THE OFFICIAL MONTHLY MAGAZINE OF THE 177th FIGHTER WING

THE CONTRAIL

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NOVEMBER 2013, VOL. 47 NO. 11

On the cover: *A U.S. Army Air Corps P-51D Mustang "Jersey Jerk" flown by Maj. Donald J. Strait from the 361st Fighter Squadron, 356th Fighter Group scores a victory against a Luftwaffe Me 109 on Nov. 26, 1944 while escorting bombers over Ruhr. That day the 356th Fighter Group destroyed 23 enemy aircraft without losing a single American. Strait began his career as an enlisted Airman in the 119th Observation Squadron, New Jersey Army National Guard. (U.S. Air National Guard illustration by Tech. Sgt. Matt Hecht)*

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PHOTOJOURNALIST	TECH. SGT. ANDREW J. MERLOCK
PHOTOJOURNALIST	AIRMAN FIRST CLASS SHANE KARP
EDITOR/BROADCAST JOURNALIST	TECH. SGT. MATT HECHT
AVIATION HISTORIAN	DR. RICHARD PORCELLI

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Commander's Column

(This month's column is written by Col. Patrick Kennedy, commander of the 177th Maintenance Group)

It has been an extremely challenging year for the Wing and specifically for the Maintenance Group. With an inspection, the government shutdown, phase inspections of aircraft and furloughs, "Business as usual" has been a far cry from what was accomplished over the past several months.

The year started with a tough yet successful consolidated unit inspection. For the 177th Maintenance Group, it was a challenging inspection that took a great deal of preparation, yet yielded tremendous results. The Inspector General team wasn't off the base more than a few weeks when we were informed that the 132nd Fighter Wing from Des Moines, Iowa would transfer their fleet of F-16's to the 177th. Over a five month period, we received new aircraft and moved our existing jets to four separate locations; 8 retired to Aerospace Maintenance and Regeneration Group (AMARG), commonly referred to as "The Boneyard" in Tucson, Arizona, 1 to Madison, Wis., 9 to Carswell ARB, Texas and 4 to Homestead ARB, Fla.

As we built the jet transfer plan, the ANGRC saw an opportunity to ensure the entire ANG fleet of F-16's were modified with updated SLEP (Service Life Extended Plan) engines. Converting the fleet to upgraded SLEP engines has been the number one F-16 safety priority for the Air Force and ANG. Because the majority of our existing 22 Wing jets were previously modified with the SLEP engines, we were tasked to pull all SLEP engines out of our jets and ship them to bases around the country to completely modify the ANG F-16 fleet. Bases in return sent us the older model engines which were installed into our retiring fleet. When it was all completed, the 177th Maintenance Group conducted 23 engine pulls and re-installs, garnering the ANG a saving of $40 million dollars worth of maintenance cost avoidance dollars!

In addition to engine recapitalization, our Avionics flight pulled over 80 aircraft system components and either put them back in to the supply system or shipped them to other ANG units for F-16 fleet modernization. This highly coordinated effort between the ANGRC and gaining units recaptured $4.3 million worth of vital mission equipment! Our Hydraulic shop also swapped 18 Diagnostic Engine Starting Systems Controller (DESSC) components to increase fleet-wide system reliability and standardize the ANG. This reclaimed $324,000 of equipment and maintenance costs!

The Weapons element took the lead in coordinating movement to and from seven different AF units consolidating 440 pieces of outdated and or faulty Alternate Mission Equipment (AME) via aircraft transfer during this conversion. Their efforts saved the Air Force over $500,000 in crate buildup and ground shipping costs while revitalizing ANG on-hand equipment. During the 177 FW 2013 Conversion, the enhanced troubleshooting skills of the Weapons element identified 12 faulty wing stores matrix assemblies used for successful consent and firing of external stores. Their tireless efforts enabled all 12 matrix assemblies to be fixed at home station and saved the Air Force $143,000 in shipping and repair costs.

On top of all the work accomplished to retire, transfer and recapitalize parts and engines, we had to put each newly acquired jet through a thorough acceptance process. For each tail number gained, the inspection process took two shifts, over 17 work days and consumed 621 man-hours.

The events of this year have all have taken a huge toll on our Wing workforce with regards to mission capability, training and personal sacrifices. The professionalism, dedication and hard work of the men and women of the 177th Maintenance Group truly shined during this complex and difficult task. Over $45 million worth of equipment and maintenance costs recaptured – Wow!! My sincere thanks and appreciation is extended to all 177th Fighter Wing airmen for their efforts and commitment during these tough times and I salute the men and women of the 177th Maintenance Group for achieving such significant accomplishments and truly realizing far reaching impacts throughout the Air National Guard.

PATRICK KENNEDY

Colonel, NJANG

177th MXG Commander

From Enlisted to Ace

Story by Tech. Sgt. Matt Hecht

Donald J. Strait was born on April 28, 1918 in East Orange, N.J., and grew up in the nearby town of Verona.

As a child, he dreamed of being a pilot and built model airplanes.

