

# ***FORWARD in FLIGHT***

Volume 17, Issue 4

Quarterly Magazine of the Wisconsin Aviation Hall of Fame

Winter 2019-2020

**John L. Jerstad**  
Congressional Medal of Honor

**2019 WAHF Inductions**  
Wisconsin's best

**Houdini as a Flyer**





# FORWARD in FLIGHT

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#### 2019 WAHF Induction Ceremony:

Chris Campbell,  
WAHF Board member,  
introducing 2019  
WAHF inductee  
Lt. Alfred Gorham  
(posthumous)  
with plaque on screen.

(Lt. Gorham was the only  
Wisconsin member of  
the Tuskegee Airmen.)



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# President's Message

## By Tom Thomas

Welcome to 2020, as a new decade of aviation in Wisconsin begins. Change continues, and that's a good thing.

We have had a banner 2019, with talks, conference participations, and WAHF history displays around the state, at functions including Veterans Day in Madison and the Milwaukee Annual Bong Awards. We also have taken WAHF "out in the field" across the state, sharing Wisconsin's aviation history. In past years, we even had been requested to give WAHF presentations in the Upper Peninsula. Those have been some of our best.

One of those trips included a tour of the former K.I. Sawyer Air Force Base, which has now become the Marquette County Airport, also known as Sawyer International Airport. Located there is a Russian Military Inflight Refueling Tanker; it came from the Ukraine and is parked on the terminal ramp. A group of individuals had planned on modifying that tanker, turning it into a water bomber, primarily to fight fires on the west coast. The last time we checked, it is still there. Also, if you get up to Marquette, Michigan, please stop by their airport museum. It includes both a B-47 Strato-Jet and a B-52, virtually side by side. Other aircraft of that era are there as well, and one can walk around and take lots of photos.

In Madison, on Veterans Day, the attendance was quite high this year. HyVee covered 699 free meals on Veterans Day,

November 11. It was a great day for the Vets at HyVee and for WAHF. Combining friends of the Vets, there were well over 900 people who had a chance to see our WAHF displays. In total this year, adding up our talks across the state, over 2,000 people have had the opportunity to view our WAHF displays.

Earlier this year, I was able to reunite with Terri Donner, an intern from the Wisconsin Bureau of Aeronautics, who worked with us in the early 1980s. She had acquired her pilot's license and was hired to do the FAA 5010 Airport Master record updates across Wisconsin. Long ago, she had worked for us for three summers, and she left with plans to work for UPS.

As it turns out, Terri was hired by UPS. She also had three children, who all became balloon pilots when they turned 14. Her oldest son, Nick, went on to become a transport-rated pilot and was also hired by UPS. On June 6, 2018, operating out of Louisville, Kentucky, to Chicago-O'Hare, our Wisconsinite pilot, Terri Donner, and her son, Nick, were the first mother-son airline flight crew flying a commercial airline flight together. What a great testament to flying families in Wisconsin.

Again, Wisconsin is a leader in aviation.

Thank you for your support and continued membership. Wherever and whenever invited to present, your WAHF Board is working to foster and promote Wisconsin's aviation history.



**ABOVE left:** This young man received an airplane picture and a FiF magazine. He also found himself a Richard Bong collector card. Perhaps a future aviator?



**ABOVE right:** Terri Donner and Tom Thomas

**Forward in Flight**  
the only magazine dedicated exclusively to  
Wisconsin aviation history and today's aviation events.

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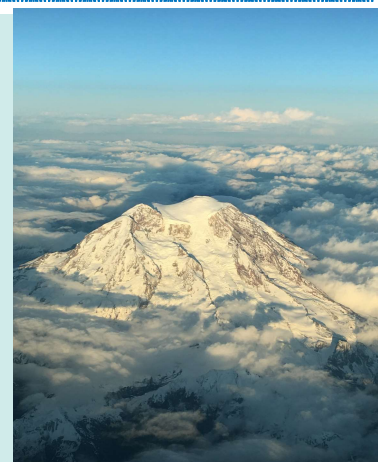
**The Wisconsin Aviation Hall of Fame is a non-profit membership organization** with a mission to collect and preserve the history of aviation in Wisconsin, recognize those who made that history, inform others of it, and promote aviation education for future generations.

### On the cover:

Top of the World:  
View from an airliner  
flying over majestic  
Mount Rainier in the  
State of Washington.

Photo courtesy of  
Harold Dahlstrom

© 2019 Harold Dahlstrom





## Our 1932 Franklin Sport 90 "Old Double Trouble"

By Patrick Weeden (assisted by Edmund Johnstone and Megan Smith)

One of my favorite things as the director of an aviation museum is learning new details about some of the rare aircraft in the collection. I'm not talking about memorizing technical details by re-reading William Juptner's excellent series on civil aircraft on a drab winter's day; I mean learning by making unexpected personal connections with museum visitors.

One such experience concerns our 1932 Franklin Sport 90. Most people have never heard of the ship, myself included. Joy Mfg Co., of Franklin, Pennsylvania, was a coal-mining equipment builder, which got into the aviation business in 1930. By 1933, the Depression caught up and aircraft production ceased after 35 planes were built. The Kelch Aviation Museum has serial no. 105, one of seven known to still exist.

All indications, including Juptner's text and Al Kelch's hand-written logbook notes, are that the Sport 90 was a handful to fly. It was built for aerobatic training and is inherently unstable. "Spirited" is a polite word for its handling characteristics. Confirmation of this came from an e-mail I received in 2017 from Megan Smith of Indiana. Her father, Edmund Johnstone, owned s/n 105 decades ago and she passed along an amusing story he had written about "Old Double Trouble."

Edited for space, here it is:

### **"Old Double Trouble," (Edmund Johnstone, per Megan Smith)**

It was the summer before my final semester at Purdue University and I had a summer job in Cincinnati. As was my usual practice, I visited all the airports in the vicinity. At one lonely corner of Lunken Airport was an old biplane. It was covered with morning glory vines and full of bee's nests. It had one lower wing missing and the top wing was held up with some old weathered boards. It looked like it might have been wading at some time when the nearby Ohio River jumped its banks. I was still taken with the flying stories from the 1930's, so I felt I had to save that old plane from the graveyard.

With some asking around, I got a name and made a phone call. It turned out that Nick, the owner of the plane, worked for an undertaker and lived in the funeral home. The missing lower wing was on one of the slabs in the basement of the morgue. Every night after work I went to the morgue, where Nick and I would work on the wing.

When school started again in the fall, I planned on flying the plane back into Aretz Airport, which was east of Lafayette. Back at school, I called on "Cap" Aretz at the airport office. When I told Cap that I wanted to borrow a parachute because I was going to fly my biplane back from Cincinnati, Cap (who had been a WWI pilot) advised me strongly that I hire someone who was familiar with the old biplane to fly it back. However, in my youth, I was very confident; it was my plane and I wanted to fly it back. Cap said no more, but just pulled out the chute

and slammed it across the counter. He then proceeded to stalk out into the inner office with disgust. I grabbed the chute and scurried to my car, so as to make my way back to the Lafayette train station.

Once I arrived, I hurried in to buy a ticket as the train was pulling in. I picked up my bags and ran out to the platform. Looking back, I noted that in my hurry I had left my car door wide open. I set the bags down, vaulted the fence, and ran back to slam the car door closed. The train was pulling out, so I vaulted the fence once again, grabbed my bags, and threw them up to the conductor. I grabbed the handhold by the door, managed to get my right foot on the step, spun around 90 degrees with my left foot, as the conductor grabbed my outstretched left arm and helped me get on board.

I had on old clothes, two duffle bags full of tools, and another small bag with my cloth helmet and goggles and a change of clothes. As I walked back through the train, I headed for an empty seat. I must have looked like a bum, since the woman sitting next to the seat I was about to occupy gave me a disapproving look. I thought, "Hallelujah, I'm a bum!" I put her out of her misery by choosing another seat. I then settled down for the long, slow train ride to Cincinnati. We stopped at every little station along the way.

Once in Cincinnati, I got a taxi to the YMCA; a sandwich; and two cans of bug spray. Early the next morning I rode a taxi to the airport. I needed to find a Designated Aircraft Mechanic Inspector (DAMI) to sign a ferry permit, so I started to make my rounds of the general aviation operators on the field.

At the first place I tried, the DAMI opened the drawer of his desk and pulled out a revolver, emptied the bullets, stuck the cylinder back in leaving one bullet, and slammed it on the desk. He said, "Here, find a corner and play Russian roulette. Save us from having to clean you up off the runway." At the next place, the DAMI merely held up his hands and shook his head with a vigorous *No*. There wasn't any use in trying to convince him, but I wasn't about to give up. So, I moved on to another. Finally, I found a maintenance inspector who was willing to sign off on a ferry permit. He was an older fellow who worked for a crop-dusting outfit.

The Hamilton Standard metal prop had been sent in after being involved in a previous ground-loop accident, then replaced with an old wood prop that would work with the Lambert engine. The DAMI told me to make one take-off only with that prop, because he was concerned about the glue joints on the laminations.

The right-hand lower wing was packed with wasps' nests. I removed all the inspection plates one at a time. Then I knelt down with a can in each hand, sprayed, and immediately danced backwards to avoid mayhem. Miraculously, I did not get stung. Finally, the left wing was attached; the rigging complete; and I was ready to go.





**BEFORE and AFTER:** “Old Double Trouble” as discovered at Lunken airport; and as currently restored at Kelch Aviation Museum

To take off into the wind, I would have to fly over the Ohio River. I was apprehensive since the Lambent engine was not to be trusted and my swimming skills were minimal at best. Therefore, I climbed up to the control tower and told the operator that I was non-radio and would like to take-off downwind, since the wind was light and the runway long. The WWII hold-over's only comment was, “As long as I know who y’ar and what y’ar flying.”

I had no brakes, so I taxied on the sod. The idle was set high, probably to keep the engine from quitting. Therefore, I had to keep s-turning vigorously, not only to see ahead but also to keep from building up too much speed. It must have made a spectacle. As I taxied past each open hangar, some onlooker would motion at those inside. Pretty soon I had a fairly good-sized audience waiting for a disaster.

I opened the throttle, making sure I held it straight. I wanted to make sure the engine kept running, so I held it on the ground with the tail high before easing carefully on the stick, expecting a Cub-type take-off. Suddenly I was staring at the sky through the cabane struts. The thing to do now was to control “Bucky.” I thought I had overreacted on the stick; what had been pointing straight up was now seemingly pointed straight down, although I am sure my surprise had exaggerated my perception.

Finally, by being very careful on the stick, I was able to get the thing flying level. I found out later (as I was rebuilding the biplane) that someone had stuck a thick-walled iron pipe down the tail post, which moved the C.G. aft. No wonder the former owner, Nick, had ground-looped on his take-off attempts. With the effects of decalage on the biplane, the C.G. would tend to move forward as A.O.A. increases. This exacerbated the aft C.G. effects. Therefore, I minimized the time in climb and was able to fly all the way back at 700 ft.

The flight back went reasonably smooth, considering I was anticipating an engine failure at any given moment. Finally, the grass X of Aretz airport at Lafayette appeared. I flew a normal pattern and lined up with the runway. I had been told that the Franklin had a fairly steep glide angle, so I made a high approach. Actually, it glided like a J-3 Cub, so I was too high and had to go around. Those on the ground thought that it was an intentional fly-by. The second approach was perfect.

On the rollout, it was okay, and then all of a sudden I was on a merry-go-round. Fortunately, I missed dragging a wingtip in a ground-loop. As it turned out, one of the control springs that connect the rudder horn to the tail wheel had broken, and thus pulled the tail wheel all the way over. Some of the onlookers came out and helped walk the plane to the tie-downs.

After “Old Double Trouble” was tied down, the head mechanic, “Bid” Shadley, came out to look it over. Bid was somewhat of a character, as were several other people at Aretz Airport. Bid stood back in front of the plane with a strange expression upon his face. He approached the airplane and began poking his finger through the fabric. Each time he poked the fabric, he would repeat the same words, “You flew this back?” (accompanied by a witch-like laugh). Followed by, “I have seen toilet paper stronger than this!” and more laughter. He continued poking until he got to a wing rib. He began rubbing the rib between his thumb and forefinger, and the rotted rib section gradually reduced to powder.

