



Newsletter of the NAS Fort Lauderdale Museum

September – October 2011

Website: www.nasflmuseum.com

E-mail: nasftlauderdalemuseum@netscape.com

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June 2011 Luncheon



From left to right: Undersheriff Thomas P. Wheeler, Ron Lowther, Allan McElhiney, Bob Morris and Deputy Donald Prichard.

Our Luncheon Guest Speakers were Ron Lowther, Audio, Video and Production technician for the Broward Sheriff's Office, Undersheriff Thomas P. Wheeler, and Executive Officer to the Sheriff Donald Prichard.

Ron Lowther is also the CEO, Producer & Director of Photography at *Flying Lobster Productions*. Ron spoke about his new documentary on the 756th Tank Battalion, and about his work with Steven Spielberg.

Thomas Wheeler, spoke about his family's military history and how personally important it was to him. Donald Prichard spoke about his experiences as a soldier in the Army during the Iraq Gulf War, and about how he became involved at our Museum.

From the Luncheon



Broward Navy Days members: Garry Murphy, Mary Anne Gray, Colleen Lockwood, Ron Lowther, Undersheriff Thomas Wheeler and Deputy Donald Prichard.



Thomas Wheeler, Allan and Donald Prichard



Colleen Lockwood, Mary Anne Gray & Navy Liaison Garry Murphy attend the NASFL Museum's month luncheon at the Fort Lauderdale Yacht Club.



Producer Ron Lowther and Allan McElhiney

Producer Ron Lowther is presently in pre-production of a documentary about the 756th Tank Battalion, and their journey from North Africa to Berlin. The main focus of the film is about the men who crewed the M4 Sherman Tanks. From inside a sweat box to an ice box, these men endured grueling, if not horrific, experiences throughout World War II in a tank. With Lowther's experience he is expecting this project to be another award winning film on his resume. He wants audiences to smell, taste and feel what it was like to be at the controls of a Sherman Tank.

If you're interested in becoming a sponsor for the film, you can contact Ron Lowther at: ron@flyinglobster.net Or go to his *Flying Lobster Productions* website to learn more about this documentary project: flyinglobsterproductions.com

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

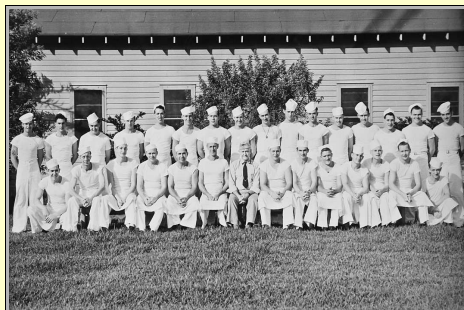


PHOTOGRAPHER FRANCIS "FRANK" FREZZA USN (Ret)

Francis "Frank" Frezza is a native of New York. He arrived at NAS Fort Lauderdale in 1943, and was initially assigned duty cleaning the cook's barracks. Frank was an easygoing fellow and made lots of friends quickly. While at the base, he met Joe Chefitz, a professional civilian photographer. Joe arranged for Frank to get assigned to the photo unit where he worked. Together, they recorded life on the base with their photography. They would also accompany pilots on their training missions. Many of their photographs were used for brochures and for training. Frank's experience grew with each mission.

In 1944, his friend Joe was assigned to take professional photos of NASFL's Captain Pratt in his uniform. Some time later that year, Captain Pratt, Joe, and Frank were transferred to Hawaii. Captain Pratt went on to command a small carrier, which on an unfortunate mission was hit and sunk, however he was able to survive. Joe who had swapped places from another carrier, went down with the ship. Meanwhile, in NAS Honolulu, Frank worked at Admiral Nimitz' Office and continued learning all he could about photography. Then he was selected to be a part of the JICPOA (Joint Intelligence Center Pacific Ocean Area), or better known as the "Silver's Gang"—a group of about 180 Navy photographers that became instrumental for reconnaissance. They worked tirelessly, and in 3 months they would have between them 2 ½ million pictures. Their missions included taking aerials, beach charts, moon charts, tide charts, and they would also come to photograph island invasions in the Pacific theater, including Iwo-Jima. On the final days of the war, they recorded in images, the site of the atomic bombs—two days after they were dropped. On their down time, they would focus on photographing life on the base, as more and more women joined the service, and their contributions to the success of the war had to be recorded. Frank also took pictures of several celebrities visiting the Honolulu base in support of the troops.