“I used to spend the weekends… up at the airport talking to crew chiefs, talking to pilots… just watching airplanes fly because I was extremely interested in aviation,” said Strait. “It was a pretty extensive bike ride and my mother used to pack me a brown-bag lunch, and I would spend the whole day there watching these airplanes maneuver and be tested.”

These experiences laid the foundation of a career in aviation, when, in 1940, frustrated with his job working for Prudential Insurance, he enlisted in the 119th Observation Squadron, which was located at Newark Airport.

“In January of '41 they sent me to aircraft armament school out at Lowry Field in Denver, Co. … for about four months, where I was training as an aircraft armorer.”

Strait worked his way from armorer to aerial gunner in the backseat of an O-47 observation aircraft. During that time, the pilots he was flying with convinced him to sign up for pilot training. After qualifying as an aviation cadet, Strait was sent to flight school at Maxwell Field, Ala., where he graduated and received his commission in January 1943.

“Fortunately I was one of the 30 that went to fighters,” said Strait. “I don't know what I would have done if they had have called me out for B-17s. I don't think I could have handled it because I wanted to be a fighter pilot so badly and I had done very well in flight school.”

After training on a P-47 Thunderbolt at Westover Field in Chicopee, Mass., Strait and his fellow Airmen were made a part of the 356th Fighter Group and sent to England in the summer of 1943.

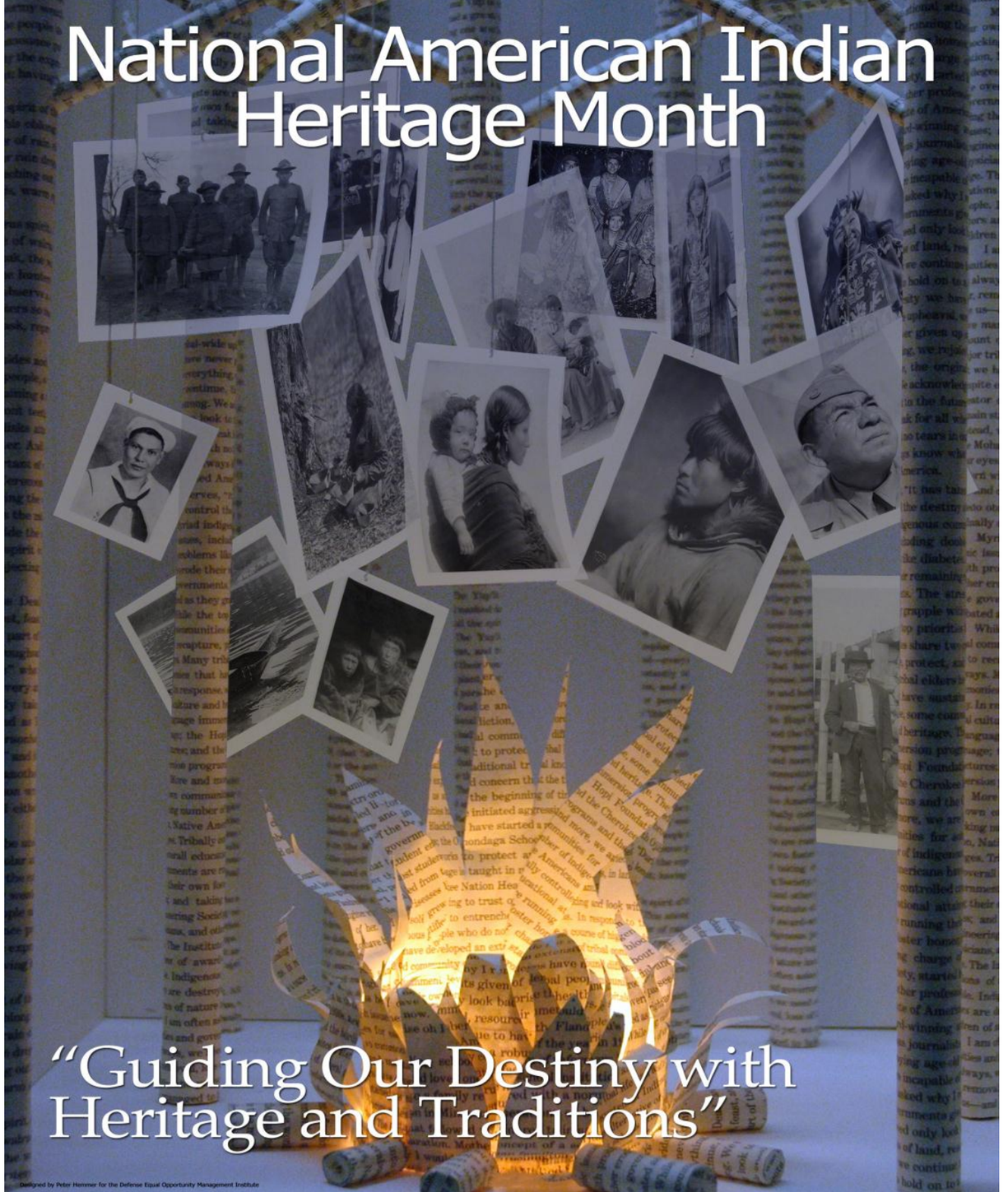
It was in a P-47 that Strait had his first victory against the Germans when he shot down a Messerschmitt Me 109 fighter aircraft in February 1944. By the end of the war, Strait gained 13.5 aerial victories in the P-47 and the P-51D Mustang. In a sign of how his command career would progress, by the end of 1944, he had been promoted to commander of the 361st Fighter Squadron – the only captain in the 8th Air Force to command a squadron.