Well, at least I had flown it back in relatively smooth air.



*Patrick Weeden is the Executive Director of the Kelch Aviation Museum at Brodhead Airport (C37), a Board member of the Brodhead Pietenpol Assn., and a newly-elected Board member of WAHF. He is a private pilot and has been involved with vintage aircraft operation and restoration since childhood.*

## Substance Abuse and Dependence

“Our brain rewards us with the release of neuro-transmitters”

By Dr. Reid Sousek, AME

Substance abuse and dependence are topics that make many people uncomfortable. Some think substance abuse is not present in certain professions or socio-economic groups. This is not the case. Substance abuse and dependence are more common than most think. No profession, ethnicity, or age-group, is spared. And certainly the aviation community is not immune.

Substance abuse is a disease, not simply a matter of will-power or weakness. The disease may not even be noticed until adverse consequences arise. I have written about this topic in the past, but it is too important to let this topic fade from our memory. What is the scope of the problem?

The prevalence of alcohol dependence, according to the CDC, is just over 10% of the general population. While many have an image of alcoholics (or substance abusers) being homeless and living on the streets, actual homeless substance abusers only account for about 5% of alcoholics. Studies have not found any difference in the rates of substance dependence in pilots compared to the general population.

Some may wonder why people use substances to get drunk or high. In terms of biology and evolution, our brain rewards us with the release of “positive” neuro-transmitters. These make us feel good. We humans tend to repeat activities that make us feel good. Yet the underlying brain “reward pathway” can be “hijacked” on occasion and can reward even unhealthy behaviors. This hijacking occurs when we repeat “feel good” activity, even if the activity is unhealthy and not good for us.

If a drug or substance releases in a person a “positive” neuro-transmitter, it is easier to understand how that person could become addicted to the drug or substance. Even worse, while a normal drinker may receive “one unit” of reward from a drink, an addicted individual may get ten units (or 100 units) of reward from the same drink. Ultimately, substance dependence and addiction are diseases of the brain.

Many alcoholics appear relatively functional, and have jobs and families. Like everyone, they lead what appear to be normal lives — until their disease progresses. They can experience loss of control, compulsive use, and over-use, despite any adverse consequences they also experience.

### Aviators

As an Aviation Medical Examiner, and specifically a HIMS AME, I see many aviators with substance related concerns.

The HIMS Program (Human Intervention Motivation Study) is an occupational substance abuse treatment program. It helps us to coordinate the identification, treatment, and return to work of affected aviators. While the HIMS program is technically specific to commercial pilots, the general guidelines and concepts are used for private pilots and student pilots as well.

A single DUI, or a history of DUIs, for an aviator will often lead to a required HIMS evaluation. We have learned that

5% of pilots have had one DUI, and 0.5% of pilots have had two or more DUIs. It is legally important in these situations to learn when the DUI occurred and how severe the intoxication was at the time of the incident.

A single DUI from five or more years prior to an examination, with a Blood Alcohol Concentration of less than .15, will generally not require significant evaluation or a monitoring program. Yet it will still require documenting in MedXpress. Documentation including arrest reports, court records, and a personal statement may also be required.

A single DUI that occurred less than five years ago, however, or any DUI with a Blood Alcohol Concentration greater than .15 (or with a refused BAC test), will require further evaluation and will require deferral of the exam by the AME.

A history of two or more lifetime DUIs, or substance related events, will also require further evaluation and likely a Special Issuance with a two to five year monitoring period.

If, through the HIMS evaluation, it is determined that a substance dependence problem is present, the FAA will want to see evidence of the pilot’s active recovery.

There is a difference between recovery and abstinence. Recovery is a process and not an event. A so-called “dry” drunk has a higher risk of relapse, compared to someone in active recovery who is attending aftercare programs and regular AA/NA meetings.

### FAA definitions and Medical definitions

The FAA views substance dependence using the disease model. Substance dependence is a primary disease and not just a response to external factors (such as stress or other mental issues). There are thought to be genetic influences towards predisposition to substance dependence.

Substance dependence is a chronic disease and prone to relapse if not actively treated. The disease is also progressive and the person suffering from it tends to deteriorate over time. Loss of control, compulsive use, and continued use, despite adverse consequences, are hallmarks of substance dependence.

No person may act or attempt to act as a crewmember of a civil aircraft within 8 hours of consumption of an alcoholic beverage, while under the influence of alcohol or a drug that affects the person’s faculties in a way contrary to safety, or while having a blood alcohol concentration greater than 0.04 g/dL. (14 CFR 91.17)

A 1964 article by Harper and Albers evaluated presence of alcohol in general aviation fatalities. Of the 158 fatalities included in that study, 35.4% were positive for alcohol. Subsequent studies have shown improvement over the years. By 1993, it was found that 8% of aviation fatalities had blood alcohol greater than .04%. More current data (from 2004-2008) have



found 1353 pilot fatalities with 7% having blood alcohol greater than .04%.

The legally required mental standards for first-class, second-class, and third-class airman medical certifications are set forth in different sections (14 CFR 67.107; 67.207; 67.307), yet they all read essentially the same. The "mental standards" set out there refer not only to personality disorders, psychosis, and bipolar disorder, but also to substance use.

The 2017 National Survey on Drug Use and Health calculated that an estimated 19.7 million people over age 12 to have a Substance Use Disorder. A "substance" is broadly defined as a psychoactive drug or chemical such as alcohol, opioids, cocaine, amphetamines, cannabis, hallucinogens. It is not limited to these substances only. Some of these substances may be legal, some may be illegal.

In regular clinical practice, a psychiatrist or family doctor will make a mental health diagnosis based on the criteria found in the DSM-V (*Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition*). The **DSM-V** requires **three or more** of about ten symptoms to be present within the past year.

However, the FAA definition of substance dependence differs rather significantly from the definitions in the DSM-V.

The **FAA** criteria for substance dependence are met if **any one** of the following is present:

- Increased tolerance
- Manifestation of withdrawal symptoms
- Impaired control of use
- Continued use despite damage to physical health or impairment of social, personal, or occupational functioning

The FAA criteria are much more strict and they require only one criterion to be met. The FAA criteria can be viewed as a *regulatory* requirement, rather than a clinical (medical) diagnosis.

Similarly, the FAA defines abuse differently than the DSM-V definition. Substance abuse is a different concept than substance dependence.

The FAA's regulatory definition of substance abuse is as follows:

- Use of substance in a situation in which that use was physically hazardous
- Verified positive drug test result; alcohol test result greater than 0.04; or refusal to submit an alcohol or drug test required by the US DOT or other regulatory agency
- Misuse of a substance that the Federal Air Surgeon finds
  - Makes the person unsafe to perform duties or exercise the privileges of the airman certificate
  - May be reasonably expected to be unable to perform those duties or privileges for the maximum duration of the certificate

***The FAA criteria for substance abuse and dependence are regulatory requirements; they are not necessarily the same as our medical or diagnostic criteria.***

### Your Reporting Responsibilities as an Aviator

As anyone who has completed a MedXpress application knows, the application contains questions regarding substance abuse and dependence. In addition, there are questions related to alcohol/substance related events. This includes arrests, convictions, and administrative actions (such as required educational or rehabilitation programs).

A key point here is the requirement for the aviator to include arrests and administrative actions, not just convictions. Therefore, you *must* report your arrest for presumed DUI, even if your lawyer ultimately finagles a different charge or plea deal. Similarly, a disorderly conduct charge with alcohol involvement is required to be documented.

Falsifying this information has significant consequences. Airmen have had not only their medical certificate pulled, but also their pilot ratings revoked, and even fines or jail time assessed.

For those who currently have a medical certificate, and who have a new alcohol or substance related event, it is not appropriate to just wait for your next medical application to document these. All pilots are required to notify both the FAA Security Division (Part 61) and the FAA Medical Division (Part 67) within 60 days.

Failure to notify both may have significant consequences similar to those mentioned above. (See 14 CFR 61.15)

A pilot on a special issuance for substance dependence will generally have specific criteria required for ongoing issuance. Generally, such a pilot will see his or her HIMS Aviation Medical Examiner at least twice a year. This person will also need to show ongoing engagement in a recovery program, such as letters from an aftercare counselor and AA/NA meeting logs.

In the first few years of the special issuance, the person will often be subject to random alcohol and/or drug tests. Some people will also be required to have regular HIMS Psychiatry and HIMS Neuropsychology evaluations.

The vagueness with which I mention these criteria is intentional. Each case is truly unique and will have its own specific criteria to meet.

A diagnosis of substance dependence does not automatically exclude an individual from the aviation world. With treatment and recovery activities, sobriety is achieved and maintained. At that point, the FAA may grant a Special Issuance for medical certification.

## Harry Houdini First to Fly in Australia

By John Dodds

Harry Houdini (Erik Weisz, then Ehrich Weiss) was born in Budapest, Hungary in 1874, immigrated to the United States with his mother and siblings in 1878, and lived in Appleton (1878-1882) and Milwaukee, Wisconsin (1882-1887), later moving to New York City. Self-described as the “Handcuff King” and later as an “escapologist,” he became a national and international phenomenon.

While performing in Hamburg, Germany in 1909, he bought an airplane and learned to fly (his first flight was November 26, 1909). Under contract to perform next in Australia, his goal was to be the first person to fly in Australia. He accomplished this feat the following spring in Melbourne on March 18, 1910.

Keep in mind as you read this article that Houdini flew a mere six years after the Wright Brothers’ flights at Kitty Hawk in December 1903. Some accounts say that Houdini was the 25<sup>th</sup> person to ever fly a plane.

### Hamburg

On a personal note, in the summer of 1965, I flew to Hamburg from England where my father was stationed in the Air Force. My friend’s mother took my friend and me to Germany and Denmark as somewhat of a present for graduating from the eighth grade. I remember the flight from England vividly because I had never flown on a DC-3 and because I had never flown from a grass field (the sheep were on the other side of the wood fence). Hamburg is famous for being the “apprenticeship” for the Beatles according to the official program for the Beatles concert my sister and I went to in London in December 1965, several months after I came back from Hamburg (program cover and ticket shown at right).

During World War II, Wisconsin aviators were no strangers to Hamburg as the city and its suburbs were heavily bombed numerous times by Allied air forces. Several of these flyers have been featured in *Forward in Flight* in recent articles by the editor, Tom Eisele. Karl Eisele’s B-24J (93<sup>rd</sup> Bomb Group) was heavily damaged on January 17, 1945 over Harburg (now one of the seven boroughs of Hamburg) but made it to and landed in neutral Sweden (*Forward in Flight*, Winter 2018-2019). Bob Birmingham’s B-24H (458<sup>th</sup> Bomb



Beatles concert program and ticket (by Beth Dodds)



Houdini in Hamburg (Monash University, Melbourne, Australia)

Group) was also heavily damaged on the same day, and most of the crew, including the pilots, bailed out over Sweden. The two waist gunners did not hear the bail-out order, yet survived after the plane righted itself and crash landed minutes later in Sweden (*Forward in Flight*, Summer 2019). Additionally, Don O’Reilly, a military policeman with the 44<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group, flew in a B-24 over Hamburg after the war on a bomb damage survey mission (*Forward in Flight*, Fall 2019).

### The Voisin Airplane

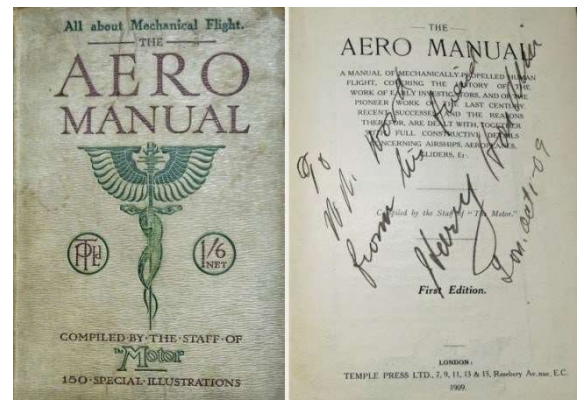
At one time, Houdini had considered having an airplane designed for him by the man (Montraville M. Wood) who built some of Houdini’s performance apparatus. He sent the manual (shown below) to Wood from London, where he was performing in October 1909, the month before his first flight in Hamburg. The manual had detailed descriptions and drawings of several airplanes.

