

The Tri-State Warbird Museum...a historic aviation museum dedicated to remembering those who fought for our freedom, and honoring those who made the ultimate sacrifice.

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The Tri-State Warbird Museum

Tri-State Warbird Museum

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Hours:

Wednesday 4pm-7pm

Saturday 10am-3pm

Admission \$12

Discounts available for veterans and students

Annual and lifetime individual and family memberships are available

Donations are needed and are most appreciated - Thank you!

Walk of Veterans Bricks

...continued...John Page 2
Steele, Sr.

A Weekend to Page 3
Remember by Ken
Glass

...continued...A Page 4
Weekend to Re-
member

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John Steele, Sr.



For most of his life John Steele, Sr. has been in the building materials business as the owner of Hilltop Basic Resources, Inc. of Cincinnati, Ohio. But he still has vivid memories of his flight training and wartime service as a TBF (TBM) Naval Aviator in World War II.

John was born in Rochester, New York but moved with his family to Cincinnati in 1941. In December 1942 John was a freshman attend-

ing Dartmouth College in New Hampshire. He will never forget the smartly uniformed gentleman from Boston who showed up to talk to the freshmen about becoming a Navy aviator and convinced John to sign up. First finishing his school year, John then went to Williams College in Williamstown, Massachusetts for 3 months of ground school and athletics training then on to Mt. St. Mary's College in Maryland and Chapel Hill to the University of North Carolina. It was Peru, Indiana where he finally got to his primary pilot training. In the cold winter months he learned to fly in an open cockpit Stearman biplane. Happily moving to Pensacola, Florida John had 6 months of advanced flight training in the SNJ (AT-6 Texan) and earned his Navy Wings. He was grouped with the Navy Academy and Marines and sent to Opa Laka, Florida for torpedo bomber training in a TBF version of a TBM Avenger. Remembering clearly, John says "the proper way to release the torpedo is to be not higher than 50 feet, flying completely straight, and at only 85—90 knots when you then push the "pickle", the torpedo bomb release button which is on the on the stick."



...continued on page 2...

As a 501(c)3 organization the Tri-State Warbird Museum is supported primarily through membership dues and the contributions of individuals and businesses that share in the desire to preserve our country's rich aviation legacy.

...continued from page 1

The Avenger has a crew of 3; the pilot, the radioman and the tailgunner. The aircraft was used as a sort of "glide bomber", flying low and at an angle of less than 45 degrees to drop its two 500 pound bombs or one 1000 pound bomb. In this way the bombs continue their forward path after being released and the plane can immediately begin to pull up to gain altitude and be clear from the bombing impact. The usual targets were enemy submarines.

In June 1944 John was in the Battle of Saipan in the Pacific on a mission of pre-invasion shore-bombing to "soften up the island" when there was a near-catastrophic incident. John pushed the pickle to release his bomb but the bomb did not release and instead was stuck in the bomb bay of his plane. As the bomb had become armed with the pickle-push there was only a short time span until it would explode still stuck in the plane. After what must have been some very tense moments John was able to dislodge the bomb by sharply maneuvering and shaking the plane. Luckily, he was able to fly out of harms way as he saw it leave the plane and explode in the air.

John was stationed at 3 different bases in California mostly flying at night and patrolling the shoreline and awaiting his next assignment as a replacement squadron. During one routine patrol he just avoiding a midair collision due to a poorly trained radioman. At one point he was assigned to a hospital ship where he experienced the frustration Navy and Marines felt with 100 Marine women aboard and strict orders of no fraternization allowed. Another assignment brought John to Pearl Harbor Barbers Point Naval Air Station where Ken Glass was the Commanding Officer. What a small world that these men would both become a valuable part of the Tri-State Warbird Museum.

An assignment on the USS Saratoga brought the opportunity for John to become night carrier qualified, which of course is landing a big plane on a little ship deck complete with rolling seas and utter darkness...it does not sound easy. In early 1945 John was sent back to Saipan for 3 months flying nighttime anti-submarine patrols. There they were testing several torpedo bombing innovations such as the sonobouy which radiated radio frequencies in a 1 1/2 mile square pattern allowing the pilots to actually hear the submarine propellers and steering mechanisms and sometimes even voices coming from inside the sub. This advancement greatly enhanced the ability to pinpoint the submarine. At this time torpedoes were getting outfitted with propellers and so the TBM dive techniques were being tested and changed so that bombs could be released at a higher altitude.

When the war ended John was in the Philippines. He was then again sent to Pearl Harbor, island hopping on a DC-3 ride back to Barbers Point where he continued flying and practicing carrier landings for a few more weeks before transitioning out of active duty and into the reserves. He made his way back to Cincinnati by way of an oil tanker through the Panama Canal, merchant marines ship and train, then back to Dartmouth College to finish his degree in Business Management.

