

FLIGHT LINES

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Reed M. Chambers James A. Meissner Edward V. Rickenbacker
with the
94th Aero Squadron (*Hat In The Ring*) - American Expeditionary Force (1917)



ALABAMA REMEMBERS

James Armand Meissner (1896 - 1936)

James Armand Meissner was a World War I "Flying Ace" and founder of the Birmingham Flying Club, which ultimately became Alabama's first Air National Guard unit.

Meissner grew up in Brooklyn and graduated from high school in 1914. He enrolled at Cornell University but left there in 1917 to enlist in the Army Signal Service to be trained in aeronautics. He was sent to France to continue his training and was commissioned a 1st Lieutenant. He was assigned to a flying group known as the Lafayette Escadrille and counted Eddie Rickenbacker among his colleagues.

Piloting a Nieuport 28 on May 2, 1918, Meissner downed his first enemy plane earning him the Distinguished Service Cross and the Croix de Guerre. His second kill was made on May 30th and racked up two more kills before being made Commander of the 147th Pursuit Squadron. Now flying a Spad fighter, he scored four more kills.

Meissner was discharged as a Major in March 1919, returned to Cornell and completed his Masters Degree in engineering. He then moved to Birmingham and began a career at the Tennessee Coal, Iron and Railroad Co. Later that year, he and Henry Badham, Jr. created the Birmingham Flying Club which was nicknamed "*Birmingham Escadrille*". They leased a tract of land near Ensley that was named Roberts Field, one of the early airfields in Birmingham.

Meissner immediately began promoting the flying club to be part of the Alabama National Guard. Having finally convinced the War Department to establish the seventh air unit of the Guard, the Birmingham Flying Club was organized as the 135th Observation Squadron on January 21, 1922, with

7-Curtiss "*Jenny's*", 26 officers and 120 enlisted personnel under Meissner's command. In 1924, the unit became the 106th Observation Squadron and was responsible for aerial mapping and surveying, federal infrastructure projects, and for operating the first government air mail routes in Alabama.

The father of the Alabama Air National Guard, James Meissner died on January 16, 1936 at age 39 from pneumonia. Eddie Rickenbacker made the trip to Birmingham to serve as pallbearer during the memorial service, which was capped by a flyover by members of the 106th. Meissner's ashes were interred at Arlington National Cemetery in May 1936.

The 106th left Roberts Field in 1938 and moved to Fort Sumpter Smith at the then-named Birmingham Municipal Airport.

On November 25, 1940, the 106th was ordered to active service. The squadron was still on active duty

when the World War II began. The unit grew through the years changing aircraft and missions numerous times in its history. In 1994, the unit took delivery of 9-Boeing KC-135R refueling aircraft and was re-designated the 106th Air Refueling Squadron of the 117th Air Refueling Wing, with a mission that continues to this day.

Meissner's World War I fame as a decorated Ace was important at establishing the very first Air National Guard Unit in Alabama and the seventh such unit in the United States. His legacy is still reflected in the ongoing mission of today's Alabama Air National Guard at Birmingham.



*Oil Painting of
James Armand Meissner*



CURRENT HAPPENINGS



No More Banks High School



a F-86 jet fighter mounted over the entrance of the school that served as the school "mascot" for over 40 years. Time,

Demolition of the Banks school in East Lake, Birmingham, took place during July 2021. The school campus had been abandoned since 2007. Part of the old school's landscape was the "Banks Jet",

and football rivalry attacks on the jet, took a toll on the aircraft, and in August 2007, the jet was placed via crane on a flat bed trailer. It was then transported to



a new life due to the generosity of Banks' HS alumnae, led by Dr. William Wood. Following the restoration by a talented team of volunteers, the jet was proudly placed on display in 2012. Banks High School now remains in lasting memory at the Southern Museum of Flight!