As it turned out, Houdini bought a French Voisin plane. The plane can roughly be described as resembling a box

kite. The manual had a 4-page detailed physical description of the Voisin. The plane was almost 33 feet long with a similar wingspan, and it had a 60-80 horsepower engine. A steering wheel controlled the front elevation rudder (comprising a left and right elevation plane) as well as the rear rudder, which provided stability as well as steering. The plane had no ailerons since the Wright Brothers’ patent on wing warping was determined to cover ailerons.

The plane had four wheels that supported the plane: two under the fuselage and two at the rear. The purpose of the front wheel was to absorb the shock should the plane nose over at any time (either in taking off or landing). Sometimes, this wheel is referred to as the “guard wheel.”

Therefore, in the photo (above, next page), the plane is fully on the ground despite the appearance of the front wheel.



ABOVE: “Aeromanual” (1909) by *The Motor* magazine (British)





Houdini in Sydney (National Library of Australia)

The manual also had chapters on how to fly the various aircraft, including a 3-page section aptly titled “PILOTING A VOISIN AEROPLANE.” This section began:

It would be an exaggeration to say that anybody can drive a Voisin airplane but it is not going beyond the confines of truth to declare that any sportsman, especially a man familiar with motoring, cycling, ballooning, or yachting, can learn to fly in half-an-hour.

Half-an-hour? Actually, it does seem rather easy according to the descriptions on how to take off, turn, and land. All these maneuvers were controlled by the steering wheel: pull it towards you to raise the plane, push it away to lower it, turn it to the right to turn the plane right, and turn it to the left to turn the plane left.

However, there were a few detailed pointers. Consider the case of taking off: “Of course there is a right and a wrong way to start, or rather one right way and many wrong ways.” The manual explains that the elevation rudder must be slightly raised when taking off, not only to obtain lift but also to keep the front of the plane from nosing down as speed is obtained and the tail lifts off the ground. The plane should be running on the two wheels underneath the fuselage as the back wheels come off the ground. The manual states: “...if the elevation rudder were kept in a horizontal position the tendency would be for the tail to overbalance the front portion and bring the machine to a brusque stop by falling on its nose.”

Once the plane is airborne, the elevation rudder is lowered to prevent loss of speed, in which case the plane “will rapidly fall.” The manual points out that the sensation of flight is different from traveling on the ground: “For there is also this difference: that, whereas 30 miles an hour on the ground seemed a giddy speed, the same rate of travel in the air is very gentle motion. With the ground several feet away and no objects near at hand to indicate speed, the sense of motion is almost lost.”

Note in the photo (to the right) that the elevation rudder is comprised of two elevation planes.

And then there is this admonition: “But it is necessary to pay attention to the control of the aeroplane, or the gentle sailing motion will quickly transform itself to a rough encounter with the ground.” I think “rough encounter with the ground” is a polite way of saying “crash.” The manual repeatedly advises that movement of the steering wheel must be gentle, not harsh, and not brusque. That is especially true for the elevation rudder:

The point to remember, therefore, is to operate the front elevation rudder without any brusqueness whatever. Emphasis has been laid on this because the operation of the elevation rudder is generally found to be the most difficult, doubtless from the fact that the sense of movement in a vertical direction has not yet been developed in man.

Turning seemed to be rather easy, so long as the pilot realizes that the plane will lose speed and altitude during a turn. The turn must be made at a “sufficient height to prevent any possibility of the inside of the wing touching the ground.”

While there was one correct way of taking off, there were two ways to land: (1) cutting the engine while airborne when “not less than 15 ft. from the ground and allow the plane to gradually fall until the speed has decreased to such a degree that the last few inches of its flight are a vertical drop, but so gently that the wheels do not suffer any damage”; and (2) cutting the engine as the wheels touch down.

### Learning to Fly – Hamburg

Houdini hired Antonio Brassac from France as his mechanic. Brassac also knew how to fly, and he taught Houdini how to fly. Although the plane could hold three people (according to Houdini), Brassac never flew with him.

In other words, Houdini soloed on his first flight.





Houdini kept his plane in a shed at a German military parade ground in Wandsbek (now one of the seven boroughs of Hamburg). He would have his flying lessons, such as they were, during the day and perform in a variety theater in Hamburg in the evenings.

Brassac was very protective of the plane and would not allow Houdini to take to the air until there was no or very little wind. After two weeks of waiting, Houdini made his first attempt. After a few seconds in the air, the plane nose-dived and crashed. Houdini was not injured, and the only real damage to the plane was a broken propeller. As Houdini wrote: "I smashed the machine. Broke Propeller all to hell." After a two-week wait for a new propeller, Houdini made his first flight on November 26, 1909. Fewer than 50 people (mainly German soldiers) witnessed the flight, yet some photographs were taken (see above).

## To Australia

The primary purpose for Houdini's travel to Australia was to perform as an escapologist in theaters in Melbourne and Sydney under contract to Harry Rickards, who owned or leased a number of theaters in Australia. As Houdini repeatedly pointed out, Rickards paid him a salary for his performances as well as his time on-board ship.

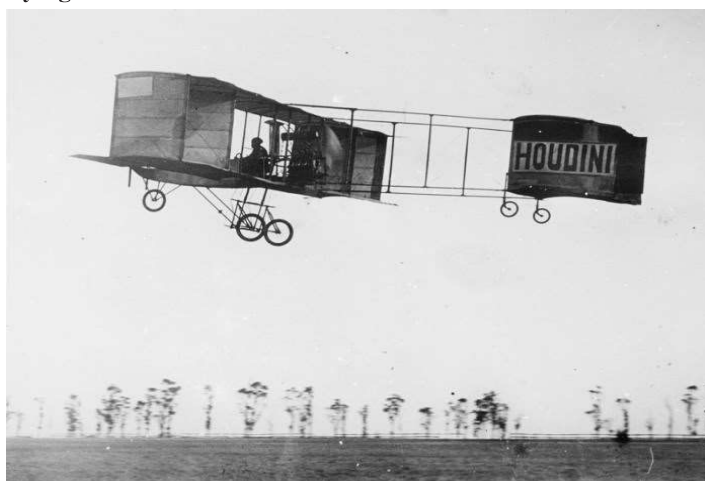
Houdini left Hamburg for Marseilles with a stop in Chalons in France where he would continue flying. He arrived in Chalons on January 4<sup>th</sup> but apparently was prevented from flying (and even taxiing) the next day, due to fog. He left Chalons on January 6<sup>th</sup> for Marseilles, where he boarded the *R.M.S. Malwa*, a British passenger ship. He was on-board for almost a month as the ship transited the Suez Canal, stopped in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), and arrived in Adelaide, Australia on February 5, 1910. He was seasick for a good portion of the trip as reported in the *Adelaide Advertiser*:

I have heard there have been quite a number of handcuff kings out here. I am prepared to do my best to show the public I am the real fellow although I do not now do so much handcuff work

as formerly, because it has become old. I go in for novelties, such as escaping from straight jackets [sic] and from wet sheets in which I am tied. I can escape from most things, but I have been awfully bad on the voyage. I suffered severely from sea sickness, and do what I would I could not escape from it. I have lost about a stone in weight [14 pounds].

Earlier in his career, Houdini was known as the "Handcuff King" for being able to get free from any kind of handcuffs. He was billed in Australia as the "Handcuff King," but you can see from the excerpt above that Houdini had moved beyond handcuffs. Houdini quickly left Adelaide for Melbourne, and the Melbourne *Argus* reported Houdini as saying: "If I might be allowed to coin a word, I would call myself an escapologist."

## Flying in Australia—Melbourne



Houdini's first performance in Melbourne was on February 7, 1910 at the Opera House. He would perform at the Opera House in the evenings and would travel during the day to a place about 20 miles from Melbourne called "Digger's Rest" where he based his plane. He bought a forty-foot square tent to house the plane.

It took some time for Brassac to unpack the plane, assemble it, and test the engine. During this time the weather was very hot, as Houdini wrote on the 20<sup>th</sup>: "Hottest day I ever lived. Must have been 119 in the shade and the wind was scorching. Drank enough water to float a rowboat."

He made his historic flight on March 18<sup>th</sup>; actually, there were three flights that day. The first flight went well as he circled the field 25 feet in the air and landed about a minute later. The second flight did not go well. He circled the field but forgot to straighten the elevator when he landed. The plane nosed over and landed on the front wheel with the back wheels in the air.



He quickly adjusted the elevator to bring the back wheels on the ground. On the third flight, Houdini made three circuits around the field at an altitude of about 100 feet; the flight lasted over three minutes. Getting out of the plane after landing, he threw up his arms and exclaimed, "I can fly! I can fly!" In 2010, Australia issued a postage stamp (shown at right) to commemorate his March 18<sup>th</sup> flights.

He returned to Digger's Rest the next two days, but his flights were short. However, on the 21<sup>st</sup>, part way through his second circling of the field, he headed out into open country. He flew almost six miles in a time of seven minutes and 37 seconds. While at Melbourne, Houdini made 14 flights.

### Flying in Australia—Sydney

After Melbourne, Houdini performed at the Tivoli Theatre in Sydney; his first performance there was March 28, 1910. Houdini made a short speech that night, which was reported the next day in the *Sydney Daily Telegraph*: "In a brief speech Houdini said amid cheering, that he had telegraphed to Digger's Rest for his bi-plane, and hoped to make an ascent in Sydney." Houdini's first flights in Sydney were on April 18<sup>th</sup> at the Rosehill Racecourse. The first flight was only about 250 yards, and in the second attempt, the plane refused to rise. On the third attempt, he crashed and was thrown from the plane. As reported in the *Sydney Morning Herald* the next day:

She [the plane] comes down quickly with a rush, hitting the ground with the left hand portion of the front plane. The impact was so severe that Houdini was thrown from his seat landing on his hands and knees some distance from his disabled machine. Springing up his first care was for his machine. Quickly he runs to it and shuts off the engine.

Houdini resumed flying the following week (as indicated in the poster at far right, next column).

Houdini's last flight in Australia was on May 1, 1910. It lasted only three minutes and 17 seconds and covered not quite three miles. Yet, the headline in the *Sydney Morning Herald* proclaimed, "SENSATIONAL JOURNEY." The headline in the *Sydney The Daily Telegraph* echoed, "SENSATIONAL EXPERIENCE."

What was so "sensational" in those few minutes? Soon after takeoff at a height of 20 feet, the plane dipped and rushed toward the ground. "The public gasped while a number of women screamed, for it seemed as if the aviator were rushing to certain destruction." Houdini managed to recover, and "the machine soared gracefully skyward" to an altitude of 150 feet. "But his difficulties were not over." At a height of 200 feet, the plane again fell toward earth as the engine had stopped. "The



Australian Houdini stamp (Stampboards: <https://stampboards.com>)

crowd was dumbfounded," but Houdini restarted the engine and circled around the racetrack twice and landed. "A better demonstration of modern aeronautics could not have been provided and the public cheered heartily." As he landed, "[h]e was carried shoulder high by the excited crowd."

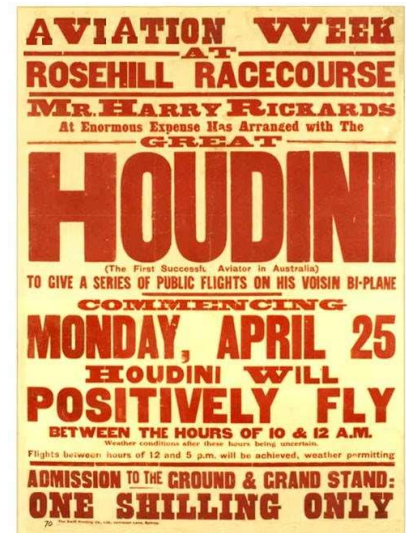
### Was Houdini the first to fly in Australia?