After the war, Frank decided to become a Detective Photographer for the New York Police Department. He retired in 1971 after 23 years on the force and moved to Colorado Springs, Colorado, where he became a businessman. He'll be 88 yrs old this year. He's semi-retired now and lives with his wife Maria, who are both avid hunters and fishermen. Frank has donated a large cache of photographs which are on display at our Museum. Below, is a small sampler of the many images Frank took during his time in the service.



An army of cooks and bakers worked at the "Chow Hall" of the Naval Air Station Fort Lauderdale. Photo taken in January, 1944.



Inside the writing room and recreation hall at NASFL, given to the base personnel by Captain Pratt. Photo taken in December, 1943.



Life at NASFL: Mechanics loading TBF Wing guns. Photo taken in January, 1944.



From the group of 500 US Army Air Forces, these flight nurses prepare for a mission. They're arranging their flying suits, because initially, they were required to wear male clothes. Later on, several types of flying clothes for women were developed. Photo circa, 1944.



The French Frigate Shoals were a clandestine landing/refueling site for Japanese missions against Pearl Harbor. They were discovered, photographed, and occupied by US forces prior to the Battle of Midway, effectively cutting off the Japanese from their greatest single source of intelligence on the US fleet. Photo taken in April 1945. Altitude 1,000 ft.



Lockheed P-38, 424021, Lightning flying over the Hawaiian mountains. Nicknamed "fork-tailed devil" by the Luftwaffe and "two planes, one pilot" by the Japanese.



Rene Gagnon was the youngest survivor and the man who carried the flag up Mt. Suribachi. He was the first survivor to arrive back in the US. Photo taken in April 1945 at NAS Honolulu.



Fleet Admiral Nimitz autographing a WAVES journal. Nimitz was a WWI, WWII, Battle of Coral Sea, Battle of Midway, Solomon Islands Campaign, Battle of Philippine Sea, Battle of Leyte Gulf, Battle of Iwo Jima and Battle of Okinawa Commander in Chief. Circa, 1945.



The End of War by Frank Frezza, Honolulu, 1945. To see more Frank Frezza's WWII Gallery of photos, check the Member Spotlight on our website: nasflmuseum.com/member-spotlight.html



REMEMBERING NAS Fort Lauderdale

By Communications Officer William J. Hopwood

We received a great visit from **William J. Hopwood**, who was the Communications Officer at NAS Fort Lauderdale when it opened in 1942, and until 1944. It was an honor and a pleasure to see him again, and to learn more about life at the Naval Air Station during the war years.

Commander Hopwood remembers:

- The first C.O. was Commander (later Captain) Donald E. Wilcox, who was transferred out around late 1943. At the time I arrived in October of 1942, the Bachelor Officers Quarters (BOQ) were not ready and they put us up in a small Hotel on Andrews Avenue, which was owned by a man and wife who were *Free French* refugees. We used to sit around the lobby at night and listen to the short wave broadcasts from Radio Brazzaville in French Equatorial Africa.
- Commander Wilcox was relieved as C.O. by Captain Pratt and Commander Joe Taylor was, I believe, the first Operations Officer and he was in charge of flight training. Lt. Marshall Myler started the first station newspaper, *The Avenger*; and after the war I knew him in Miami where he ran an advertising/public relations business. Joe Stiret was Personnel Officer. Major Prine (USMC) was in charge of the Marine Detachment. Lt Burton Wheeler (I forget his title) ran the Payroll department. More of the names come back to me when I think hard enough. Those were busy days.
- The student aviators came and went, so I didn't know many of them but I got to know a number of the flight instructors, some of whom had just come from the early days of the Pacific war and had had first-hand combat experience. CDR Joe Taylor was one who later went back to the Pacific and was, I believe, one of those who was on the carrier Franklin when she was set on fire and badly damaged by the Japanese late in the war. I think I was still there when former President George H.W. Bush went through training and I may have seen or met him but he was just another student then and nobody would have dreamed they were talking with someone who would later be President of the U.S.