John's business in Cincinnati is Hilltop Basic Resources, Inc. and it is the growth of the business his father bought in the early 1930's originally called Hilltop Building Materials. The original business was building materials and ready-mix concrete but the evolution and growth through the years has seen 25 concrete plants, then sand and gravel, and then mining and pulverizing limestone which was needed in the utility industry to neutralize sulfur dioxide emissions in coal burning power plants. The business now markets ready-mix concrete and aggregates to Ohio, Indiana, Kentucky and West Virginia and includes a plant in downtown Cincinnati. In 2006 Hilltop was awarded the Tri-State Family Business of the Year. John remains as strategic advisor and Vice Chairman and his son John Steele, Jr. is the Chairman and so Hilltop continues as a family business in its third generation. →

A Weekend to Remember

Written by Ken Glass, World War II veteran and Tri-State Warbird Museum Honored Veteran

On the weekend of October 15-17, 2010, the B-25 Billy Mitchell World War II Medium Bomber was made ready for a flight from the Clermont County (Ohio) Airport to Blacksburg, Virginia.



Planning for this trip had been underway for a year or more. Stan Cohen, a 1949 graduate of Virginia Tech University, had the idea of doing a “flyover” at a Tech football game. Stan, an active member of the Tri-State Warbird Museum, contacted David O’Maley, founder and major supporter of the Museum, to seek permission for such a flight. With permission granted, Stan began the yearlong coordination with officials at Tech to accomplish the planned mission. It all came to a successful conclusion on the Saturday Virginia Tech battled Wake Forest University.

Stan Cohen had asked his good friend Don Brandt to be his guest for the weekend. Don, unable to accept due to a conflict, recommended that I might want to take advantage of a chance to fly in the B-25. I gladly accepted this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. It should be noted that Stan, Don and I are all active members of the Tri-State Warbird Museum.

On Friday morning the 15th of October, Stan and I arrived at the airport eager to accept the challenge of a ride to Blacksburg in the B-25. We were greeted by Paul Redlich, President of the Museum and pilot for the weekend. Phil Rountree from the Museum staff was the co-pilot. We soon had our necessary gear for the weekend stowed aboard.

Stan and I sat in two seats directly behind Paul and Phil. Right on schedule at 10 a.m. the two-engine B-25 lifted off under bright sunny conditions. With a tail wind of considerable speed, Paul and Phil



(incidentally, two expert pilots) brought the plane into a landing at Blacksburg approximately one hour after take-off. It should be noted here that Paul Redlich is qualified to fly all of the Mu-

seum planes, which include the P-51 Mustang and the TBM Avenger.



About 15 minutes from Blacksburg Paul and Phil encountered some weather including rain and snow showers. We broke out of the clouds on the approach to the field. Paul at the controls set the plane down very smoothly under a strong cross wind condition. Stan and I in our seats stationed directly under a gun turret managed to endure the cold and wind whistling around us.

Soon after landing a sizable crowd of people began to gather where the plane was parked. This interest and activity continued throughout the rest of the day and Saturday morning. Stan and I as pilots of World War II were proud and flattered to be given so much attention by the folks from the University and Blacksburg. Of course everyone wanted to talk with Paul and Phil, the two pilots flying the famous old aircraft. We all conversed at length about the Tri-State Warbird Museum. It should be noted that a number of people approached Paul wanting to pay for a ride in the plane. He, of course, declined these requests.

During the weekend Paul and Phil went aloft in the plane to practice the approach and timing of the flyover on Saturday. Two such flights were made. I went on one of the flights and also on the Saturday flyover flight. As you might expect, their timing over the stadium of 66,000 people was almost perfect.

...continued on page 4...

Hours:

Wednesday
4pm-7pm

Saturday
10am-3pm

Admission \$12

Discounted admission for veterans
and students \$7

Admission for World War II veterans
is complimentary

Group tours are a great way to spend
some time learning about World War
II aviation history

Memberships:

Annual individual and family

Lifetime individual and family

Bricks can be engraved into the Walk
of Veterans—a great way to honor
someone

Donations are needed and are most
appreciated - Thank you!



...continued from page 3...

Now briefly a few words about the weekend. Everyone seemed to know Stan and as a result the rest of us were warmly greeted by everyone we met. We were escorted in first class style and every need attended to throughout the weekend. We stayed Friday and Saturday nights at the University hotel. It was homecoming weekend at Virginia Tech with many special events, many of which we attended such as the Corps Cadet parade and the Highty-Tighty band luncheon on Saturday prior to the game. At halftime the four of us were introduced on the field. We were then escorted to the President's spaces where we enjoyed the rest of the game in comfort with food and conversation.

Sunday morning under cool and beautiful conditions, we loaded aboard the B-25 for our flight back to the Museum. En route I crawled up to the nose section and enjoyed spectacular views. At 10 a.m. Paul landed the plane at the airport in the usual smooth manner I had become accustomed to.

My thanks to David O'Maley for making it possible for me to be a passenger in the B-25. Also my thanks to Paul Redlich and Phil Rountree for their superb flying ability. Also for all the help they gave to a "less than limber" World War II vet, getting in and out of the plane.

My special thanks to Stan Cohen who was primarily responsible for making all this possible. His yearlong quest and coordination with officials from Virginia Tech paid off with great results. Arrangements were made with David O'Maley and Paul Redlich, President of the Museum, and others. Stan was a super host for the weekend. It seemed like everyone we met at Tech knew and appreciated Stan Cohen. This was an experience I have already shared with family members and friends that will be long remembered.

Finally, the Tri-State Warbird Museum is the catalyst for providing opportunities such as I enjoyed the weekend of October 15-17 in a B-25 Mitchell Bomber.

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