He certainly thought he was. His first show at the Tivoli Theater in Sydney was on March 28 1910, at the end of which he gave a speech in which he talked about retiring in two years and probably devoting himself to aviation (neither of which later occurred).

The next day, the *Sydney Morning Herald* described part of this speech as follows:

He trusted that when his name as 'The Handcuff King' had been forgotten, his reputation would be established in Australian history as the first man to fly there in a machine heavier than air. (Loud applause.)

Writing in the *National Aeronautical Association Review* in 1926 (the year he died), Houdini continued to maintain that he was the first to fly in Australia: "The following year [1910] saw the start of my aerial tour of Australia and I was the first pilot in that land. The Australian Aeronautical League gave me a plaque in commemoration of the event."



Indeed, the Aerial League of Australia, formed in 1909, presented him with a trophy on April 29, 1910 for “The First Aerial Flight in Australia.”

But it seems that Houdini may not have been the first to fly in Australia. A case has been made for another person.

Several months before Houdini’s flights—on December 9, 1909—Colin Defries (from England, but who learned to fly in France) flew a Wright Flyer for a distance of just over 100 yards at a height of 15-20 feet at the Victoria Park Racecourse in Sydney. His next flight was almost 300 yards, but he crashed. Like it had done for Houdini, Australia issued a stamp in 2010 to commemorate Defries’ effort.

The difference between the Houdini flights and Defries’ flight raises the question of what is a powered, *controlled* flight. As one commentator put it: “There is no argument that Houdini flew the wings off Defries.” If the definition were to fly an airplane for a distance beyond which gravity would bring it down (there being no requirement for turning), then it was argued that Defries should be credited with the first flight in Australia.

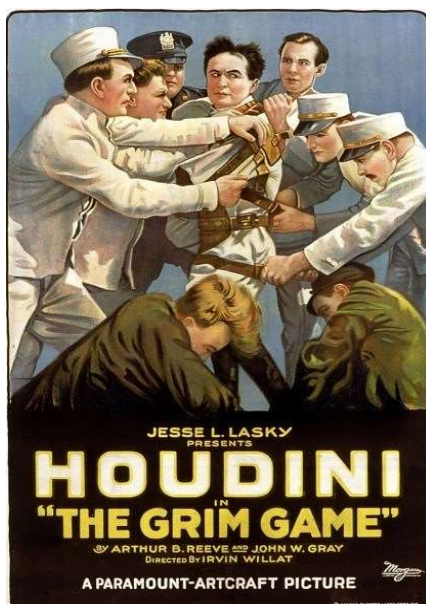
By comparison, the Wright Brothers are credited with being the first to fly on December 17, 1903 with four flights of 120, 175, 200, and 852 feet, apparently with no turns attempted and with unintended landings (as opposed to crash landings).

## The Grim Game

While Houdini never flew after leaving Australia, he did not lose his interest in aviation. For example, in August 1911, he attended an aviation meet in Chicago where he met Glenn Curtiss and Orville Wright. In a letter he wrote to his wife, Bess, he said they mistook him for an Australian and “wanted to know all about my country.” Also at this meet, famed aviator Lincoln Beachey set an altitude record of over 11,000 feet, and, tragically, two pilots died in separate accidents.

Houdini appeared in several films, including *The Grim Game* that had a famous flying scene (film poster below).

In this 1919 silent film, Houdini starred as a reporter (Harvey Hanford) unjustly arrested and jailed for a murder he did not commit. He frees himself in various situations that showcased his skills as an escapologist. The villain has taken off in an airplane with Harvey’s love interest. Harvey gives pursuit in another plane with the goal of descending from a rope as his pilot flies over the pursued plane. Once in the cockpit of the plane



Movie poster for *The Grim Game*

below, he would overpower the villain and then fly the plane to safety.

The scene was filmed by a camera plane. During filming while Harvey was dangling under the pursuing plane on the rope, the two planes collided and crashed. Surprisingly, no one was killed. Harvey in that scene was performed by a stunt double and not Houdini, although that fact was seemingly not made known during the advertisements for the film.

The film itself disappeared for many years, and it was finally located and restored. A four-minute segment of the film containing the flying scene can be viewed at this link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jHuyMeXXEic>.

Frankly, it is not clear at some places in this segment whether they were actually filmed in the air.

## First to Fly in Wisconsin—Arthur P. Warner

This article perhaps would not be complete if it did not point out that the first flight in Wisconsin took place a mere 22 days before Houdini’s first flight in Hamburg. Arthur P. Warner (1870-1957) of Beloit purchased a Herring-Curtiss airplane that arrived in Beloit unassembled. Without instructions, Warner assembled the plane and made 6-9 flights on November 4, 1909. Warner was inducted into the Wisconsin Aviation Hall of Fame in 2000. Warner’s and Houdini’s aviation exploits are recounted in the richly-detailed book, *Forward in Flight: The History of Aviation in Wisconsin*, by Michael J. Goc (Wisconsin Aviation Hall of Fame and New Past Press, Inc., 1998).

## What Happened to Houdini’s Plane?

Writing in the *National Aeronautical Association Review* in 1926, Houdini wrote: “I left the plane in England to be remodeled and returned to my own work. I never saw it again, as it happened.” In 1913, Houdini had written a letter to Messrs Mulliners in London giving Donald Stevenson, also living in England, the “power to settle your account and remove the machine.” And that, unfortunately, is where the record ends.

## A Final Thought from Houdini

Houdini departed from Australia from Brisbane on the *S.S. Manuka*, a New Zealand passenger ship, arriving on June 2, 1910 in Vancouver.

While in Brisbane on May 10<sup>th</sup>, he talked to a reporter from the Brisbane *Daily Mail* and made the following comment: “Aviation is the most wonderful thing in the world today, and to fly in an aeroplane is an experience worth living for.”

[I would like to thank Eric Frazier, Reference Librarian, Rare Books and Special Collections Division, Library of Congress, for his help in making available to me a scrapbook (containing original clippings from Australian newspapers) put together by Edward Saint on Houdini’s performances and flying activities in Australia. Saint was a manager and companion of Bess Houdini (Houdini’s widow) who helped her in promoting Houdini’s legacy.]





## Four Inducted at 2019 WAHF Ceremony

**Lyle Grimm; Alfred Gorham; Richard Schmidt; Jeff Skiles**  
By Tom Thomas

The 34th Wisconsin Aviation Hall of Fame Induction Ceremony was held on Saturday, November 16th, in EAA's Eagle Hangar in Oshkosh. It was a beautiful setting in which to honor this year's Inductees: Lyle Grimm, Alfred Gorham, Richard Schmidt, and Jeff Skiles.

The setting of the Eagle Hangar — with nine aircraft in the room and the large American flag over the stage — ensured that everyone entering the room would enjoy the ceremony. The induction ceremony was later in the year than usual because of the popularity of the EAA facilities for weddings, other social activities, and training events. We thought this venue was worth the wait.

The purpose of our induction event is to recognize Wisconsin aviators and those people working in the aviation industry who have made a difference that is related to aviation. Each year the Induction Selection Committee searches for individuals from Wisconsin who have made that special difference to aviation. This year's group of four individuals includes people who have made truly significant impacts; indeed, some of them are not yet done with their careers and their volunteer work, and they are continuing to foster and promote the advance of aviation.

As the 2019 WAHF Induction began, some of the past inductees who were in attendance, or else who were represented, were introduced to the audience. The group included Don Volland, Bob Clark, Jeff Baum, Janis Sierra, Field Morey, Archie Henkelmann, Chuck Swain, Duane Esse, Joshua Sanford's son, Bill, Jim Szajkovich, and Darrel Gibson. [See photo, p. 20]

We also recognized the three college students who were selected to receive WAHF scholarships. They are:

- Joshua Mioduszewski, who is attending Ohio State University, with the goal of becoming a commercial airline pilot. Joshua is receiving the Robert Payzer Memorial scholarship and the EAA Chapter 640 scholarship.
- James Murphy, a student at Western Michigan University. James has declared a double major in Flight Science and Aviation Management. He is receiving the Jeff Baum Aviation Business & Jim Quinn Flight School scholarship.
- Isaac Lee, who is enrolled at Fox Valley Technical Institute in its Aeronautics-Professional Pilot program. Isaac is receiving the Thiessen Field scholarship & Carl Guell Memorial scholarship.



**Left to right:** Lyle Grimm (grandson David Cabelka); Alfred Gorham (nephew Norman Florence); Richard Schmidt; and Jeff Skiles

After these preliminary activities, we arrived at the main order of business: our 2019 inductions.

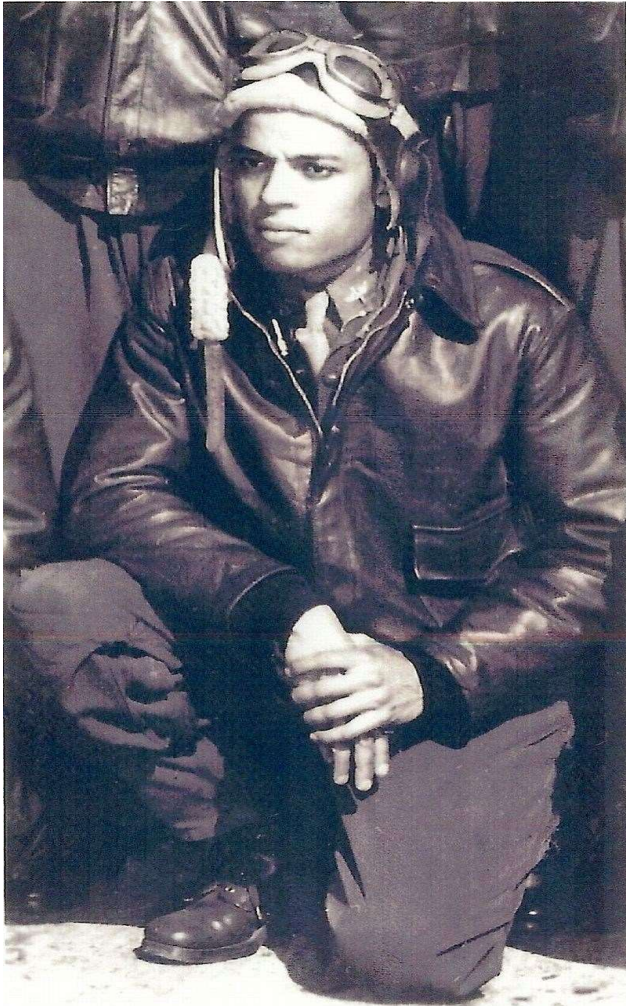
We were greatly assisted by our four Board members who introduced each of our inductees, and who gave us some background information about each inductee.

- Chris Campbell, WAHF Board member and Treasurer, made the introduction for Alfred Gorham (represented by his nephew, Norman Florence).
- Chuck Swain, WAHF Board member, introduced the plaque and presentation for Lyle Grimm (represented by his grandson, David Cabelka).
- Ron Wojnar, WAHF Board member, presented the biographical and background information on Richard Schmidt.
- Kurt Stanich, WAHF Board member, made the final introduction for Jeff Skiles.

A summary of these remarks and of the background information for all four inductees is presented on the next two pages, as well as accompanying portrait photos of the inductees.

Our 2019 induction ceremony started and ended on time, and we hope everyone in attendance enjoyed themselves. We look forward to the next induction ceremony in the fall of 2020.

**WAHF**  
Wisconsin Aviation Hall of Fame



**Alfred Gorham**

In presenting Alfred Gorham's plaque to Alfred's nephew (Norman Florence), WAHF Board member Chris Campbell noted that Lieutenant Gorham actually fought on two fronts simultaneously — Gorham battled against the foe of Nazi Germany in Europe, but he also fought against the bane of segregation back home in the United States.

Alfred Gorham graduated near the top of his class in 1939 from Waukesha High School, after which he attended Carroll College. When the United States entered the war, Alfred enlisted in the Air Corps. He had as his goal becoming a Tuskegee Airman. There were well over a thousand applicants for fewer than a hundred positions, but Gorham made the cut and was selected to become a fighter pilot.

