

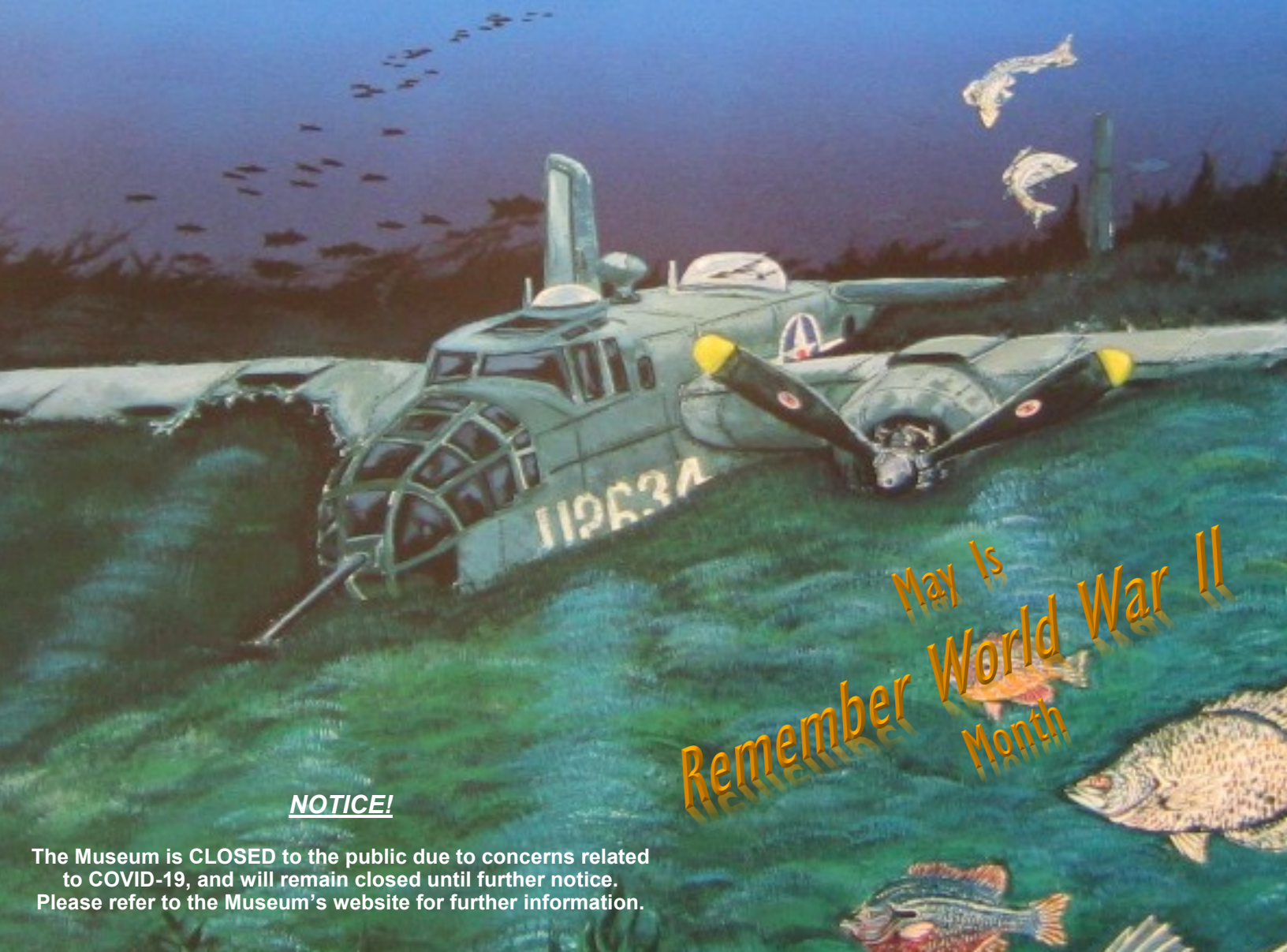
FLIGHT LINES

MAY
2020



A PUBLICATION OF THE SOUTHERN MUSEUM OF FLIGHT
BIRMINGHAM, AL

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May Is
Remember World War II
Month

NOTICE!

The Museum is CLOSED to the public due to concerns related to COVID-19, and will remain closed until further notice. Please refer to the Museum's website for further information.