NAS Fort Lauderdale Central Office Personnel at their Xmas Party – 1943.

“The Only new thing in the world is the history you don't know.” – Harry Truman

MUSEUM NEWS

We're almost done with installing the carpet and continue with re-organizing and preparing the Museum for its future Grand opening. We have a new state of the art alarm system donated by **John Ray**, owner of [Sonitrol Security Systems](#). Later on, Mr Ray will install security video. Thank you so much for your support John Ray! We also have several Bids for the remodeling of the building, and those are currently being reviewed by the Airport. Thank you to everyone for their efforts.



Uniforms on display. This exhibit was featured at City Hall.



We're in the process of finishing the carpet and the photo displays.



Theater and sitting area.



Exhibit work area.

LIST OF THINGS WE NEED

- We need help with the editing, organizing and sending of our Newsletter. Please contact [Minerva Bloom](#) to volunteer.
- We need volunteers to help finish the carpet installation.
- Restoration of the Guard House. We have the materials, we just need people to do it.
- We need a fork lift to move two large torpedoes from the back, to the front of the building.
- Hurricane preparedness: tree branch trimming of a couple of large trees that are close to the building.

If you can volunteer, contact the Museum: (954) 359-4400 or e-mail us at: nasft.lauderdalemuseum@netscape.com

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS!

Clive Taylor, Yon O. Chang, Chuck Black, Raymond Cunningham,
Mike Brown, Ron Lowther and Rudy & Louise Oetting.

BOOKS WE RECOMMEND

My Father's Fight of Honor by Rebecca Jones - [Click here to view at Amazon.](#)

A very interesting read, about the personal WWII diary of William G. Griffin and his extensive experience with war—as he traveled throughout several countries. A loving tribute, Ms. Jones should be very proud of her father's service to our country.

NEWS FROM OUR WEBSITE

A lot of people continue to contact our website, some of them with donations of materials, others with stories, photographs, inquiries about the history of NASFL, or a desire to volunteer. We were visited by **Mary Babcock**, her mother and their friend, who enjoyed the exhibits. Also by **Ray Cunningham** USNR, from the USS Mission Bay (AVG-59) formerly the USS Atheling. And many other visitors, too numerous to name. Great to see you all!

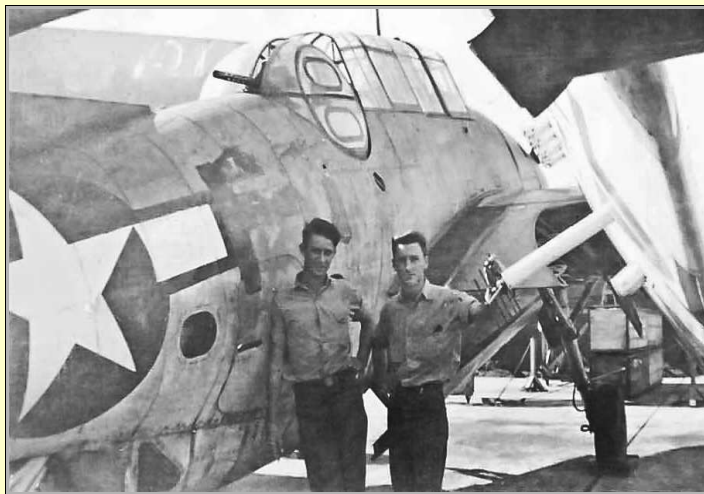
Seymour Baumgartner, was stationed at this naval base working as an aircraft mechanic. He lived at NASFL for two years from 1944 to 1945. Thanks for sharing your memories Seymour and also thanks to Jennifer and Mary (Seymour's daughters), for contacting the Museum and sending us photos. We are proud to honor Seymour's service, as it is important for our generation and the ones following—that we do not forget. [Click here to view more photos on our Blog.](#)



Seymour atop the cabin of a TBM/TBF Avenger.



Seymour on the right, and a colleague, attempt to inspect a dent on the fuselage of a TBM/TBF Avenger.



Seymour on the right with a colleague, taking shade in between airplanes.