At war’s end, Strait returned to New Jersey, where he served as commander of the 108th Tactical Fighter Wing. During the Korean War, he was one of two Air National Guard officers promoted to colonel. He was responsible for setting up the 108th Tactical Fighter Wing at McGuire Air Force Base and moving the 119th Fighter Group from Newark to Atlantic City. In 1955, he was the first Air Guard officer to graduate from Air War College. A year later he did a 21-month tour at the Pentagon as the deputy assistant secretary of the Air Force for Air Force ROTC, Air Guard, Air Reserve and Civil Air Patrol Affairs all the while serving as the 108th’s commander.

He later became the first Air National Guard officer in New Jersey to be promoted to major general and was selected as the commander of the New Jersey Air National Guard serving from 1958 to 1971.

“I'm a product of the Air National Guard. I can say that with all respect because the Air Guard did everything for me,” said Strait.

- This article contains quotes from an interview with retired Maj. Gen Donald J. Strait, NJANG by Chief Master Sgt. David P. Anderson from the Air National Guard History Program on May 15, 2008.



FUELING FIGHTERS

Story and photos by Tech. Sgt. Matt Hecht

Staff Sgt. Alexander Hunter III secures grounding cables prior to refueling an F-16C Fighting Falcon from the 177th Fighter Wing on Nov. 6 at Atlantic City International Airport, N.J. Hunter is a fuels specialist assigned to the 177th Logistics Readiness Squadron.

Tech. Sgt. Kevin Dickinson keeps watch at his R-11 refueling truck as he refuels an F-16C Fighting Falcon from the New Jersey Air National Guard's 177th Fighter Wing at Atlantic City Air National Guard Base, N.J. on Nov. 6. Dickinson is a fuels specialist assigned to the 177th LRS.

Fuels specialists transport and deliver the lifeblood of the U.S. Air Force - aviation fuel! Not only do these airmen help to optimize the transport and delivery of fuel, but they are also stewards of the environment, making sure that fuel gets where it's going safely.

After basic training, airmen that are studying to be fuels specialists spend an additional 31 days at Sheppard Air Force Base, Texas, where they learn the ins and outs of the trade.

Staff Sgt. Alexander Hunter III from the 177th Logistics Readiness Squadron has been in the business for seven years, and has deployed in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom.

"No matter what, we always make sure the planes have what they need to do the mission."

"What helps me enjoy my job, aside from the people in my shop, is knowing that what I do every day contributes to the bigger picture," said Hunter.

"No matter what, we always make sure the planes have what they need to do the mission."

"POL is an outstanding organization," said 177th Logistics Readiness Squadron commander Lt. Col. John J. Fogarty III. "They play a critical role in providing a valuable commodity to keep us flying, fighting, and winning; No fuel, no fly, it is as simple as that."

Staff Sgt. Alexander Hunter III pulls a hose from an R-11 refueling truck to refuel an F-16C Fighting Falcon from the New Jersey Air National Guard's 177th Fighter Wing at Atlantic City Air National Guard Base, N.J. on Nov. 6. Hunter is a fuels specialist assigned to the 177th Logistics Readiness Squadron.

Click here to learn more about fuels specialists!

