



The ThunderWord

Thunderbird Field EAA Chapter 1217

July 2021

Scottsdale, Arizona

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

Greetings from my corner of the hangar. Last month John Koplin took us on a journey through space and a tour of the International Space Station. The amount of engineering and logistics that went into creating it was amazing. A big thanks to Chapter member John Davis for getting the speaker lined up.

With the summer heat in the blast furnace mode there isn't much action unless you get to the airport at sun up for a couple of hours. A few weeks ago Jerry Lane and John Davis stopped by and we put the wings on my Curtiss Jr. on a scorching hot day. Now it's just a matter of putting jury struts on, rigging the ailerons and a dozen or so nuts. Hopefully the magic box of parts that came with it is about empty.

The annual Oshkosh pilgrimage will start for me on the day after our meeting this month. If you are attending, stop by our Chapter 1217 Happy Hour and enjoy a Spotted Cow or two, and some of the local delicacy of fried Lake Perch.

See you around the aerodrome!

Curtis

JULY CHAPTER MEETING

The July meeting of Thunderbird Field EAA Chapter 1217 will be held on Thursday, July 15th, beginning at 7 pm in the Thunderbird Room, Scottsdale Airport Terminal building. The address is 15000 North Airport Drive. For our July meeting we have recruited Jack Norris to talk about the Tucano replica kits he is selling. The plane is an all metal, two-seater where the back seater has an elevated seat so they have excellent forward visibility. The plane is a scaled down version of the Shorts Tucanos that are based on the south side of Deer Valley Airport.

The company website is www.flyinglegendusa.com for the Tucano Replica. Folks that want to see the Jabiru Supercharger project can look at it on www.n530mh.tumblr.com

Guests are always welcome!

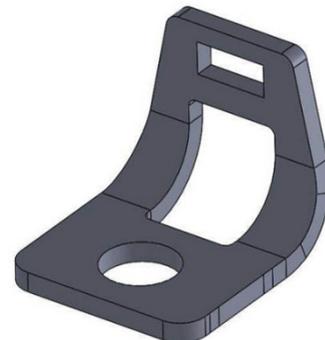
AIRVENTURE HAPPY HOUR

It has now been a 23-year tradition of Chapter 1217 members attending the Oshkosh AirVenture Fly-In to get together one evening and compare sightings and stories. This year on the first day of the Fly-In, we will have our annual AIRVENTURE HAPPY HOUR AND FISH FRY at WENDT'S ON THE LAKE. Come and join us for some traditional Wisconsin food and libations. That's on Monday, July 26th around 7 pm.

If you want to plug it into your GPS, the address is N9699 Lake Shore Road, Van Dyne, WI 54979-9703 (920) 688-5231; www.wendtsonthelake.com. They are located 3.8 miles south of the seaplane base.

BOLT ON ZIP TIE TAB

Terrible wiring and loose hoses and brake lines have plagued homebuilders for years. A company named TMR Customs has come up with a CNC laser cut Zip Tie Tab that sells for \$15.95 for a pack of ten. For more info on how you can order this new product check out their website at TMRCustoms.com



SCOTTSDALE AIRPORT UPDATE

Scottsdale Airport has received an \$11 million federal grant for runway rehabilitation. The project focuses on rehabilitating the runway and will provide no new renovations to the airport itself. This is the largest federal grant ever received by the airport and will cover expenses to ensure the airport's infrastructure is maintained in excellent condition and best serve all aircraft customers.

The project is strictly rehabilitation and does not increase the length or weight capacity. The airport has always had the ability to handle much larger aircraft with the limiting factor being the runway width. No mention has been publicly made about increasing the width.

The airport closed on July sixth for forty-five days for the runway improvement project.

FAMOUS FLYOVERS

While flyovers are common at sporting events today, one particular flyby in 1943 caught spectators and players by surprise as it was totally unplanned!