Crew of airplane mechanics at NASFL.
Seymour Baumgartner is on the top center.

FROM JOE MAY: TRAVEL FOR AIRCRAFT

Several years ago, after getting a photographic kit together for the quality of photos he likes to obtain, Joe May decided to visit aviation displays systematically and as frequently as he could manage. He made good use of Google Earth, Wikipedia, airliners.net and Google's search engine. Joe researches using these tools. He is passionate for his subject as he enjoys seeing remarkable aircraft and pondering their history. He travels for aircraft viewing, photographing and sheer pleasure.

As he says: *"Travel allows me to experience how things are done by other peoples; try coffees, teas, beers, wines and food; see*

historic aircraft; visit museums; wonder at geology and geography; as well as to just get lost for a while.” Joe contacted our website and then visited the NASFL Museum on June, and Allan walked him around on a tour. You can read about his interview with Allan and see the photographs he took of the Museum, on his travel blog. Check his Archives for June 2011 at:

travelforaircraft.wordpress.com



The USS Enterprise is an 8 foot long custom model donated to the NASFL Museum by Herb Leach. Photography by Joe May.



Remembering Flight 19, five Avenger models fly over an aeronautical map. Photography by Joe May.

[From our Online Gift Shop](#)

Thanks for your support, the merchandise is moving and we're already getting profits! We added many more products to our Gift Shop: Vintage Posters, T-Shirts, Greeting Cards, Postcards, Postage, Business Cards, iPads Cases, Mousepads, Binders, Hats and more! 100% Satisfaction Guaranteed! **The products are of excellent quality and fully customizable.** There is a line of T-shirts with vintage aviation art by Architect **Paul Bradley** and WWII military cartoons by **Phillip Bower**. Check them out!

zazzle.com/nasfortlauderdale



BIG THANK YOU'S TO:

- Thank you to **George Lord**, an Aircreman Gunner's mate from NASFL, for the great gift of a vintage WWII Pilot's leather jacket! George will be featured in our next newsletter.
- Thank you to **Jess Karcher** for the gift of a Marine's Dress Blue Uniform! We have both of these items on display in the exhibit room of the Museum.
- Thank you to **Geraldine Tavares** for all her hard work at the Museum, for doing the City Hall exhibit, and for locating the mannequins for the displays.
- And our thank you to the [Broward Sheriff's Office](#) for hosting our next Luncheon at their place!

Remembering George Thorne

George Thorne was born in London, England on March 2, 1924. He began his career in plastics in 1938 and helped develop injection molds for the plastics industry. In 1942, he joined the Royal Air Force (RAF) and saw action in the Bomber and Coastal Command. While in the RAF, he attended the Third School of Technical Training and the London Polytechnic Institute.

In the course of his career, he traveled the world and patented many plastic devices. He served for 12 years on the Executive Committee of the Society of Plastic Engineers and was selected their Fiftieth President in 1992. He delivered lectures all over the world on the design of injection molds and the history of plastics, over his fifty year career. In 1999, George received the most prestigious award given by the Society of Plastics Industries (SPI), for outstanding service.

George and his wife Veronika immigrated to the United States in 1963. They settled in Fort Lauderdale, in 1972, purchasing Industrial Plastic Products, Inc, a plastic injection molding and extrusion company in Miami Lakes, FL. They retired from their business in June, 2006.

Both George and Veronika have been strongly supportive of many charitable and cultural organizations in South Florida, such as the 1000+ Club of the American Cancer Society, Florida Grand Opera, Cystic Fibrosis, Hospice Hundred, Humane Society, Royal Dames of Cancer Research, US Navy League Council, the Fort Lauderdale Naval Air Station Historical Association, and the Sea Cadets. George was instrumental in securing a permanent headquarters in Fort Lauderdale, for the Cadets. George was also a member of the Royal Knights for Cancer Research, Broward Sheriff's Advisory Council, Seafarer's House and Symphony of the Americas Society.

George and Veronika had been married over fifty years and have two daughters, Tatiana Grotendorst and Valerie Hediger, and four grandchildren: Alexei, Anastasia, Nicholas and Alexandra.