Atlantic City Goes to War…

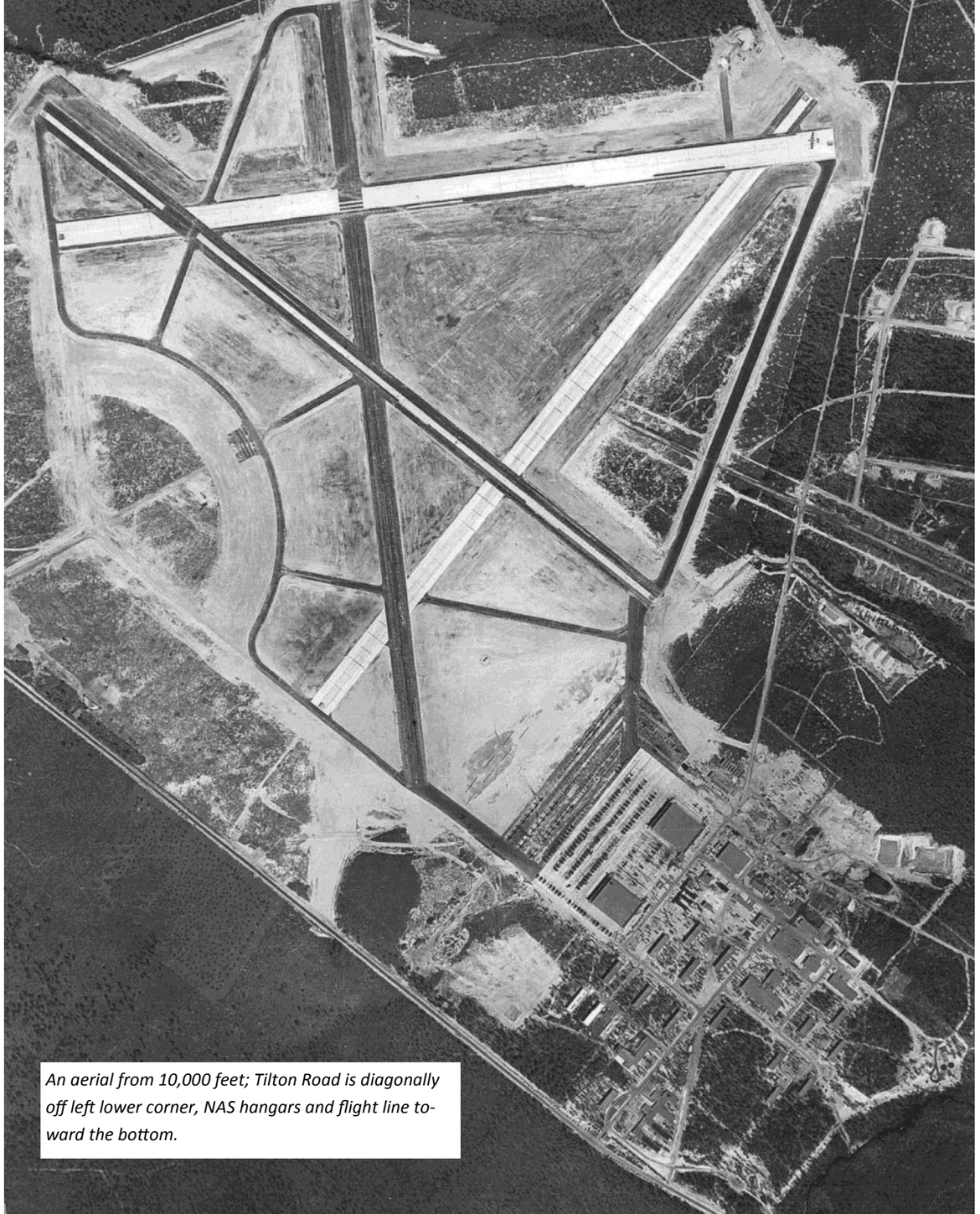
….*You're In The Navy Now!*

by Dr. Richard Porcelli

In the last issue of *The Contrail* we related the effort of the Atlantic City government and business leaders to build a new municipal airport. After application to the Federal government by Atlantic City, in November 1941 the Civil Aeronautics Administration using Work Projects Administration [WPA] funds started construction of a new $1.5 million Atlantic City Municipal Airport near Pomona, New Jersey, located on a 1200 acre parcel of pine trees and marsh land 12 miles inland. A workforce of 1,187 men was initially employed to clear the land. But the U.S. involvement in the World War II, triggered by the Pearl Harbor attack on December 7, 1941 changed those plans drastically, as we will relate here.

Going back a few years earlier to 1939, war was raging in many parts of the world as Great Britain, France and other European nations bore the brunt of the aggression of Axis partners Germany, Italy and Japan. On the surface, the United States still had an apparent policy of isolation and neutrality, but in reality the Roosevelt administration began to institute a number of executive orders, including authorization of new military installations, defense plants and shipbuilding aimed at preparation for eventual war. By May 1941, this effort was building steam and President Roosevelt declared an "unlimited emergency" directing all branches of the military to build up capabilities rapidly. For the Army Air Corps and Navy, this directive included reactivation of existing facilities and the construction of new airfields for both the defense of the nation and training of flight crews.

Being located along the Atlantic coast, the impact on New Jersey was felt immediately. The Coast Guard Station at Cape May, closed in 1926, was reactivated and became a Naval Air



An aerial from 10,000 feet; Tilton Road is diagonally off left lower corner, NAS hangars and flight line toward the bottom.

A U.S. Navy SNJ-5 from Atlantic City prepares for a training flight.

An F4U-4 Corsair of VF-82 over Jersey shore; this was commander's aircraft, noted as "CAG" - commander air group.

The Atlantic City flight line in August 1945 showing Hellcats, Corsairs plus Avengers and SNJs in background.

Station in September 1940. Recognizing the inadequacy of NAS Cape May, vulnerability of the coastline to attack from the sea (and air) as well as the intensive network of oil refineries, chemical plants, aircraft production and munitions facilities in the region, the need for additional air facilities quickly became evident. A number of new air stations and auxiliary air facilities were constructed along the eastern seaboard but after the Pearl Harbor attack and the start of war, more facilities were needed. In early 1942, two more locations were added to the list – Brunswick, Maine, and Atlantic City, New Jersey. The proposed layout in terms of size, hangars, barracks, personnel, etc. would be the same for the two new additions, but ultimately Brunswick got three hangars and for some reason, Atlantic City only two.