Lt. Jack W. Watson of the U.S. Army Air Force and his crew, along with three other crews, were flying to Maine as a stopover enroute to England. As they passed New York City, the 21-year-old freckled-face Watson realized that the World Series was just starting and decided to do an impromptu visit. The flight of four Flying Fortresses buzzed Yankee Stadium where the Yankees were taking on the St. Louis Cardinals in Game 1 of the 1943 World Series. They enjoyed it so much, they decided to make two more passes, on the third pass flying so low, one reporter said it looked like they would clip the stadium's flag poles!

New York Mayor Fiorello La Guardia, who attended the game, was outraged and demanded the USAAF investigate. They did, but given the need for pilots in World War II, the four pilots, including Watson, were given a \$75 fine and the matter was dropped.

As for Watson, he would go on to complete 35 missions in the war effort and in a radio interview remarked that he hoped Mayor La Guardia, would forgive him. La Guardia, hearing of Watson's plea, sent him a cable stating:

"Delighted to get your message. All is forgiven. Congratulations. I hope you never run out of altitude. Happy landings. Will be seeing you soon."

It turns out the daughter of one of these pilots might fly with us at a tour stop this summer, so she told us about this amazing story and we wanted to share it with you!

THE TOP TEN FLYING FILMS

Want to start an argument with fellow aviation nuts, bring up the topic of best airplane films of all time. It seems aircraft have appeared on screen since the early days of the silent film era. At first, they were perceived as objects of wonder and stars in their own right.

Then they became tools of war – an endless fascination – and finally they came to be regarded as just another means of transport, only interesting to screenwriters when they went wrong or were hijacked.

Films that really have something to say about the thrills and romance of flying – films that are stuff of inspiration to pilots – are few and far between. Happily, they do exist and many of them are available to stream online. So, taking my highly subjective top ten in reverse order:

#10 One Six Right

We have been waiting for years for a film that would capture the spirit of contemporary private flying – a film about people like us and aircraft like the ones we all fly. Early web previews and trailers suggested that *One Six Right*, the story of California's Van Nuys Airport, might be that film, albeit in documentary format.

Sadly, for all the stunning aerial footage that was shot, the end result was a very 'American' kind of talking-heads effort that is actually quite tedious in places.

There are some lovely episodes – a couple figuring in the extras included in the original

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The Flying Legends Tucano that this month's speaker will be talking about

DVD release – that almost justify putting One Six Right into my top ten, but it is included not more for what it represents than its qualities as a film.

As to that ultimate private flying film? Well, we are still waiting...

#9 The First of the Few

Made in 1942 and billed as 'the immortal story of the Spitfire', The First of the Few is actually a less-than-accurate and highly romanticized account of the gestation of that great aircraft. At the same time, it captures the feel of those distant times – the story runs from the Schneider Trophy era of 1920s to the middle of WWII – in a way that nothing made today could match.

Of course, it is a wartime flag-waver – but Germans and Italians are portrayed as people, not the kind of mindless automatons who are the 'enemy' in so many Hollywood war films.

Much of the flying footage is done with models, although the full-size Schneider floatplane replicas taxiing across water-tank based studio sets are wonders in their own way.

First of the Few factoid: if the fighter pilots David Niven is seen talking to at the start of the film appear to be convincing characters, it is because they were not actors but the real thing – serving wartime RAF Pilot Officers and NCOs.

#8 *Those Magnificent Men in their Flying Machines*

A firm favorite with old-aeroplane people, to judge by the number of them who give the

movie poster pride of place in their workshops,

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An in-flight view of the Flying Legends Tucano

Those Magnificent Men was a big-budget 1960s film that entailed the construction of a number of flying replicas.

For what was intended to be a comedy, great attention was paid to Edwardian period clothes, cars and sets, and aeronautical advisor Allen Wheeler made sure the aircraft were equally authentic – so much so, that most of them could only be flown safely in the early morning or late evening hours.

In particular, the Antoinette proved downright dangerous until it was rebuilt with ailerons in place of wing-warping and a more modern blunt-edged wing section.

Famously, the film cast the best character and comedy actors of the 1960s – Terry-Thomas, Tony Hancock, Eric Sykes and even Benny Hill. Less well known is the fact that the erection of the ‘Brookley’ aerodrome set, complete with a section of banked motor racing track, marked the civil flying

renaissance of RAF Booker, now better known as Wycombe Air Park.