Upcoming Museum Events



For Veterans Day 2021, The Southern Museum of Flight and Opera Birmingham Present



UNKNOWN



SOLDIERS NEVER DIE UNTIL THEY ARE FORGOTTEN
TOMB GUARDS NEVER FORGET

WHEN: Thursday, November 11, 2021

6:00 pm-Social - 7:00pm-Program - 8:00pm-Closing Remarks

WHERE: Southern Museum Of Flight

DETAILS: See the Museum's website:

southernmuseumofflight.org

-or- Opera Birmingham's website:

operabirmingham.org

A "Newer" B-25

The museum's expert Restoration Team continue to dedicate their skills in the refurbishment of the Tuskegee multi-engine B-25 trainer of the Tuskegee Airmen. Recent efforts have focused on the radial engine restoration and propellers to prepare them for display. Earlier, the tail section had been restored, polished and displayed in the South Hangar along with the forward fuselage. The completed restoration will be an important and historical addition to the museum's Tuskegee Airmen diorama exhibit.



A total of 257 aviation cadets graduated from Tuskegee Army Air Field as B-25 bomber pilots, and were assigned to the 477th Bombardment Group. This Group was being trained for a possible role in the Pacific Theater. World War II ended before the 477th could be deployed overseas in a combat role.

UNKNOWN is a dramatic song cycle that honors the 100th anniversary of the founding of the *Tomb of the Unknown Soldier* at Arlington Cemetery, on November 11, 2021.

UNKNOWN explores the ideas of war, honor, and memory through the eyes of soldiers, family members, and *Tomb Guards* who are connected to each other and the *Tomb* through their mutual service and sacrifice.

UNKNOWN is commissioned by UrbanArias with Wolf Trap Foundation for the Performing Arts, Opera Colorado, Minnesota Opera, Opera Birmingham, and Stephen E. and Dorothy P. Bird.





REMEMBERING "ROSIE"

On May 31, 2021, Dr. Fran Carter, EdD, Birmingham, AL, the Founder and Executive Director of the American Rosie the Riveter Assoc. (ARRA), passed away. She was 99.

Dr. Carter founded ARRA in 1998 to honor the working women of World War II and preserve their legacy. Her husband thought she had in mind a small club in their home town! She had different plans. The ARRA organization now has grown to over 7,000 members.

Dr. Carter began working in 1942 at the Bechtel McCone-Parsons Airplane Modification Plant in Birmingham, on B-29 bombers. After the war, she became a professor at Samford University. She was honored at a 2016 "Rosie" celebration event held at the museum that also, at the time, celebrated her 94th birthday.

The Southern Museum of Flight is proud to present historic information and artifacts of the ARRA in a dedicated display arrangement that Dr. Carter and her associates participated in its early construction.



Commemorative Air Force (CAF) Airbase Georgia is dedicating their World War II Heritage Days 2021 in honor of all Rosie, the Riveters. The new one-day event on Oct. 9, 2021, is the Airbase's 17th annual open house and fundraising event at Atlanta Regional Airport – Falcon Field in Peachtree City, GA.

Activities for the day include warbird rides, food trucks, a PX and living history displays, presentations and military vehicles on display. As a special feature, CAF Airbase Georgia (formerly Dixie Wing) is inviting owners of Stearman vintage aircraft to participate in a fly-in for the day. The Airbase is currently restoring a Stearman biplane in honor of the Rosie, the Riveters.

An Iceberg Aircraft Carrier?

Britain was losing the Battle of the Atlantic early in World War II, with German U-boats sinking ship after ship. Enter Project Habakkuk, the incredible plan to build an aircraft carrier from ice.

The idea of using solid blocks of ice, strengthened with sawdust to create an aircraft carrier using as many natural resources as possible seemed good on paper. The original list called for 300,000 tons of wood pulp, 25,000 tons of wood fiber insulation, 35,000 tons of timber and a conservative 10,000 tons of steel. The British built a prototype in Patricia Lake, Canada, as the test site due to the availability of an ironic source of free labor nearby: a camp of conscientious objectors. They were never told what it was and only knew it was something for the war effort. The prototype confirmed the researchers' forecast that the full-size vessel would cost more money and machinery than a whole fleet of conventional aircraft carriers but the British promoters of Habakkuk were so intimidated by Prime Minister Winston Churchill that they kept this information from him.



The demise of this effort was a combination of factors such as; Iceland could be used as a permanent base in the North Atlantic (*which would negate the need for floating aerodromes*), newer planes could now patrol longer, and newer radar could track U-boats more accurately.

It took three summers for the prototype to finally melt and sink, and an underwater plaque marks the site and the remains. As good as it might have sounded on paper, the prototype proved too impractical to implement and Project Habakkuk sits comfortably among a long line of attempted military innovations that were never fully realized.