The fact that the CAA had already started clearing the land for a new airport near Atlantic City made it a perfect site for the new naval air training station. Furthermore, the Navy was attracted to the Pomona site because it felt its location would offer better weather. The thought was that when Newark Airport, NAS Brooklyn and NAS Lakehurst would be closed due to snow or fog, the Atlantic City site would remain clear. The Bureau of Aeronautics therefore requested the Secretary of the Navy on July 24, 1942 to authorize the construction of Naval Air Station Atlantic City [NASAC] and permission was granted, through the Bureau of Docks and Yards, in October. In December 1942 a lease was signed transferring control to the Navy for “the duration of the hostilities plus 6 months.” By that time enough ground was already cleared to start construction of the hangars and other facilities.

The plan was for the runways to be completed sequentially to allow flight operations to be initiated as quickly as possible, but at commissioning, the ‘fly-by’ of Navy aircraft originated elsewhere. After the ceremonies were over,

based aircraft had to be towed over local roads to the air station from nearby Bader Field and Atlantic City docks. The first runway was completed shortly after commissioning. It took a number of additional months to complete the other three runways and network of taxiways needed for full operation. When completed the four 5000 foot long runways were aligned as runways 4 – 22, 13 – 31, 17 - 35 and 26 - 8. (Only the first two listed here, considerably lengthened from those days, survive today, although traces of the other two can be seen from the air.)

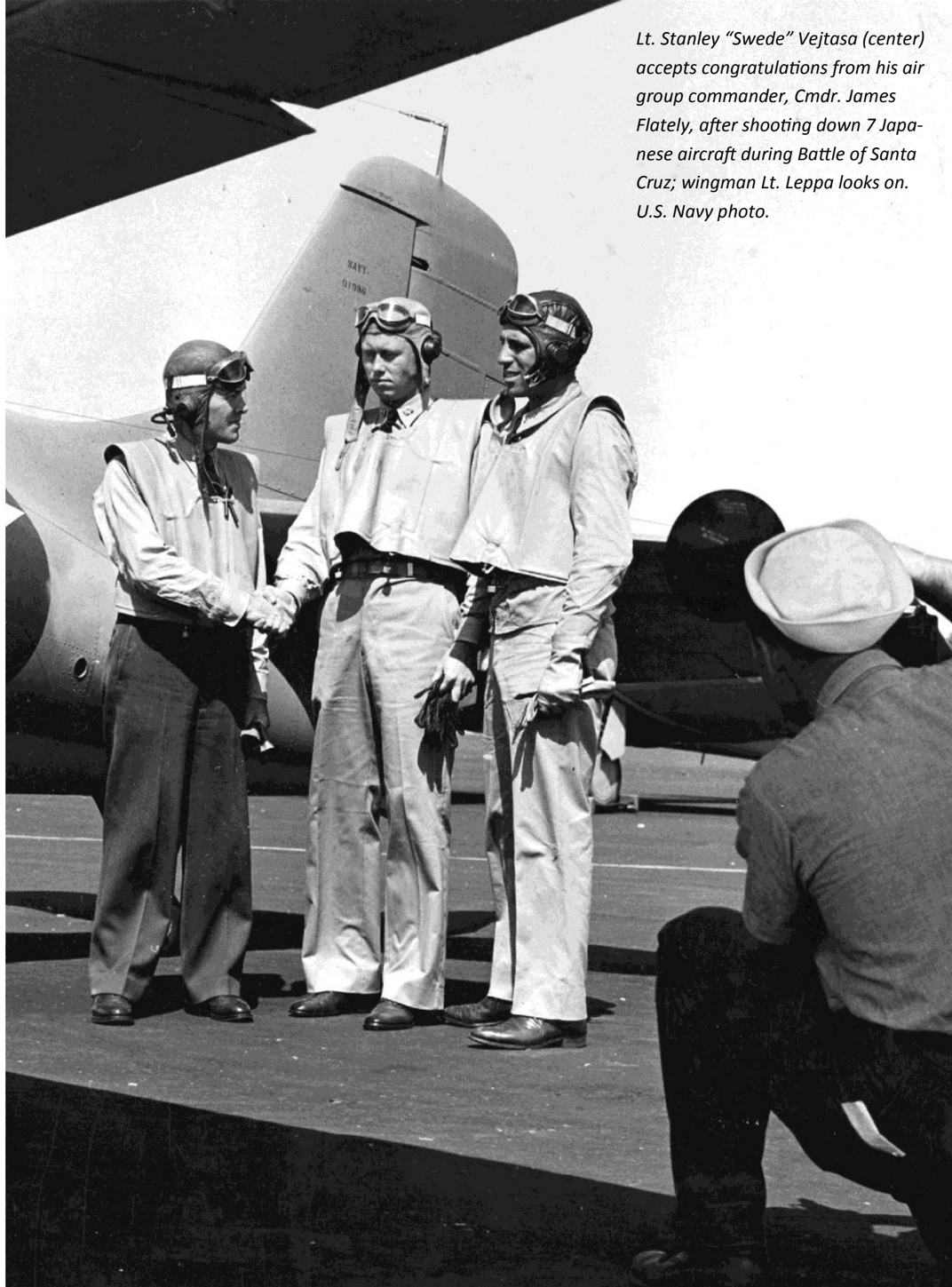
On commissioning day April 24, 1943, Rear Admiral C.T. Durgin, USN, Command Fleet Air Quonset, delivered the main address where he reiterated the stated mission of NASAC: "to serve to the limits of their ability all Fleet activities that were based upon them…the main objective of every unit of the station and of each person working there was to ready these squadrons and their crews for combat". His comments were carried live nationwide over the radio waves on Columbia Broadcasting's "Spirit of '43" series. Original facilities were for 280 officers and 1624 enlisted men, but the actual census grew rapidly as the war progressed.