THE LAKE MURRAY "MITCHELL"

"This effort is more than recovering a piece of military artillery - it is a tribute to those who built and flew the bomber"

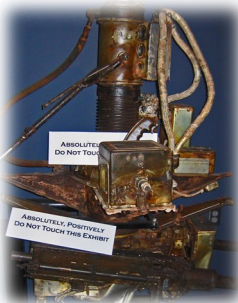
-Dr. Robert Seigler

The Lake Murray B-25C on display was completed on March 24, 1942 at a cost of \$116,346 and was the 200th B-25C of the total 1,625 C-models produced. This particular Mitchell served as a patrol aircraft off the West Coast and also served as a bomber trainer in Louisiana and South Carolina during its short service life of 13 months. On the morning of April 4, 1943, during a skip-bombing practice run, this vintage aircraft ditched in Lake Murray outside of Columbia, SC after losing power to its left engine, and sank 150' to the lake's bottom. All five crew members survived the crash.

Dr. Robert Seigler of Columbia, SC, in the late 1980s, was inspired by stories of the B-25 and began his quest to retrieve the bomber from the lake bottom. His 16-year odyssey to raise the bomber was realized in September 2005. During the 11-day recovery process, media attention focused on the aircraft with dozens of published articles and newscasts worldwide. The recovery was documented in a media presentation filmed by the History Channel as part of its Mega Movers series.

A "very serious hobby" is how Seigler describes his mission. *"The airplane is a time capsule that has everything that was on in it in 1943; a piece of history that needs to be preserved. The aircraft is a machine that can be used as a tool to teach history. The real fallen warriors are the men who flew."*

There are only fifty-four (54) of all models of the B-25 remaining in the world from an inventory of nearly 10,000 built. There are only four (4) of the B-25C models left in the world and this one is the third oldest extant B-25 and one of the rarest B-25Cs. This is the only one that has the retractable lower gun turret (*the ventral turret*) originally installed with the aircraft.



The ventral turret (*shown on the left*) was operated through a



panaflex prism periscope that caused such intense vertigo and nausea in its user that it was rarely used and often removed. In the Pacific combat theater, the turrets were immediately removed and replaced with fuel tanks to increase the range of the aircraft. The frequent monsoon rains turned airfields into mud fields which covered the gunsight on takeoff rendering the turret useless. This rare artifact, the ventral turret, is also on display as part of the Lake Murray exhibit at the museum.

Joining the B-25C with the other 101 aircraft in the museum's inventory is a TB25-N, a bomber that has the important heritage of being one of the Tuskegee Airmen's aircraft used in their multi-engine training program. Our museum is honored to have the opportunity of sharing these rare and important artifacts of aviation history and cultural heritage with our patrons and public, but to also provide the platform to educate the public relative to this important time in American history.



First Time On Land Since April 4, 1943

15 YEARS AGO - REFLECTIONS



Theories & Speculation

(reprint from 2006 Flight Lines, Volume 7, Issue 2 - Summer Edition)

Like a good murder mystery, the Lake Murray B-25 has many tales to tell and secrets to share. A good detective working on the case would probably say, *"I've looked at the evidence and something doesn't add up."*

Over the past several months we have been examining the body of evidence. We have been studying the accident reports and recalling conversations with the sons and daughters of witnesses who saw the aircraft in-flight the morning of the accident. It's been years since that day on April 4th, 1943, when 2nd Lt. William Fallon and his crew of four, ditched the twin-engine Mitchell bomber in the lake. Like most WW-2 bomber crews, they were very young and had little flying time of any kind. Lt. Fallon had 238 hours total time and around 32 hours in the B-25. The Lake Murray crash was his second aircraft accident. Two months later, he was killed in another B-25 accident in Myrtle Beach, SC, when he decided to go to the rear of the aircraft, climb in the machine gun turret and fire the guns during a flight.

Our interest in looking further into the cause of the Lake Murray accident has been "peaked" by a number of factors. Early in the search for artifacts inside the plane, a .30 caliber bullet was found in the cockpit area. One might say that finding a bullet inside an aircraft with guns on board might be a normal event. The interesting thing about this bullet is that it had been fired and had the rifling marks to prove it. Did someone shoot at the aircraft? Was it a factor in the ditching? A month after the bomber was safely back at our museum, we received a copy of the individual accident reports written by the crew members. I read them all, with great interest, to better understand the crew's version of the accident. Each report detailed how they planned to make a practice run over the target, "Bomb Island", before starting the real thing. The reports stated that Lt. Fallon pulled up and the left engine began to lose power. He ordered the two men, the bombardier and the bombardier instructor, out of the nose. Fallon turned on the electric boost pumps that supply fuel to the engine. The engine picked back up for a few seconds and then quit. He jettisoned the bomb load into the lake and told Lt. Henry Mascall, bombardier, to go back to the nose and close the bomb bay doors. The aircraft would not climb. There was a short discussion about what to do, and Lt. Mascall told the pilot that they were not going to be able to make it back the 12 miles to the base. Lt. Fallon decided to ditch the bomber in the lake. As I read each report it was evident that the story was the same as the newspapers had reported at the time. What caught my attention was that all the stories told by the crew were

