Acorn unit members. The handwritten poster above the 54 ACORN unit insignia and below Old Glory says, “From little acorns big oaks grow, US Naval Airbase Ominato”, the poster a callout to the naval planners who coined the terms for larger advanced bases “Oaks” and their smaller, more flexible and supple subordinate advanced bases called “ACORNS”. Ensign Fetzer is fourth from left with his cover (or hat) in hand. Fetzer Family photo.

The Empire of Japan capitulated against the weight of the US logistical onslaught...the “giant” that Admiral Yamamoto feared he had awakened...and, of course, against also the weight of the atomic destruction of the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and the Russians declaring war against Japan and massing forces for an attack. The Japanese surrendered unconditionally and World War II was over.

Operations at Ominato Airbase winding down and the need for ACORN units now “old news”, Norman was transferred back to the US and to civilian life with Cecelia.

Norman moved his family to Los Angeles and, still itching for the excitement he found as a naval aviator, he became an LA motorcycle cop. He sired a couple of boys, was injured in a motorcycle accident, and ultimately moved back to Florida. He lived out his remaining years near Miami, less than 700 miles from Pensacola where he had experienced some of the best years of his life.



**2nd Lieutenant Barry Fetzer in 1977 on the NAS Whiting Field flight line, trying to fill his Uncle Norman's shoes some 35 years after his uncle strode the same flight lines.
Fetzer Family Photo.**

Years later, I had the opportunity to disturb some of the same air—disrupt the same Pensacola, Florida “Bernoulli's” (as aviators are prone to say)—that Norman did way back in 1942. I was vaguely aware of what he did during WWII but, focused on my own life and trying hard not to be washed-out of training as a student naval aviator, I concentrated on my survival vice on what my uncle had done. That is, until now, having the great honor to research Norman Fetzer's Navy career and share a little of his story.

While I came achingly close several times in my own naval aviation career as a Marine pilot, I never exhausted the fuel in any of the aircraft in which the American People had entrusted me. But there went I but by the grace of God.

Next time: My brother-in-law's father and Charles Lindbergh meet in NC.





Please Join ECAHF Each Year

ECAHF needs your support to share the story of the advancement of military aircraft and those who have made it possible in eastern North Carolina. Your membership helps to provide resources to encourage students to acquire science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) skills through interactive exhibits and programs.

Together, by joining forces as members of ECAHF, we will help honor Marines' vital mission in advancing military aviation, a mission they've accomplished since 1942 when MCAS Cherry Point was commissioned as a USMC airfield. In addition, your membership will help influence a new generation of aviation enthusiasts and skilled workers for the future. Be a part of this challenging and exciting mission.

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