#7 *The Blue Max*

Based on Jack Hunter’s well-researched WWI novel, *The Blue Max* is about as close as any film has come to matching the aerial spectacle of Howard Hugh’s legendary 1930 masterpiece, *Hell’s Angels*.

By the time *The Blue Max* was made, flyable WWI aircraft were few and far between, so 20th Century Fox commissioned Fokker DVII and Dr1 replicas as well a pair of Pfalz scouts and a couple of very convincing SE5s. The ‘extras’, German and British, were almost inevitably mildly disguised Tiger Moths and Stampes.

While there is much that is unconvincing about *The Blue Max* – not least the cod, aircraft-in-a-screaming-dive sound effects – one or two of the aerial set pieces are breathtaking and even lyrical.

For one scene, Derek Piggot flew both of the film's Fokker Dreidekker replicas under an impossibly narrow bridge arch – he quite literally had four feet to spare, either side – and in another, he flew an aerobatic sequence in a parasol-wing Morane 230 that, allied with the camera tracking behind the spectators, is one of the great works of cinematic art.

Blue Max factoid: George Peppard learned to fly in preparation for his role as Bruno Stachel. The insurers frustrated his ambition to pilot any

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of the replica aircraft during filming, although he did get to taxi the Morane 230 for the cameras. He liked it so much that, once production had wrapped, he bought one of his own.

#6 Hell's Angels

A 1930 film in the top ten of 2020? Hell's Angels is a melodrama very much of its time but justifies its place here by being one of the first films to put cameras in aircraft, by including the biggest and most dangerous aerial dogfights ever shot, and being the brainchild of one of the most inventive – and ultimately deranged – perfectionists in aviation, Howard Hughes.

Stories of the making of the film are legend. Hughes assembled a fleet of over fifty aircraft, including a genuine DH4, which served as an aerial camera platform, several SE5s and three Fokker DVIIIs. When he needed to show battle damage, with the cameras rolling Hughes had his armorer fire live rounds from a machine gun at sections of aircraft.

He hired big twin-engine Sikorsky biplanes to be dressed up as a Gotha bomber. When the aircraft was put into a spin for the cameras it proved irrecoverable, and it took the poor devil operating the smoke pots all the way down to destruction with it. This stuff is all in the film and still grabs you by the guts after eighty years because it is not fake – it's again the real thing.

Hell's Angels factoid: At first, Howard Hughes thought he could save money by employing amateurs instead of members of the Hollywood stunt pilots' association. He put four private pilots in four rotary-engined Thomas Morse Scouts: none of those who survived takeoff got back down on the same aerodrome.

#5 The Right Stuff

You might agree with me that space flight is the ultimate expression of aviation, and that space films should therefore figure in the list. The Right Stuff doesn't include much of the hazardous jet test flying that makes the late Tom Wolfe's book by the same name one of the great aviation reads (and I have to say that the book is better).

Devoting instead much early running time to the Yeager 'sound barrier' story, the film changes gear when it gets to the Mercury programme. The story of America's first astronauts is embroidered here, but wonderfully so – and where it really matters the truth is served.

Much original NASA footage is woven into the space scenes, the aft-looking view from a Mercury launch giving new definition to the term 'rate of climb'.

Right Stuff film factoid: John Glenn's unbelievable sounding orbital flight commentary in the film, 'fireflies' floating outside his capsule window and all, is taken verbatim from the original NASA voice recorder transcript.

#4 The Rocketeer

A retro cartoon strip, The Rocketeer might in another world have been source material for a Netflix documentary on Howard Hughes. Happily, it was spotted thirty years ago by Touchstone Pictures, who made it into a superb, knockabout action thriller that not only takes eye-watering liberties with Hughes' story but enlists as a Nazi spy a very Errol Flynn-like Hollywood actor, played by a mustachioed Timothy Dalton.

The film quite literally opens with the hangar doors, leading straight into a flying sequence

with a Gee Bee racer that would have had any true-blooded aviator standing in his cinema seat.

The rest of the film is no less frenetic yet, for all the cartoonish action, it tips its metaphorical hat to real figures of 1920s and 30s aviation.