virtually identical. It's like the crew got together and decided what the story was going to be and all wrote the same thing. A number of local South Carolina residents, whose families lived around the lake at the time of the accident, have come forward with B-25 stories passed down by their parents. Apparently, it was common to see B-25s flying down the beach at low level near an area where the girls sun bathed. One gentleman said that his dad told him that he saw our B-25 skimming the water near the beach not more than 15 feet above the surface on the morning of the accident. I listened to all the 'lake lore' tales while in SC, but didn't begin to add it all up until our return to Birmingham. The bomber's airframe shows the aircraft's left wing tip is severely damaged. The nose wheel has been pushed all the way to the right side. We have had a number of engineers and others familiar with ditching damage come through the museum and comment that the damage to our aircraft is not consistent with the accident report. Divers who initially saw the aircraft in the water said that the bomb bay doors were open, refuting the pilot's report that he had them closed. The individual accident reports from the crew members each spell out how Lt. Fallon ordered the bombardier back to the nose to flip the switch that closes the bomb bay door. Each crew member emphasized that point, as a unique event. Is it possible that the doors were left open and that's part of the reason the plane would not climb on one engine? Did the pilot drag the left wing tip and prop in the water during a low pass down the beach and hit a tree with the nose trying to clear the peninsula mentioned in the reports? Did some angry farmer fire the "Golden BB" .30 caliber bullet, found inside the aircraft, after the 18 to 22 year old crew made another low pass over his chicken house?

It's all wild speculation backed up by years of "folk tales" from Lake Murray, "rubber stamped" accident reports, a spent bullet, and the "expert" opinions from observers passing through the museum.

Who knows the real answers? All members of that crew are no longer with us so speculation will no doubt continue.



Bomb Island

Dr. Jim Griffin
Director Emeritus,
SMF Board

75 YEARS AGO - THE WAR ENDS



Aviation Events in 2020 Honor World War II Heros



Germany surrendered to the Allies on May 8, 1945, and Japan followed on Sept. 2, 1945. World War II played a major role in reshaping the world we live in after combat ended in Europe and the Pacific. *"It laid the foundation for NATO, and the rise of Germany and Japan into close trading partners with the United States" and brought decades of prosperity to the United States. "It's very important for the country to take a moment, and to think about that, and to remember this important part of our national history. Who knows what could have happened if we lost?"* said Mike Ginter, a member of the Arsenal of Democracy Executive Planning Committee and Vice President of the AOPA.



The 75th anniversary of the allied victory in World War II will be commemorated around the world in 2020. Georgia will be part of it with the 17th annual WWII Heritage Days, which is now scheduled for Sept. 12-13, 2020 at the Atlanta Regional Airport-Falcon Field in Peachtree City.

The Commemorative Air Force (CAF) Dixie Wing will celebrate the 1940s, salute the Greatest Generation, and inspire all ages to preserve the legacy of America's veterans. This could be the last time in America's history to personally thank those veterans who served in World War II and are known as *"The Greatest Generation."* An 18-year old who served in 1945 when the war ended would be 93 these days.

The Arsenal of Democracy Flyover of Washington, DC will take place on Victory in Europe Day now scheduled for Sept. 25, 2020, to commemorate this anniversary of the end of World War II in Europe. The flyover is part of a five-day slate of educational and commemorative activities in and around the nation's capital. An aerial show of force will consist of more than 100 vintage warbirds of various types flying over the National Mall in 28 separate, historically sequenced formations. The care, maintenance, and restoration of these historical aircraft are privately funded.

In Hawaii, the Battleship Missouri Memorial and Pearl Harbor Aviation Museum will commemorate the anniversary of the end of World War II in the Pacific theatre with five days of educational programs and ceremonies culminating on Sept. 2, 2020. Organizers said their hope is that these aerial events *"will serve as reminders to all that freedom is precious and must be preserved."*

EAA AirVenture Oshkosh 2020 will feature expanded warbird flying activities as the annual Experimental Aircraft Association fly-in convention commemorates the 75th anniversary. *"Marking the 75th anniversary of the end of World War II and telling all the aviation stories involved is a mammoth task,"* said Rick Larsen, EAA's vice president of programs, publications, and marketing, who coordinates AirVenture features and attractions. *"Our goal is to create the go-to event that properly commemorates the aviation story of World War II, from the Eagle Squadrons and American Volunteer Groups through the final Allied victories in 1945."*

The 68th annual EAA fly-in convention is still planning to be held on July 20-26, 2020 at Wittman Regional Airport in Oshkosh, WI.