Alfred Gorham became a Lieutenant in the 301st Fighter Squadron, where he flew one of the famous "Red Tail" P-51 Mustangs. On one mission, he shot down two FW-190 German fighters. Later, on a mission over Munich, his engine quit and he had to bail out. He was captured and remained a POW until the end of the war in Europe.

When Alfred Gorham returned after the war, he worked for AC Spark Plug in Oak Creek, in its chemistry lab, for 40 years. Alfred passed away in 2009. His nephew, Norman Florence, of Reedsburg, accepted Alfred's plaque on behalf of the Gorham family.



**Lyle Grimm**

Lyle Grimm made many contributions to aviation during his 35-year career. He learned to fly in the federal Civilian Pilot Training program. During World War II, Lyle served in the Air Corps as a flight instructor. One portion of his flight instruction took place in Florida, where he trained young pilots in flying the B-29 Super Fortress.

When Lyle returned to Wisconsin, he took over the task of managing the Wausau Municipal Airport. WAHF Board member Chuck Swain, in presenting Lyle Grimm's plaque to his grandson, David Cabelka, recalled, "I worked with Lyle from 1967 until he retired in 1977. Lyle knew that the Wausau Municipal Airport was a significant economic engine for the city, and for the entire county. He saw to it that every project at the airport was done for the benefit of the citizens of Wausau. Although there were challenges over the years, Lyle made things happen and helped the airport to become the business center that it is today."

When a person lands at the Wausau airport today and walks toward the terminal, the visitor sees a large sign, "Welcome Home to Wausau." That was Lyle's inspiration.

From air corps flying instructor to airport manager, and even as a Federal Aviation Administration Flight Examiner, Lyle Grimm did it all, and did it well. His grandson, David Cabelka, accepted Lyle's plaque on behalf of the entire Grimm family.





Richard Schmidt

Richard Schmidt of Appleton was the third inductee, and he was introduced by Ron Wojnar, WAHF Board member. Ron pointed out that Richard's entire career was tied to aviation.

Richard began by building and flying model aircraft on Milwaukee's north side. His models flew fast — some exceeding 100 mph — and he often placed in national competitions. In addition, Richard later would race speed boats, again, often exceeding 100 mph on the water. So, it would seem, speed was a part of Richard's life from early on.

Richard received his wings by joining the Wisconsin Air National Guard in Milwaukee, and taking pilot training. He started flying in the F-89 Scorpion, and once, as a part of a training sortie over Lake Michigan, he busted Mach 1.

In the 1950s, Richard volunteered to participate in the nuclear tests being run in the Pacific. He trained in the B-57; their mission was to fly through post-explosion nuclear clouds and to take readings and samples. On his first flight through a nuclear cloud, Richard came back with significantly higher readings than anticipated. He was promptly returned to the states (although he reports that the colors within the cloud were fantastic).

From 1965 to 1992, Richard was a pilot for Wisconsin Airlines. He ended his career with 26,673 flying hours in 34 different aircraft. Truly, flying is in Richard's blood.



Jeff Skiles

Jeff Skiles was introduced by Kurt Stanich, WAHF Board member and currently the Waukesha County Airport Manager. All the folks in the audience knew Jeff Skiles as the co-pilot from the "Miracle on the Hudson," so in one sense Jeff needed no introduction. Yet we still learned several new things about him.

Jeff's celebrity status comes from keen thinking and action in less than four minutes in January, 2009, when the Airbus A320 piloted by "Sully" Sullivan and co-piloted by Jeff hit a flock of geese. Having lost all power, they brought down their ship safely on the Hudson River, amazingly without any loss of life. Asked if he would have done anything differently (had he had it to do over again), Jeff has remarked in an interview, "Yes, I would prefer it to happen in the summer."

Beyond this most notable feat, Jeff Skiles has compiled more than 26,000 flying hours. He is still actively flying as an airline pilot; as well, Jeff volunteers with the EAA in its youth programs, including the Young Eagle program. He also occasionally flies the Commemorative Air Force's B-29, "Fifi."

In his remarks at the induction ceremony, Jeff paid tribute to his mentors in aviation: both Paul and Tom Poberezny, and Bob Hover. As those men devoted their energy and motivation to aviation and its mysteries, so too has Jeff Skiles.

The induction audience appreciated Jeff's warm and heart-felt remarks.



## John L. Jerstad

### Awarded Congressional Medal of Honor for the Ploesti Raid (August 1, 1943)

By Tom Eisele

In Wisconsin, there have been 63 recipients of the highest military honor, the Congressional Medal of Honor. Three of these recipients have been from the Air Corps or the Air Force: Richard Bong; John Jerstad; and Lance Sijan (Vietnam War). General Billy Mitchell received a special Congressional Medal of Honor for his work in promoting the cause of military aviation.

Of the two Badger aviators honored by the CMH for their heroism in World War II, Major Richard Bong is probably the more famous or celebrated of the two fliers. His exploits against Japanese pilots in the Pacific Theatre are justly renowned.

Here I focus on the story behind Major John Jerstad's accomplishments, and his sacrifice, in the European theatre. These matters have certainly been publicized, although they probably are slightly less well-known than Major Bong's story. I think they deserve to be more widely known.

#### Early years.

We don't have many details of "Jack" Jerstad's early life. He was born in 1918 and raised in Racine, Wisconsin, the son of Art and Alice Jerstad. Jack had a younger sister, Mary. He was active in scouting, and he attended Washington Park High School, where he graduated in 1936. He then attended Northwestern University, where he earned a bachelor's degree in 1940; after which, he taught junior high school for a year.

All of these matters make his early years seem uneventful. Yet Jack must have realized that something important was brewing, because he enlisted in the Army Air Force on July 12, 1941, well before Pearl Harbor. Perhaps Jack, considering Hitler's early victories in 1939 and 1940, thought it was only a matter of time before the United States would become involved in World War II. We don't know what motivated him to enlist.

#### Army Air Force.

For the rest of 1941, into 1942, Jack Jerstad trained as an aviation cadet, earning his commission as an officer (2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant) in the Air Corps on February 6, 1942, six days before his 24<sup>th</sup> birthday. After his commissioning, Lt. Jerstad served in Louisiana with both the 98<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group and the 93<sup>rd</sup> Bomb Group.

It was in 1942 that Allied plans for the bombing of the European continent began to take shape. By this stage in the war, Hitler controlled Europe from the top of Norway to the tip of the boot in Italy, and easterly into the Balkans and the approaches to Russia. The western edge of Europe was a consolidated fortress, although not yet approximating the soon-to-be vaunted "Atlantic Wall" of the Third Reich. The U.S. Air Corps planners meant to fly over that wall and bomb the factories and airfields and oil refineries and railway facilities behind it.

The execution of that plan began in late 1942. The 93<sup>rd</sup> Bomb Group was the first heavy bomber group to locate in East Anglia in England, just across the North Sea and the English Channel from the European continent. In October 1942, Jerstad,



**ABOVE:** Major John L. Jerstad in cockpit of B-24D Liberator. **UPPER RIGHT:** Desert-sand painted B-24s during their bomb runs at the Ploesti oil fields and refineries. (USAF photo)

now a Captain, flew his B-24 Liberator (named "Jerk's Natural") to England as a part of the 328<sup>th</sup> Bomb Squadron, one of the four squadrons composing the 93<sup>rd</sup> Bomb Group. Very quickly, Jerstad rose to become squadron commander.

The details of his service in 328<sup>th</sup> BS are difficult to find among the archives, and I have not seen a list of the missions he flew. Suffice to say that he did far more than his share.

In April, 1943, Jerstad was promoted to Major, and a month later he left the 93<sup>rd</sup> BG to join the staff of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Bomb Wing headquarters. Jerstad had been chosen by Colonel Edward ("Ted") Timberlake to be the chief operations officer at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Bomb Wing. "As his operations officer, Timberlake selected one of his [Flying] Circus squadron leaders, a slight, sharp-witted youth from Racine, Wisconsin, named John Jerstad, . . . Major Jerstad had flown so many more missions than his quota that he had stopped counting them." [Dugan & Stewart, *Ploesti* (Random House, 1962) p. 42.]

By this time in 1943, Jerstad could have rotated home. But Jack chose not to go home. Instead, hearing of the initial plans that were in progress for the low-level bombing mission against the oil fields and refinery facilities near Ploesti, Romania, Jerstad asked to be included in the planning and in the mission itself. Col. Timberlake tried to dissuade Jack from flying this mission, but Jerstad insisted. The person taking over the 93<sup>rd</sup> Bomb Group from Col. Timberlake was Lt. Col. Addison Baker. As it turned out, it would be the tandem of Baker as pilot and Jerstad as co-pilot who flew the lead bomber ("Hell's Wench") for the 93BG portion of the Ploesti Raid



### Target Ploesti.

In the 1930s, with the rise of Hitler and the Nazis in Germany, the mechanized equipment and burgeoning technology behind modern warfare (spawned in World War I) came into full-fruition. Whether it was combat on the land, with mechanized armies; or sparring at sea, with contests between massive Task Forces; or fighting in the air, with bombers and fighters engaging one another, there was one common denominator, namely, that the machines of modern warfare needed to be fed with oil.

Hitler knew this as well as did many other statesmen. But where was Germany to find the oil, and how to access it?

Europe itself (at least, western and central Europe) is not particularly rich in oil. Hungary and Romania are probably the two countries most abundantly supplied with oil reserves. The Carpathian Mountains, the Balkan Mountains, and the Transylvanian Alps shelter these oil-rich areas from easy accessibility. (All of this discussion ignores, of course, the possibility of using oil rigs in the North Sea or in the Baltic Sea; such technology for underwater oil exploration was generally unavailable during the 1930s and 1940s.)

In 1856, Ploesti, Romania became the site of one of the world's first oil refineries. Things developed naturally from there. "By the late 1930s Ploesti was surrounded by thirteen major refineries, many smaller complexes, and the infrastructure to support all of them." [Jay Stout, *Fortress Ploesti* (Casemate, 2003), p. 3.] The entire complex at Ploesti produced 10 million tons of oil per year including having the ability to produce high-grade aviation fuel.

In 1940, soon after the fall of France to Hitler's hordes, through a variety of adept German moves, Romania came into the Axis fold. Hitler thereby gained unrestricted access to his most substantial and important source of oil. Until the Russians invaded Romania and possessed the oil fields in late August, 1944, the Romanian oil fields produced 30-35% of the oil resources for the entire Axis war machine.

These oil facilities were central to every mechanized activity that the Axis armed forces undertook. One enduring question of World War II became, "Could Hitler and the German war machine protect this precious Romanian asset?"

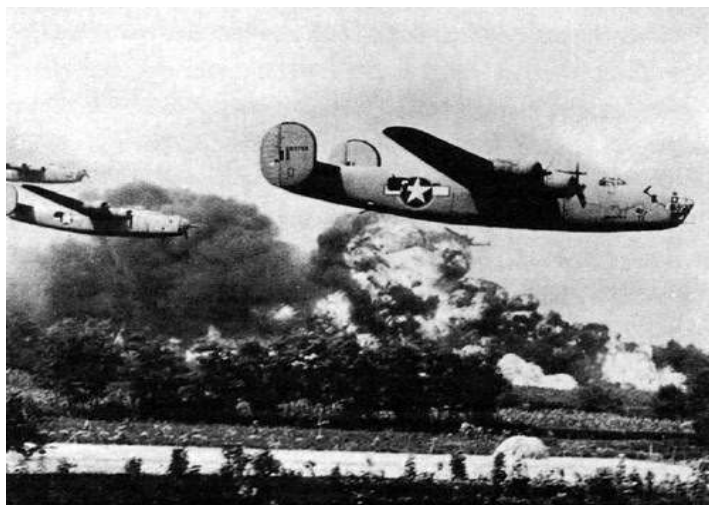
### The prelude.

The Allies thought not, but there was disagreement how to effectively stifle the oil flowing from Ploesti's fields and refineries. As it turned out, various methods of attack were attempted.