Initially, NASAC was the home of Carrier Air Groups [CAG] 31, 25 and 3, with Grumman F4F Wildcats and F6F Hellcats from the corresponding fighting [VF] squadrons and Grumman TBF Avenger torpedo bombers and Douglas SBD Dauntless dive bombers from composite [VC] squadrons 17, 2 and 32, respectively. The pilots honed their flying skills through training and coastal patrol flights prior to being assigned to fleet and light carriers. (As an interesting bit of trivia, Navy fighters then and today are assigned to *fighting* squadrons, while the Air Force operates *fighter* squadrons.) Also assigned was Carrier Air Service Unit Twenty Three (CASU-23) whose role was to provide maintenance for aircraft assigned to the fleet. CASU-23 also flew a fleet of immaculate, polished aluminum SNJ trainers as 'station hacks' to chase down spare parts and give flight hours to desk-bound aviators.

But during the summer of 1943, the mission of NASAC was drastically altered to reflect the Navy's trend in specialized air stations, rather than in training entire air groups. NASAC became a fighter pilot training base, while nearby NAS Wildwood, NJ, trained dive-bomber squadrons and NAS Quonset Point, RI, focused on torpedo bomber squadrons. For the Atlantic City fighter-training unit, Pacific War ace Lt. Stanley W. "Swede" Vejtasa was chosen to set up the curriculum. With the aid of eight other Pacific air combat veterans on his staff, the training program included air-to-air and air-to-ground tactics and training, as well field carrier practice landings [FCPL] used to prepare the new pilots for operations aboard aircraft carriers.

The Navy couldn't have picked a better leader and teacher than Vejtasa. In early 1942 he was a *dive-bomber* pilot flying a Douglas SBD-3 Dauntless with VS-5 off of the *USS Yorktown.* During the *Battle of Coral Sea*, his bombs contributed to the sinking of the first Japanese aircraft carrier sunk in the war, the *Shoho*. Two days later, he shot down three "invincible" Japanese Mitsubishi Zero fighters while flying an inferior and supposedly "defenseless" dive-bomber. He won two *Navy Crosses* for his efforts during that battle.

To be continued in the next edition of The Contrail!



Lt. Stanley "Swede" Vejtasa (center) accepts congratulations from his air group commander, Cmdr. James Flately, after shooting down 7 Japanese aircraft during Battle of Santa Cruz; wingman Lt. Leppa looks on. U.S. Navy photo.

HOOKED

Story by Airman First Class Shane Karp

Airmen from the 177th Fighter Wing's Civil Engineering Squadron performed testing Friday on their aircraft arrest system here.

The system is used to rapidly decelerate an aircraft in the event of an emergency brake failure or on short runways which may not offer the distance required for a traditional landing.

"If an aircraft is coming in and cannot stop in time, it's important that the cables are able to bring them to an abrupt stop," said Senior Master Sgt. Brian Alexander, the base fire chief.

The importance of the aircraft arrest system extends well beyond the 177th FW and is used everywhere from Navy aircraft carriers to deployed environments overseas, said Alexander.

The arresting cables must be operational for every flight that takes place on base and is certified by the Civil Engineering Squadron once per year.

Airmen from the 177th Fighter Wing reset a cable during a cable arrester system exercise, Nov. 14, at Atlantic City International Airport, N.J. The system, which is tested once a year, can aid any tail hook equipped aircraft to stop safely in the event of a failure of the braking systems. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Tech. Sgt. Matt Hecht)

A U.S. Air Force F-16D Fighting Falcon from the New Jersey Air National Guard's 177th Fighter Wing "Jersey Devils" piloted by Maj. Jason Halvorsen catches an arrestor cable with it's tail hook on runway 31 at Atlantic City International Airport, N.J. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Tech. Sgt. Matt Hecht)

Master Sgt. Bruno Egizi from the 177th Civil Engineering Squadron Fire Department instructs airmen during a test of the runway aircraft arrest system Nov. 14 at the 177th Fighter Wing at Atlantic City Air National Guard Base, N.J. The arrest system is used to stop aircraft in the event of a brake failure and must be tested yearly. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Airman First Class Shane Karp)

Airman 1st Class Christopher Garrison performs Liquid Oxygen (LOX) servicing at Atlantic City Air National Guard Base, N.J. on Nov. 6. LOX is primarily used as aviator breathing oxygen. Garrison is an F-16C Fighting Falcon crew chief assigned to the 177th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron.