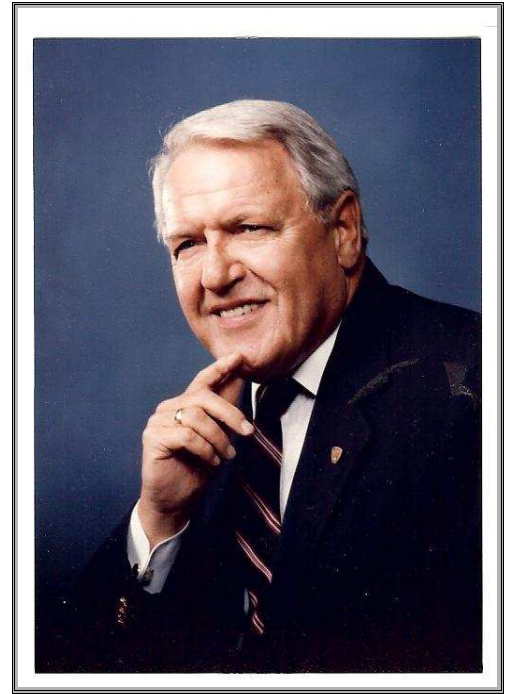
A NOTE FROM ALLAN McELHINEY:

“I want to tell you about some of what I know of how great a man George Thorne was in my eyes. I was a Director of the Fort Lauderdale Council Navy League, from 1978 to 1990. During that time, I got the idea to save a WWII US Navy building at the Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport. I met George Thorne one evening, while entering the last building occupied by the Navy, and I explained to him what I was trying to do. I mentioned to him that we had formed an association—the *Naval Air Station Fort Lauderdale Historical Association*. He immediately wanted to support the cause and signed on as a Life Member and he became my very first Vice-President.

On one occasion just before a Board of Directors meeting, one of the Directors asked me if I would ride with him to a location next to Lester's Diner, to look at a building. He was a member of an Optimists Club and he asked if I would be interested in taking over the said building as part of the NAS Museum. On the way back to the meeting, I knew that the building would better serve the Sea Cadets Youth Program, and that George Thorne should be the one to know about it. So I mentioned it to him that same evening and by gosh, he and the Navy League did make it happen... I am proud to see George Thorne's name on this building. We will never forget him.

The Naval Air Station Museum, will have a place of honor with George's picture and biography. George and his wife Veronika, were very generous and compassionate people. Everybody loved them. I have the greatest respect and admiration for them.”

George, you will be missed.



George Thorne passed away on August 14, at age 87. George always said that he was an American, born in the wrong country.

[Click here to view an Online Obituary](#)

MEMBER'S PHOTOS



Author [Angela Piraino](#) and Allan McElhiney at the Luncheon.



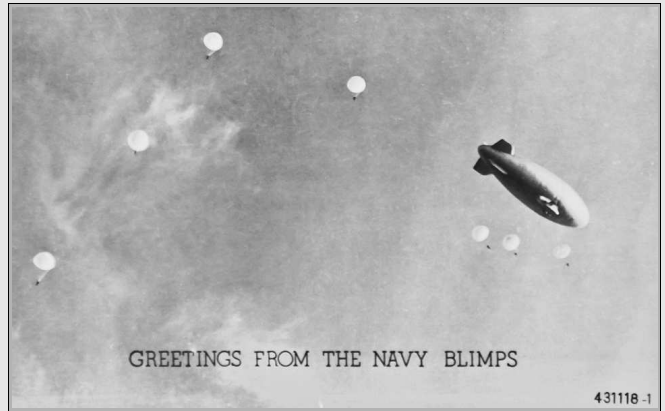
Angela Piraino, David & Donna Flynn



Chuch McLaughlin, Don Prichard, Greg Flynn & Tim Davis



Tish & David White



NAS Lakehurst New Jersey - Parachute School where David Epstein trained in Parachute, Packing and Jumping. Photo taken in 1943.



Nancy Lindberg, who continues with her streak of winning the 50/50 raffle. Congratulations Nancy!



Frank Frezza with a big catch!



CDR Charles Wirt and Cecilia Barocas

Naval Air Station Fort Lauderdale Museum

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