Thus, when the hero escapes from his hangar by gliding away under a scale model of the 'Spruce Goose' flying boat, Howard Hughes murmurs "the sonofabitch will fly" – a throwaway line purely for the propeller heads in the audience.

#3 Battle of Britain

Patriots and anoraks would no doubt have had the Battle of Britain at the top of the list, even if some of them can never forgive the production crew for blowing up one of Duxford's historic hangars in making the film.

Indeed, in pursuit of authenticity, aerial coordinator Hamish Mahaddie searched Britain for Spitfires and Hurricanes that could be made airworthy and the producers bought from the Spanish air force much of its recently pensioned off Hispano Buchon (licence-built Messerschmitt 109) fleet.

British, Canadian, American and Spanish pilots flew their hearts out in the making of the aerial battle scenes, and the storyline was extraordinarily faithful to the real events of 1940.

The Battle of Britain is more of an honest, accurate historical record than most latter-day documentaries. However, for the same reason it lacks the humor, beauty and romance that put the first and second-place films above it in my list.

#2 Catch 22

Forget the whine that the book is better (it's not) forget the rather flat feeling television remake, which lacked class and grandeur, and marvel at the seventeen-ship B-25 squadron Frank Tallman assembled for the cinema film, David Watkin's outstanding cine photography and a cast that included some of

the finest and most charismatic actors ever seen on screen.

Of course, it is yet another war movie, but one with some of the best and most hairy flying scenes ever staged for the cameras. Once you've seen it, you'll never forget the great mass takeoff, shot in a howling crosswind with one or two sick engines trailing smoke.

It takes more than action to make a satisfying flying film: *Catch 22's* great strength lies in the compelling combination of period atmosphere and black satire: war, you think, really must be like this hell.

Catch 22 film factoid: dancing around on a pontoon off the beach, 'Hungry Joe' was supposed to have been cut in two on screen by a low-flying B-25. However, even Frank Tallman could not wheel one of these big, twin-engine bombers tightly enough over the confines of the dunes and hills on location to get a convincing shot.

A hastily borrowed Stinson L-5 'spotter plane' was substituted, but there was no time to get it painted up – hence the odd non-military color scheme it wears in the movie.

#1 The Great Waldo Pepper

Set in the great barnstorming and movie stunt-flying era of the 1920s, Waldo Pepper is in every sense a pilots' film – in fact, the pilots' film. Based on a story by director George Roy Hill, who flown as a US Marine Corps pilot in WWII and Korea, and directed *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, and *The Sting*; Waldo Pepper is genuinely a distinguished film-maker and aviator's salute to the great flyers of the past.

Hill not only used where he could genuine aircraft of the era – 'Waldo's' Hisso-engined Standard biplane and his rival 'Axel Olsson's' Curtiss Jenny – but sent his actors and cameras aloft in them. Blue-screen studio shots were only used where the flying – and crashing – absolutely could not be done for real.

Thus, when you see someone climbing out on the wing in flight and then from one biplane to

another, it is the real thing. The only concessions to it being 1975 and not 1925 were concealed slim-line parachutes for the wing-walkers and disguised Tiger Moths substituting for Standards or Jennies when there was a lake or fairground to be smashed into.

However, *The Great Waldo Pepper* is far from being a mindless action movie; it somehow manages to capture all the beauty, romance and tragedy of flight in one story. Nothing made since has even come near it.

Waldo Pepper film factoid: aerobatic star Art Scholl was employed to fly the 'Styles Monoplane' – actually a canopy-less Chipmunk with dummy wing bracing wires – in the film's blood-curdling low-level outside loop sequence. The actor who played Styles was practicing his 'negative-G face' in front a dressing room mirror when the director arrived and told him that he'd be doing it for real, with Art flying from the front seat.



Chapter member Pat McGarry flying his Pitts Special named Racer X at the annual pylon racing school in Reno Nevada last month

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LONGEZ AND SONEX

Tom Partin has decided to stop flying and has two airplanes for sale at Thunder Ridge air park (AZ28), a 180hp LongEz and a 120hp Sonex. Contact Bertha Partin at bmpartin@gmail.com

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