It is not well-publicized, but the first air attacks on Ploesti came from the East, not the West. Russian bombers (only six) were sent against the Ploesti oil facilities on July 13, 1941, a few weeks after Hitler's sneak attack against the Russians was launched on June 22<sup>nd</sup>. Four of the six Russian bombers were shot down by German fighters, yet the Russian planes managed to destroy more than 9000 tons of oil and some storage tanks and railway tanker cars.

The Russian bombing results, although modest, were promising.

The first incursion from the West came almost a year later, on June 11, 1942, with 13 B-24D Liberators from the "Halverson project" ["HALPRO"]. This bombing effort did little damage, and it unfortunately awakened the Germans to the



possibility of Allied long-range bombers doing significant damage to the German's primary supplier of oil and fuel. If the Halverson raid did put the Luftwaffe on notice that the Allies were likely to continue to try to blast Ploesti into ruins, then, in this respect, the Germans were forewarned of the later Tidal Wave operation.

It is also unfortunate, perhaps, that the American Air Corps planners seem to have drawn a different inference from the Halverson raid. Since the resistance to that attack was, relatively speaking, "light," the Allies thought the anti-aircraft measures taken by the Germans in the Ploesti area were not substantial. Initially, the defenses may not have been formidable; but eventually the Ploesti air and ground forces became the single most substantial defensive establishment to be found outside Nazi Germany itself. By the time of the Tidal Wave operation, anti-aircraft guns of the 88-mm and 105-mm variety numbered well above 200 in and around Ploesti, and the German Luftwaffe had substantial numbers of fighters (mainly ME-109s and ME-110s) based in this air defense zone, planes flown by German as well as Romanian pilots.

After the "Operation Torch" invasion in 1942 had introduced the American forces to North Africa, U.S. Air Corps bases existed in Libya capable of supporting a bombing raid against Ploesti. The only American bomber in existence suitable to make the 1200-mile trip (2400 miles roundtrip) was the B-24.

### Operation Tidal Wave.

Plans were then made to assemble the requisite B-24s at Benghazi in Libya, to practice and simulate the bomb runs against sand models built in the desert, and then to unleash the B-24s for a low-level bombing mission against Ploesti.

Three groups from the Eighth Air Force (the 93<sup>rd</sup>, 44<sup>th</sup>, and 389<sup>th</sup> Bomb Groups) joined two groups from the Ninth Air Force (the 376<sup>th</sup> and the 98<sup>th</sup> Bomb Groups) to compose the massive formation of American bombing might.

*Surprise* was to be the fundamental value of this plan.

The lumbering bombers, flying below radar, were synchronized to fan out on the outskirts of Ploesti and attack simultaneously most of the major oil facilities in this area of Romania. The belief was that, if the German air defenders could be taken unawares, they would be unable to recover in time sufficiently

to impede the in-and-out appearance of five bomb groups at seven diffuse oil targets. The target designations were, respectively, Targets White One through Five, Blue, and Red. (Truly, it would be a red-white-and-blue attack.)

The B-24D bombers to be used in the Ploesti raid, 178 planes strong, were organized and sequenced as follows:

- There were 29 planes from the 376<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group (the “Liberandos,” led by Colonel Keith K. Compton). This group would lead the bombing column. Its target was the large Romana Americana oil complex, eastern-most of the targeted areas. [“White One”]
- Second in the formation would be the 93<sup>rd</sup> BG (“Ted Timberlake’s Travelling Circus”), comprising 39 B-24Ds led by Lt. Col. Addison Baker, whose co-pilot was Maj. John L. Jerstad. This group would split into two elements, one element heading to the Concordia Vega facilities [“White Two”]; the other element, led by Majors George Brown and Ramsay Potts, would attack the Standard Petrol Block and the Unirea Speranza refineries [“White Three”].
- Next, in the middle of the formation, would be the 98<sup>th</sup> BG (the “Pyramiders,” led by Col. John [Killer] Kane), which comprised the most aircraft of any participating bomb group. They were 47 planes strong, and their target was to attack the Astra Romana and the Unirea Orion refineries. [“White Four”]
- Then, fourth, would be 37 bombers from the 44<sup>th</sup> BG (the “Flying Eight Balls,” led by Col. Leon Johnson). As with the 93<sup>rd</sup> BG, the 44<sup>th</sup> BG would split into two elements, one element attacking the Colombia Acquilla refinery [“White Five”], while the other element, led by Lt. Col. James Posey, would separate and strike the Romanian Creditul Minier operation in Brazi [“Blue”], which was geographically separate from Ploesti.
- Fifth and final in the column of bombers would be 26 planes from the 389<sup>th</sup> BG (the “Sky Scorpions,” led by Col. Jack Wood). This group would also separate from the main column of bombers and attack the Steaua Romana refinery at Campina, again, some miles distant from the Ploesti area. [“Red”]

#### Executing the plan.

The raid took place on Sunday, August 1, 1943. The horde of bombers took off from their desert airfields around 4:00-5:00 am, creating local sandstorms. One of the 178 bombers (plane named “Kickapoo,” pilot: Lt. Robert Nespor), taking off toward the end of the line of planes, had engine problems and tried to return to base, but it hit an obstruction in the blinding sand whipped up by the other planes and was destroyed (with two of the crew surviving).

With 177 bombers safely launched, the air armada aimed to cross the Mediterranean and Adriatic Seas, then cross the Balkan Mountains and the Danube River, and quickly swoop down on the unsuspecting prey at Ploesti. Yet a second mishap occurred over the sea. One of the ships in the lead group, the 376<sup>th</sup> BG, mysteriously fell out of formation and crashed into the sea near Corfu (plane named “Wongo-Wongo,” pilot: Lt. Brian Flavelle). Some commentators have claimed that the lead navigator for the mission was in this plane, but Jay Stout has indicated that this claim is false [see Stout, *Fortress Ploesti*, pp. 42-44].

During the overseas passage, a gap opened in the bomber column between the first two groups (the 376<sup>th</sup> and the 93<sup>rd</sup>) and the following three groups (the 98<sup>th</sup>, 44<sup>th</sup>, and 389<sup>th</sup>). Then, crossing the mountains, with billowing clouds obscuring their views, these five groups became even more separated and disjointed. And, coming down from the mountain peaks over which they had just flown, the leading ships picked up a tail wind, which further separated the bomb groups in column.

While the attacks on different targets had been planned to take place simultaneously, the bombers were becoming disorganized. Survivors of the mission seem to agree that the 376<sup>th</sup> and 93<sup>rd</sup> were tied together, while the remaining three bomb groups were strung out well behind the leading two groups. This meant that much of the surprise element – counted on by the mission planners – would be negligible, at best, for the bomb groups following the leading two.

In fact, it turns out that a German Signals Interception unit situated in Greece had picked up the initial indications that a large formation of American bombers had taken off from Benghazi in the early morning. While the bombers’ destination was unknown, Ploesti was an obvious possibility, and the German unit circulated an alert to all likely regional defense commands.

The element of surprise, then, had already been lost. The German defenders at Ploesti knew the Americans were coming and were amply prepared to defend their oil fortress.

Once clear of the mountains, and then over the Danube, the bombing formation was supposed to follow an easterly course, using the Romanian towns of Pitesti, Targovisti, and Floresti as navigational check-points along the way. For some reason, still inexplicable (other than the confusions naturally incumbent while flying at 190 miles per hour at low altitude), the lead plane in the 376<sup>th</sup> BG turned early, at Targovisti, rather than Floresti. This inadvertent turn put the leading portion of the formation on course to bomb Bucharest, southeast of the Ploesti oil fields.

The immediately following group, the 93<sup>rd</sup> BG, initially preserved formation integrity and stuck to the tail of the 376<sup>th</sup> BG. Yet, very quickly, the pilots and navigators in the 93<sup>rd</sup> BG realized the inadvertent wrong turn and broke radio silence. Their alarm-calls were to no immediate avail.

While the 376<sup>th</sup> BG continued to head in the wrong direction, southeast toward Bucharest, the lead ship for the 93<sup>rd</sup> BG, broke ranks and headed toward Ploesti. As I mentioned before, the 93<sup>rd</sup>’s lead pilot and co-pilot were Lt. Col. Addison Baker and Maj. John Jerstad in a B-24 named “Hell’s Wench.” Being



south of their intended approach point, the lead plane and the rest of the 93BG (along with a few strays from the leading group, the 376<sup>th</sup>) turned north.

But now they were out of position, and somewhat out of sequence, according to the initial plan. Doing the best that they could do under the circumstances, they improvised.

The bombers came under withering fire from the numerous anti-aircraft batteries in the Ploesti area. It is said that some ack-ack batteries located in the surrounding hills actually had to depress their gun barrels in order to track the low-flying Liberators. The B-24s were so close to the deck that several surviving bombers returned to base with cornstalks and other vegetation stuck in their undercarriage and bomb-bay doors! Their low altitude approach – which was supposed to give the raiders the element of surprise—merely rendered the planes vulnerable to every type and caliber of gun on the ground. The fire was intense and deadly.

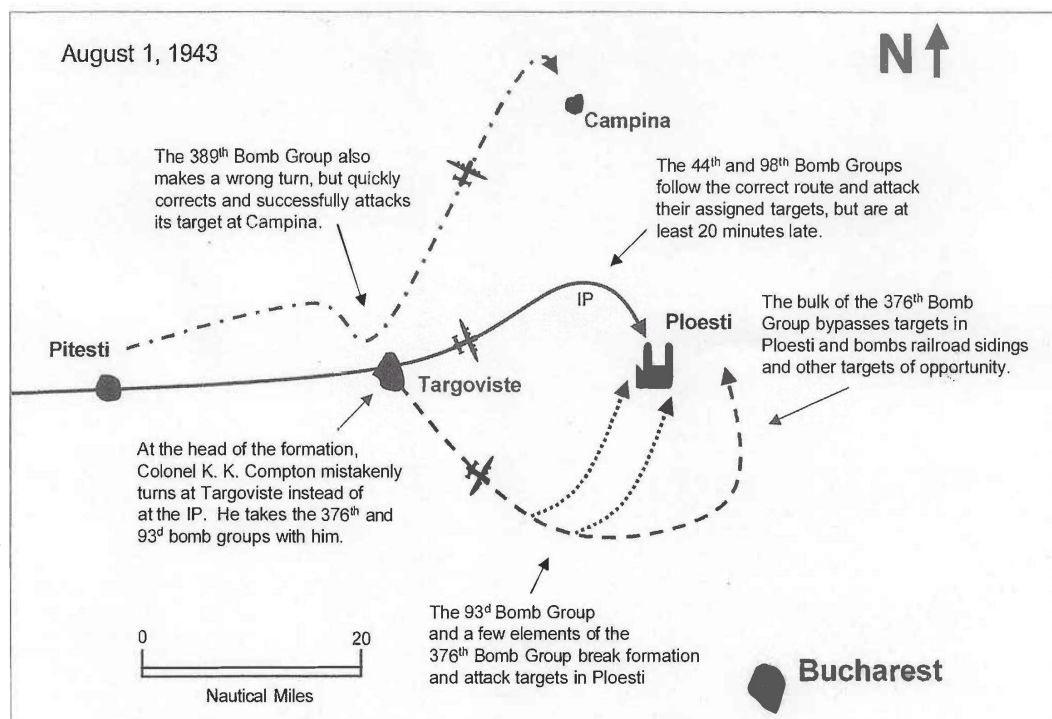
As I mentioned earlier, the formation of the American raiders had been reported much sooner in the day by spotters on Corfu and by the German signals interception unit in Greece. So, no surprise was achieved; and no escape was possible from the concentrated flak batteries and the already warned Luftwaffe fighters. Worse yet, the initial wrong turn of the lead bomb group meant that the bombers would be exposed to attacks from the German-Romanian fighter and anti-aircraft defenders located near the Bucharest area.

As the bombers in the second unit, the 93<sup>rd</sup> BG, broke away from the lead bomb group and flew north, the target that became most accessible to this unit (led by Baker and Jerstad) was not their assigned target, “White Two,” but rather the “White Five” target, the Columbia Acquilla refinery. This latter facility is the target they chose to attack.