CHILLED OUT

Story and photo by Tech. Sgt. Matt Hecht

Liquid oxygen, commonly referred to as LOX, is used by the U.S. Air Force to provide breathing oxygen for pilots in its high-performance fighter aircraft. When oxygen gets to about 300-degrees or so below zero, it becomes a liquid and takes up considerably less space than it does in its more common gas form.

The U.S. Air Force uses liquid oxygen on aircraft so that they are able to provide a substantial supply of oxygen to the aircraft's pilot and crew without taking up a lot of space and adding extra weight with large, bulky air tanks. The study and use of oxygen in aircraft actually began during World War I, when aviators and balloonists operating at higher altitudes began experiencing strange debilitating symptoms, know known as hypoxia, or lack of oxygen.

The first flight with a USAAC LOX system occurred in 1923, when a DH-B4 was flown above 13,000 feet for two hours.

"Wearing doubled gloves, a leather apron and a full face mask, Airman 1st Class Christopher Garrison makes sure that canisters are topped off with LOX and ready for the next mission," said Staff Sgt. Nathan Hollander, who was over watching the procedure.

Because liquid oxygen boils at approximately 298 degrees below zero, handling it requires special precautions, such as the gloves and face shield Garrison donned prior to re-filling the canisters. A cloud of escaping cold, white vapor is a regular feature of LOX operations.

Maj. Gregory Poston exits his F-16C Fighting Falcon after a training sortie on Nov. 6 at Atlantic City Air National Guard Base, N.J. Poston is a pilot with the New Jersey Air National Guard's 119th Fighter Squadron. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Tech. Sgt. Matt Hecht)

Around the Wing

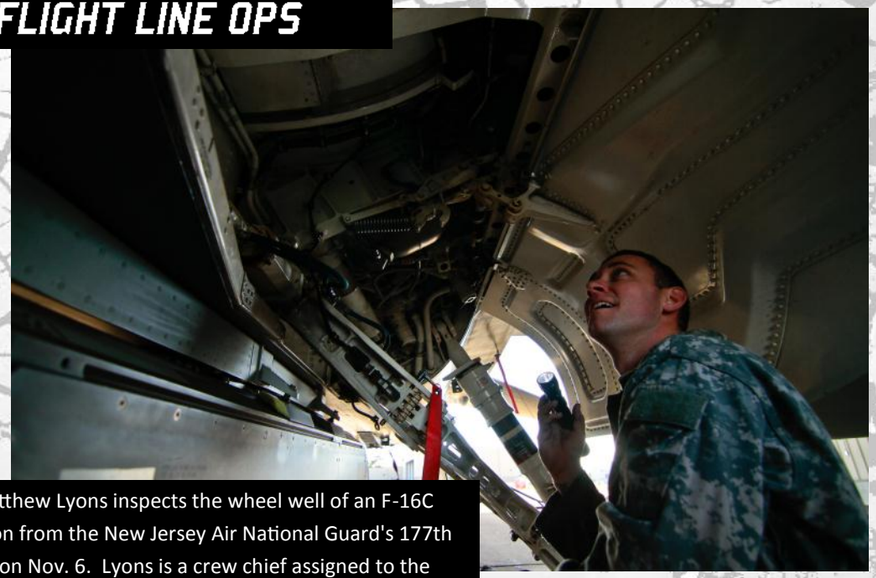
POST-FLIGHT CHAT

Master Sgt. Richard Szerbin (left) talks to Col. Kerry Gentry, commander of the 177th Fighter Wing (right) after a training sortie on Nov. 6 at Atlantic City Air National Guard Base, N.J. Szerbin is an integrated avionics specialist assigned to the 177th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Tech. Sgt. Matt Hecht)

VEHICLE MAINTENANCE

Staff Sgt. David Hansen does repair work on the engine of an R-11 refueling truck at Atlantic City Air National Guard Base, N.J. on Nov. 6. Hansen is a vehicle mechanic assigned to the 177th Logistics Readiness Squadron, New Jersey Air National Guard. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Tech. Sgt. Matt Hecht)

FLIGHT LINE OPS



Staff Sgt. Matthew Lyons inspects the wheel well of an F-16C Fighting Falcon from the New Jersey Air National Guard's 177th Fighter Wing on Nov. 6. Lyons is a crew chief assigned to the 177th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Tech. Sgt. Matt Hecht)

For more awards photos, check out the 177th Fighter Wing Facebook page!

3rd GRADE VISIT

Lt. Col Diana Brown, deputy mission support group commander, visited St. Joseph's Regional School in Somers Point, N.J. to talk to the 3rd grade class about Veterans Day. Courtesy photo.