Jay Stout describes what happened:

“Early in the bomb run, unable to maneuver for fear of colliding with other aircraft in the formation, Baker and Jerstad severed a balloon cable. Next, the nose section took a direct hit, and the aircraft started to burn. Baker’s *Hell’s Wench* wasn’t the only aircraft that took fire. Every bomber in the group was hit. ...” [*Fortress Ploesti*, p. 52]

It is remarkable, but Baker and Jerstad didn’t flinch. They led their planes to bomb the refinery works, which they did with effectiveness, but at a huge cost. The withering fire took its toll.



“Baker and Jerstad knew that *Hell’s Wench* had been mortally hit, but rather than putting their bomber down in the flat fields outside the complex, the two elected to continue to lead the formation. Unable to stay airborne with a full payload, Baker jettisoned his bombs and continued toward the target – miraculously maneuvering through, below, and among the refinery infrastructure. His bomb group – what was left of it – followed him through it all.” [*Fortress Ploesti*, p. 53]

Exiting the flaming ruins of the refinery, Baker and Jerstad were finished. They slowly tried to climb their burning, exhausted ship, to enable their crew to bail-out. Some crewmen tried, but their chutes didn’t have time or altitude in which to open. All the men, and “Hell’s Wench,” plummeted to their destruction.

Behind these two leading groups, and twenty minutes behind schedule, both the 98<sup>th</sup> BG and the 44<sup>th</sup> BG made the correct navigational turn at Floresti. But, because of the chaos of the moment, and because the leading two groups often had already selected “targets of opportunity” (since they were off-course and out of their assigned positions in the “Tidal Wave” plan), the results of the raid were less than effective. It is fair to say, however, that the 389<sup>th</sup> BG, bringing up the rear, clobbered target “Red.”

All in all, the bombing actually accomplished that day proved to be too little, too late.

- The bulk of the planes in the lead group, the 376<sup>th</sup> BG, ended up missing Ploesti entirely; at best, they only bombed railway yards and other opportunistic targets.



- The 93<sup>rd</sup> BG and a few stragglers from the 376<sup>th</sup> corrected the navigational error in time to attack Ploesti, albeit from a southerly direction.
- The 98<sup>th</sup> BG and 44<sup>th</sup> BG hit most of their targets, although some of those same targets had already been attacked from the milling mob of B-24s in the lead.
- The fifth and final group, the 389<sup>th</sup>, made another initial navigational error of its own, but then corrected the error in time to bomb the Campina works.
- [See map at page 17 for details.]

Essentially, since both surprise and synchronization-of-attack were lost, the raid was much less effective than hoped, and its loss-rate was horrendous — 54 planes lost over the target alone.

#### Aftermath.

I shall not recount all of the mighty exertions of the surviving crew and planes to return to base in Libya. Suffice to say that the B-24s were set upon by Axis fighters on their return trip. Some were shot up but still flyable; some were lost; some ran out of fuel, crashing into the land or the sea. And some made it to other countries (mostly Turkey), where crews were interned.

Only 88 B-24s returned to Benghazi, out of a total of 178 planes — a staggering loss rate above 50%. [Duane Schultz, in *Into the Fire* (Westholme, 2007), p. xii, puts the returning-to-base number at 93 planes — still, a terrible loss-rate.] Airmen killed, captured, interned, and missing in action: between 496 and 532 men. Another 440 men, back at base, were wounded.

Was the mission a failure and the attack a shambles? History has adjudicated “Operation Tidal Wave” a huge failure, and many harsh opinions about the errors made by the Operation planners and the formation leaders have been expressed and defended.

This we may say in truth and fairness: the Ploesti raid was a calculated risk gone terribly wrong.

Yet, still trying to be fair, and especially in war, it might also be said that all too often we seem to learn only on a trial-and-error basis, by stretching ourselves, trying to do the improbable.

Look at D-Day, for example, and consider what was accomplished there, especially on Omaha Beach; and the airborne troops parachuting behind Utah Beach; and the Rangers scaling the cliffs at Pointe du Hoc. These feats amaze us. Who would have thought such deeds were feasible?

Then, is it ruthless to view human life, its value, its importance, within the prism of a calculus of gain-and-loss? Or, in war-time (however much we may wish to deny this possibility), might such a viewpoint be necessary?

In this regard, are we indicating, then, that our military men and women are expendable? I would hate to think so. Nonetheless, it seems that sometimes incredible sacrifices have been asked of — and yet willingly rendered by — our men and women in the United States armed forces.

Five fliers received Congressional Medals of Honor for their actions on August 1, 1943: Col. John “Killer” Kane; Col. Leon Johnson; 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. Lloyd Hughes (a pilot in the 389<sup>th</sup> BG); Lt. Col. Addison Baker; and Maj. John L. Jerstad.

The last three medals were awarded posthumously.



[John L. Jerstad was inducted into the WAHF in 2009.]



## Honor Roll Call — 1 August 1943 — Operation Tidal Wave

### Wisconsin Airmen known or believed to have participated in this Operation



Of all the photos to come out of the European air war during World War II, this photo of a B-24D Liberator ("The Sandman" [pilot: Lt. Robert Sternfels]) in the 98th Bomb Group, seen emerging from the fire, smoke, and oily grit of the Ploesti raid, is often said to be the iconic image of the entire European aerial conflict. However that may be, it does capture the terribly desperate straits in which those brave airmen found themselves struggling for success, and survival. (USAF photo, Air Force Historical Support Division.)

[Sources vary as to the number of the airmen who participated: somewhere between 1,725 and 1,760 airmen took part.]

BUGYIE, Steve – 44BG (Exeland)  
 CLAFLIN, Leigh – 93BG (Mondovi)  
 DALTON, Malcolm – 389BG (Soldiers Grove)  
 DOMKE, Carl – 93BG (North Freedom)  
 DURAND, Frederick – 44BG (Gile)  
 FLISTER, Henry – 44BG (Edgerton)  
 FOSTER, Leslie – 98BG (Sheldon)  
 GAMBRILL, Jean – 98BG (Madison)  
 GERHARD, Norbert – 389BG (Sheboygan Falls)  
 HAHN, Delbert – 98BG (Milwaukee)  
 HARMS, Roy – 93BG (Grafton)  
 HEGGE, Irvin – 93BG (Madison)  
 HOFF, Thomas – 389BG (Milwaukee & Weehauken)  
 HOLBROOK, Melvin – 376BG (Park Falls)  
 ISAACSON, William – 98BG (Oshkosh)  
 JANIC, Edmund – 93BG (Milwaukee)  
 JERSTAD, John – 93BG (Racine)  
 KNEISL, William – 98BG (Wausau)  
 KOCH, Ross – 389BG (Fond du Lac)  
 KORGER, Harold – 98BG (Eau Claire)  
 KRAFT, John – 98BG (Chippewa Falls)  
 LEIMBACH, Bernard – 389BG, 98BG (Milwaukee)

McLAUGHLIN, Tim – 376BG (Janesville)  
 MACHOS, Harry – 389BG (Milwaukee)  
 MARQUIS, James – 93BG (Chippewa Falls)  
 MARTENS, Edward – 376BG (Rome)  
 NASH, Robert – 98BG (Oshkosh)  
 NATHE, Raymond – 389BG (Milwaukee)  
 NELSON, Milo – 93BG (Superior)  
 NELSON, Philip – 98BG (Iron River)  
 O'CONNOR, John – 376BG (Manitowoc)  
 PETERLEUS, Arthur – 389BG (Milwaukee)  
 POLIVKA, Russell – 93BG, 98BG (unknown hometown)  
 RANGLES, Ward – 93BG (Alma Center)  
 RANTALA, Archibald – 93BG (Brule)  
 REED, Ralph – 376BG (Boscobel)  
 RUBIN, Edward – 93BG (Portage)  
 RUDELL, John – 93BG (Wausau)  
 SUPIANO, Boyden – 98BG (Racine)  
 TRAUDT, Bernard – 44BG (Milwaukee)  
 TRICK, Michael – 98BG (Hales Corners)  
 VINCENT, Larry – 44BG (Browntown)  
 WARE, Warren – 389BG (Milwaukee)  
 WESTERBEKE, Donald – 389BG (Neenah)



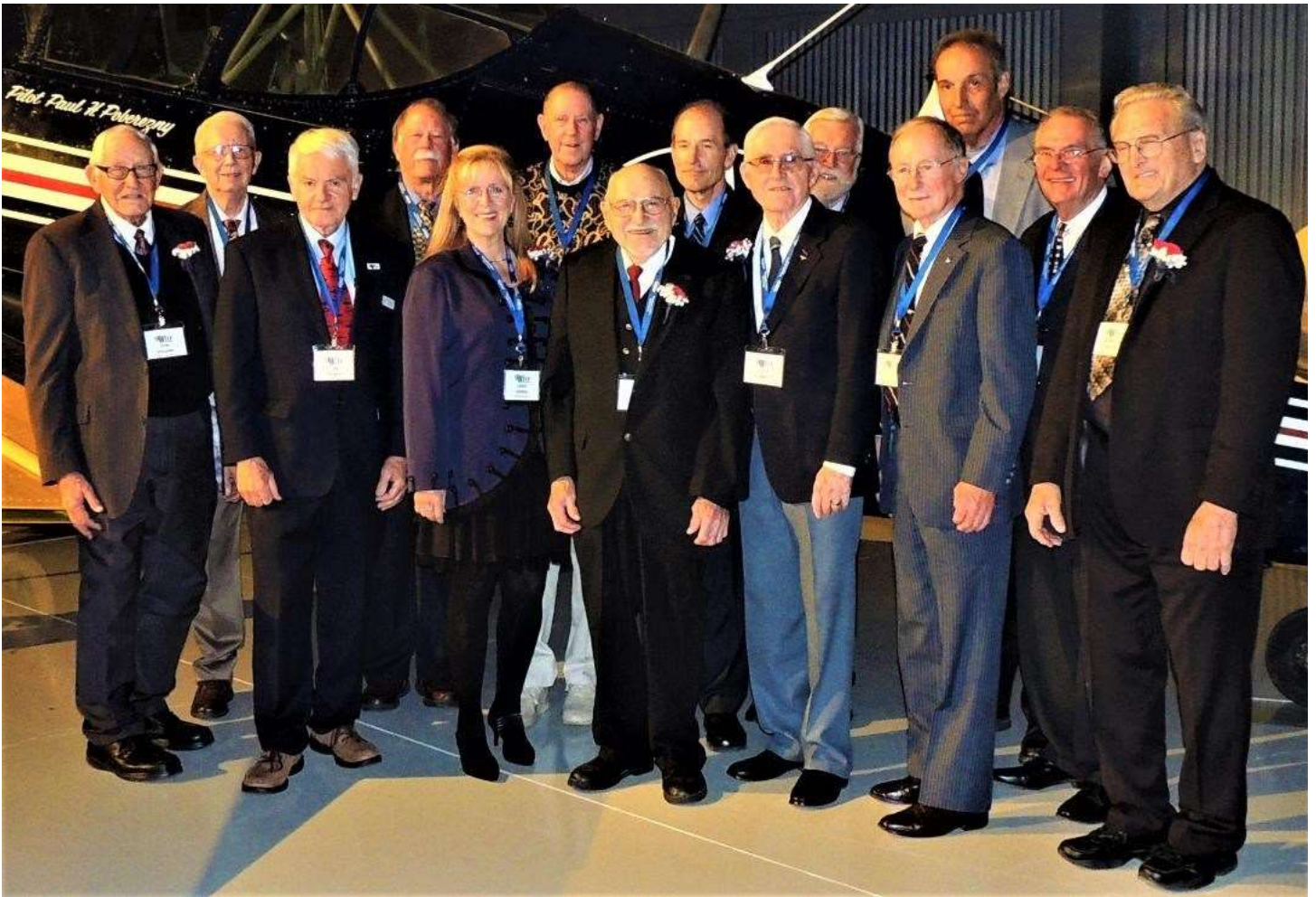
## PHOTOS—2019 WAHF INDUCTION

### AT RIGHT:

David Cabelka accepting  
Lyle Grimm's plaque,  
from Tom Thomas (left)  
and Chuck Swain (right).

**BELOW:** Group of past and present  
WAHF Inductees,  
as follows (left to right):

Donald Voland  
Robert Clark  
Tom Thomas  
Jeff Baum  
Janis Sierra  
Field Morey  
Archie Henkelmann  
Jeff Skiles  
Richard Schmidt  
Chuck Swain  
Duane Esse  
Bill Sanford (son of Joshua Sanford)  
Jim Szajkovics  
Darrel Gibson







**ABOVE:**

Jeff Skiles,  
assisted by  
Tina Swain (right)  
and  
Chuck Swain (center)

**AT RIGHT:**

Richard Schmidt  
with his plaque, being  
congratulated by  
Ron Wojnar (left)  
and  
Tom Thomas (right)



## EAA News and Notes

### Weekly Personalized Local Aviation Event Updates; 2019 AirVenture Facts

#### You Can Receive Personalized Updates for Local Aviation Events to Your Email Inbox

EAA and the developers of SocialFlight.com have joined forces to offer EAA members customized aviation newsletters, delivered weekly to the members' email inboxes.

EAA members can sign up for the EAA Aviation Event Newsletter at [EAA.org/EventNews](http://EAA.org/EventNews).

It is an easy process:

- [1] sign in to the EAA website; then
- [2] click a button to sign up for the aviation event newsletter; then
- [3] a customized registration page will open on SocialFlight's webpage; and
- [4] the customized registration page should have all of your basic EAA information pre-filled into the SocialFlight registration page.

According to the EAA Membership Development Manager, Cory Puuri, for EAA members, "finding events and places to fly is a significant interest."

Cory Puuri went on to say, "Members asked us to deliver localized event information to their email inbox so they can plan where to fly. Since SocialFlight has become known for its cross-platform aviation event information distribution, they were a logical partner to help us launch such a service."

Jeff Simon, founder of SocialFlight, remarked,

"SocialFlight and EAA share common goals of supporting General Aviation and getting more pilots out there and flying. This partnership will help spread the word about how much is happening every day in the world of aviation. Now EAA members will have to look no further than their inbox to stay in touch with their local aviation community and plan their next flying adventure."

For more information on EAA and its programs, you can call 800-JOIN-EAA (800-564-6322), or go to its website at [www.eaa.org](http://www.eaa.org).

SocialFlight is a free Mobile App and website that provides pilots with an interactive map of over 10,000 aviation events, fly-ins, air shows, pancake breakfasts, conventions, FAA safety seminars, and more.

SocialFlight is a product of Where2Interactive, which is a developer of mobile apps and websites helping to promote event and travel information for enthusiasts at [www.socialflight.com](http://www.socialflight.com).

#### 2019 Was a Record Year for EAA AirVenture

The facts and figures for the 2019 EAA AirVenture in Oshkosh from July 22-28 have been collected, recorded, and analyzed. They all add up to a record-setting event:

**Attendance:** 642,000 (approximately). Increase of 6.8% above 2018's record attendance.

**Total Aircraft:** More than 10,000 (at Wittman and other regional airports)

**Total show-planes:** 2,758

**Camping:** More than 12,300 camp sites (estimated 40,000 campers)

**Volunteers:** More than 5,500

**Commercial exhibitors:** 863

**Forums, Workshops, Presentations:** 1,500 sessions (more than 75,000 attendees and participants)

**EAA Aircraft Flights:** 3,051 people flew aboard EAA's Ford Tri-motors  
3,173 people flew aboard EAA's Bell 47 helicopters  
669 people flew aboard EAA's B-17

**Media Attendees:** 851 representatives from six continents

**Social Media & Internet:** More than 17.6 million people reached

**International Guests:** 2,772 visitors from 93 countries

**Economic Impact:** \$170 million to the five counties in the Oshkosh region





## MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

# John Zollicoffer Jr.

**Occupation:** Attorney (retired 12/31/18)

**Where did you grow up/live now?**

I have always lived in Henderson, North Carolina.

**Favorite book:** *The Greatest Generation* by Tom Brokaw.

**One thing I want to do before I die:**

See more Great-Great Grandchildren.

**What I enjoy most about my life:**

My wife, Martha, our family, and travelling.

**Favorite airplane:**

Lockheed's P-38 "Lightning"

**Favorite quote or words of wisdom:**

"Freedom is the only worthy goal in life."  
—Epictetus

**A person from history I would like to meet:**

Napoleon Bonaparte. He was responsible for so many changes in so many aspects of the world.

**The person I most admire and why:**

My father (who taught me values and responsibility).

**How I got interested in aviation:**

Kenneth C. Royall Sr. was the Secretary of the Army serving under President Roosevelt during World War II. He gave me numerous model airplanes — the kind that were used to train plane-spotters during the War — and these model airplanes got me interested in aviation.

**Other hobbies, other than aviation:** Now that I am retired from practicing law, it's mainly "piddling around" (which I enjoy).

**Why I became a member/supporter of WAHF:**

Tom Eisele sent me some issues of "Forward in Flight," and I decided to join up.



John Zollicoffer Jr.



## Have you Sent in Your Member Spotlight?

All WAHF members receive a Member Spotlight form when joining or renewing. Please complete your copy and return to the address below, or just answer the questions that **John** has and email them to WAHF.

Send it soon, along with a photo, so you can be featured in a future issue of *Forward in Flight*. Send to:

Tom Eisele  
Editor, Forward in Flight  
W8863 U.S. Highway 12  
Fort Atkinson, WI 53538-9762

[t.d.eisele@att.net](mailto:t.d.eisele@att.net)

## Address Changes

Moved recently? Are you a snowbird? Please inform WAHF of your address change so you can continue to receive *Forward in Flight* in a timely manner. Please send a note to the address above.

## WAHF Scholarships

Launched in 2002, WAHF's scholarship program annually awards scholarships to aviation students. The Carl Guell Memorial Scholarship is named in honor of WAHF's founder; the \$1000 award goes to a continuing student who meets the required academic standards and is active in both community and extracurricular activities.

Today, three additional scholarships are offered annually to students from Wisconsin enrolled in an aviation program in a technical college or college/university in Wisconsin or outside our state. WAHF member/supporter Jerome Thiessen began a \$500 scholarship. The EAA Chapter 640/Robert Payzer Memorial Scholarship and the Jeff Baum & Jim Quinn Scholarship began in 2013, for students pursuing a career in aviation management in the amount of \$500; the \$500 Payzer and \$1000 Thiessen awards are for any aviation or aerospace field of study.

Scholarship applications are available online at the Community Foundation of North Central Wisconsin website ([www.CFONCW.org](http://www.CFONCW.org)). Completed applications must be received by March 1.

# “Remember, returning is secondary”

By Tom Eisele

When I set out to write about Major John Jerstad, I had no motive other than to tell a story that seemed less well-known than it should be. After all, how many people receive the Congressional Medal of Honor for their actions?

I had finished my article when I happened to mention to Tom Thomas that I had written a piece on Major Jerstad. Tom asked me if I had seen or read Gary Dikkers' earlier article on John Jerstad in the Summer 2008 *Forward in Flight* (vol. 6, #2)? I had not, but Rose Dorcey sent me a copy.

It's a brilliant piece, very well-done. Gary's piece and my article do not share every topic — for example, his tells you much more about Jerstad's family, and about his funeral; mine has more details on the composition of the groups in this mission to Ploesti, and I haven't seen any listing of Wisconsin airmen involved in the mission, such as you'll find on page 19.

Still, the core of our articles remains the same story of determined bravery in the face of fearsome defending firepower. Upon reading Gary's 2008 story, and thinking again about my 2019 piece, I do wonder how anyone could perform such deeds.

The airmen preparing for the Ploesti raid had been told numerous times that hitting and destroying the Romanian oil fields was the main thing; their safe return to base was secondary. But how does a person's survival become “secondary?” It's just not normal. Which of us does not put our survival first?

I suppose one factor that makes this attitude more intelligible is the historical context. We (the Allies) were not winning the war in 1942-43, decidedly not. Germany in Europe and Japan in the Pacific were in firm control of matters, and almost everywhere during 1940-42, the Allies had been badly beaten. Were we desperate for a victory, willing to sacrifice anything? I believe we were. Nonetheless, when it becomes your personal hide that is placed on the line, the easy calculus of the big brass behind the fighting line becomes very muddled and problematic.

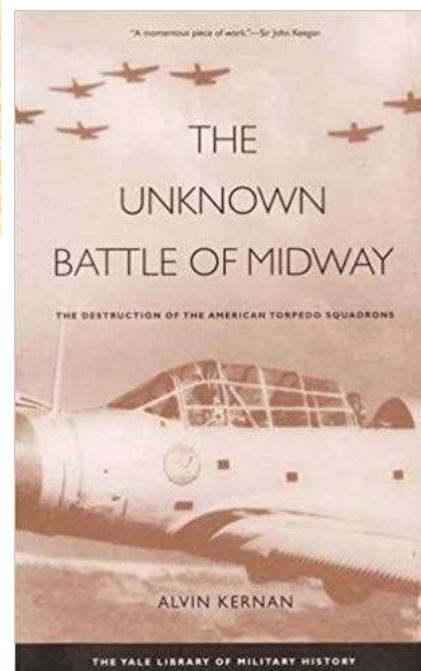
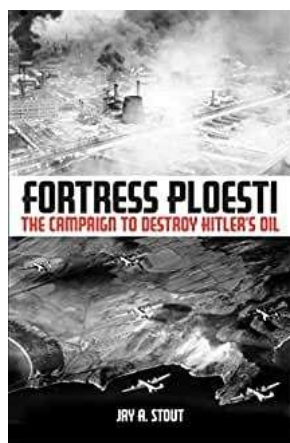
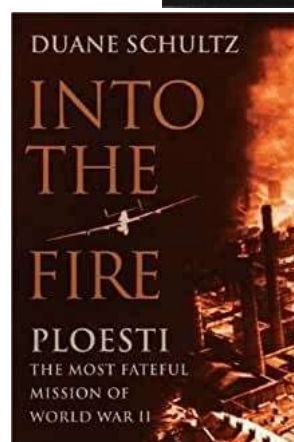
On August 01, 1943, the 1700+ airmen of the 8th and 9th Air Forces answered the call and bore in on their targets at low level, exposing their planes to devastating defensive fire.

This phenomenon did not occur just once during the war, nor only in the European theatre, nor only in the Air Force.

On June 04, 1942, after America had gotten grim news almost every week from the Pacific theatre, a few brave Navy airmen from three aircraft carriers — the *Enterprise*, the *Hornet*, and the *Yorktown* — managed at Midway to surmount the odds against them and sink four Japanese carriers in a single day.

Yet, out of 51 U.S. torpedo planes to attack those carriers, only 7 planes made it back to their ships. Out of 126 Navy airmen flying in those torpedo planes, only 29 men survived the attack. And not a single torpedo struck a Japanese carrier (all the damage done was from the dive-bombers). The whole grim tale is set out in Alvin Kernan's *The Unknown Battle of Midway: The Destruction of the American Torpedo Squadrons* (2005).

It is difficult to imagine what drove these U.S. airmen to do what they did. They knew the odds. They did the deeds.



No one pretended that these missions would be easy, or that many of the fliers would return safely. Some would return, of course, but many would not.

So, I continue to ask: Where do we get such brave people?

-TDE





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### Welcome New WAHF Members/Supporters

Paul Schumi                      Linda Jansante

*Thanks for coming on board. We hope to see you at a WAHF event soon!*

### MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS

The WAHF board and directors appreciate your support. Because of you, we are able to continue our efforts of sharing Wisconsin aviation history.

If you renew your membership annually, you'll soon be receiving your renewal reminder. We urge you to renew promptly!

Thank you!

### HAS YOUR ADDRESS CHANGED?

Please contact us to inform us of your new address. A timely reminder of your new address is very much appreciated, as it helps to save time—and money—for our small non-profit.

It's easy; send a note to Tom Thomas at <tomas317@live.com>, or else call him at 608-221-1994.

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