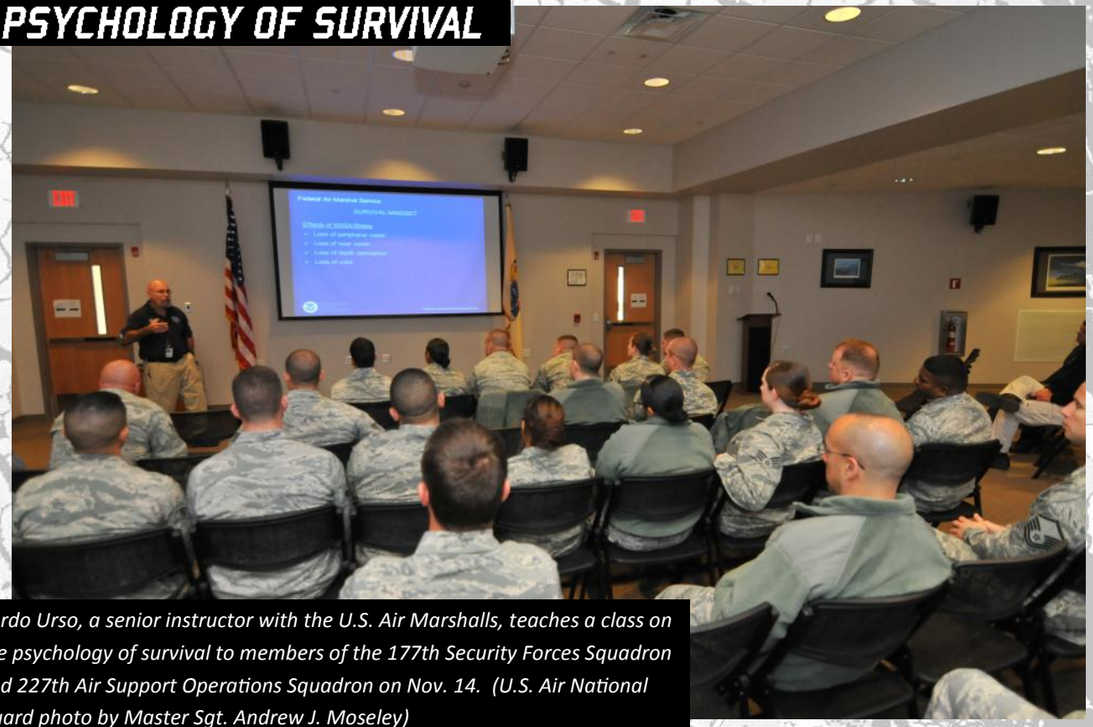
PALLET BUILDING

Senior Master Sgt. John Wesley, a contingency response load master from the 137th Airlift Control Flight, Will Rogers Air National Guard Base, Ok., teaches an AMC airlift prep course at the 177th on Nov 13, 2013. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Master Sgt. Andrew J. Moseley)

EOD TAKES PART IN VET DAY

Staff Sgt. Joseph Coates, an Explosive Ordinance Disposal specialist with the 177th Civil Engineering Squadron, places a bomb suit helmet on Dan Nunan, an 8th grader at St. Josephs Regional School in Somers Point on Veterans Day, Nov. 11, 2013. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Master Sgt. Andrew J. Moseley)

PSYCHOLOGY OF SURVIVAL



Cardo Urso, a senior instructor with the U.S. Air Marshalls, teaches a class on the psychology of survival to members of the 177th Security Forces Squadron and 227th Air Support Operations Squadron on Nov. 14. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Master Sgt. Andrew J. Moseley)

SHOOTHOUSE

Story by Tech. Sgt. Andy Merlock, photos by Airman First Class Shane Karp

Airmen from the 177th Fighter Wing's Security Forces Squadron conducted training exercises at the United States Air Marshalls' training facility in Egg Harbor Township, N.J. on Saturday.

The training focused on the techniques utilized when approaching buildings, breaching doors and clearing rooms.

Airmen from the 177th Security Forces Squadron get some last minute gear checks done before shoot house training during an exercise scenario on Nov.16, 2013 at the FAA Training Facility, N.J.

Tech. Sgt. James Armstrong (front) demonstrates room clearing procedures as he challenges Tech. Sgt. Andrew Hambleton (rear) during an exercise scenario on Nov.16, 2013 at the FAA Training Facility, N.J. Airmen practiced scenarios ranging from room clearing to entry procedures during the exercise.

Tech. Sgt. James Armstrong of the 177th Security Forces Squadron stated that, "The tactics practiced and utilized today will be beneficial to airmen both overseas and at home during active shooter situations".

Due to the fact that the situations in which these tactics are utilized can be extremely stressful and require split second decisions, training scenarios provide these airmen with a solid foundation to ensure mission success.

An airman from the 177th Security Forces Squadron practices breaching with a battering ram during an exercise scenario on Nov.16, 2013 at the FAA Training Facility, N.J. Airmen practiced scenarios ranging from room clearing to entry procedures during the exercise.

FINAL PHOTO

PIT CREW

Senior Airman Ryan Brennan from the 177th Civil Engineering Squadron Fire Department awaits a signal during a test of the runway aircraft arrest system Nov. 14, 2013, at the 177th Fighter Wing at Atlantic City Air National Guard Base, N.J. The arrest system is used to stop aircraft in the event of a brake failure and must be tested yearly. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Airman First Class Shane Karp)