CASTLE AIR MUSEUM

NEWSLETTER

Photographer: Mike Henniger, 2013

UPCOMING EVENTS

- **Flicks of Flight - August 15th**
  Featured Film: “Devotion”
- **Fall Open Cockpit Day - September 5**
- **Raz’N Health Fitness Festival - September 12**
- **Annual Golf Tournament - September 19**
- **Flicks of Flight - September 19**
  Featured Film: “Dr. Strangelove”

CASTLE’S MOST WANTED

This is the section of the newsletter where we post the job most in need of a special volunteer. Hence, our most wanted! If you have the desire and ability to fill this need or know someone who can, please contact our Volunteer Coordinator to start a journey to help make Castle the most desired destination in Central California!

VC-9 Docents/Tour Guides
We still have need of new docents for our Presidential Aircraft. The aircraft is normally open for tours every Saturday and Sunday from 10am-2:30pm. We are looking for volunteers to lead these tours. One day a month or one weekend a month, your time matters for this project. Call Bob Scoble for more info.

FROM THE BOARD CHAIRMAN

MAJ GEN CLAY GARRISON USAF (RET)

It’s hot and a slow month for activities at the museum except for Flix of Flight. If you missed “Red Tails”, you missed a real experience. Several children of former Tuskegee Airmen joined us for the showing. We had 148 guests in total! It was a wonderful evening. August will be another great film - Devotion. Check it out!

I want to take the space this month to give more background on our new Executive Director, Jared Hines. When selecting Jared, the Board sought more than museum knowledge. We wanted a leader who understood operations, aviation, valued military history, embraced innovation, and shared our commitment to making Castle Air Museum viable well into the future.

Jared grew up in Oklahoma before joining the United States Navy, where he served as an Aviation Electrician's Mate Second Class (AW/SW) with Strike Fighter Squadron 94 (VFA-94), the "Mighty Shrikes." During his five years of active duty, he maintained the McDonnell Douglas F/A-18C Hornet—the same aircraft featured as this month's Airplane of the Month and represented by our Blue Angels #2.

Before being selected as Executive Director, Jared served as both a museum volunteer and member of the Board of Directors, giving him firsthand knowledge of Castle Air Museum's mission, volunteers, and future opportunities.

With more than 25 years of leadership and operations experience, including more than seven years as Chief Operating Officer of a company with annual revenues exceeding $23 million, Jared brings extensive executive leadership experience to the museum. We are glad he is here! I hope you come out to meet him in person.

RESTORATION HANGAR

GREG STATHATOS, RESTORATION MANAGER

The heat is on... in the restoration hangars and out on the grounds!

The July 4th parade in the City of Atwater was going to be our biggest entry to date. We had our Restoration truck leading the way, followed by the ambulance towing the helicopter, the Mighty Mite Jeep towing the Nike missile, the WWII Jeep towing our recently acquired M5 Bomb Trailer (farm fresh), our 1939 Ford tractor pulling the F-16 and newly acquired T-38, and Bertha bringing up the rear to complete our 12-entry convoy.

As we arrived at the staging area, things started going sideways. The ambulance decided it didn't want to drive in the parade, the WWII Jeep was sputtering and had no power, the T-38 blew its front tire, and the F-16, not wanting to be outdone, blew its front tire too. Just like that, both aircraft became lawn ornaments!

After all the late nights and hard work to prepare for our biggest showing, I wasn't about to let a few minor catastrophes ruin the day. Bertha moved up to tow the ambulance and helicopter, while Kim and I used my truck to tow the WWII Jeep and bomb trailer. We still made it through the parade with 10 artifacts—our biggest showing yet—and made the best of the situation. Thanks to the volunteers who helped us prepare, drive, and adapt on the fly, it was still a huge success. Just wait until Veterans Day... we'll be even bigger!

Out on the grounds, we finally installed the last of the afterburners on the B-58 Hustler. Since 2016, it has been missing these components, but now it's time to close up the remaining panels, prepare the aircraft for paint, and bring the centerline pods out of the boneyard and back on display. We haven't decided on their final location just yet, but they'll be displayed near—or possibly attached to—the B-58.

Three new viewing stands were built by the Atwater High School FFA program. The Black Bunny, Harrier, and F-86 will each receive a custom-painted viewing stand, and all three will be ready for Fall Open Cockpit Day.

One of the biggest changes inside the restoration hangar has been relocating the motor pool and wood shop. Over the years, the wood shop became a catch-all for everything imaginable—and a few things people thought were "too cool" to throw away.

The move will improve the visitor experience aboard the C-123 and C-119 by placing cargo crates inside the aircraft where guests can enjoy them during tours. It also gives us dedicated space to restore the museum's mechanical artifacts without taking away from aircraft projects.

Battery maintenance has also improved significantly. After spending far too much replacing batteries over the past two years, our new battery maintenance station will keep them charged, serviced, and ready to go. Stop by and check out the new motor pool—it's a great use of previously forgotten space.

Bill has completed sanding the TF-102, while Pat is finishing the last aluminum repair patches. Eesa is now installing the ordnance bay doors and operating arms, putting us on track to have the only fully functional ordnance bay on any surviving TF-102 or F-102. These volunteers have gone above and beyond to bring this aircraft back to life. If you'd like to show your appreciation, a basket of fried pickles always brings a smile to their faces.

The A-7 will receive its rudder, exhaust can, and tail cone this week, with the outer wings and hardpoints expected by month's end. After that, it's on to sanding and paint as we work toward our October 17 AirFest 2026 deadline. The cockpit installation may take a little longer, as the Mojave Desert is simply too hot right now to retrieve the cockpit section from China Lake.

ONE TEAM... ONE FIGHT

CURATOR'S CORNER

RUSTY WYNN, CURATOR

This month must have been late spring cleaning time for the Atwater community, as we have received a large number of artifact donations. I always try to let families know how much we appreciate them entrusting us with their loved one's history. I also explain that while the items they donate may not be displayed immediately, as we continue building new facilities, we will have additional exhibit space that will allow us to display more artifacts—possibly including those they have so generously donated.

Progress continues on organizing our aircraft technical manuals (TOs). At this time, the bomber manuals have been completed, and we are now partway through organizing the cargo aircraft manuals.

This month, I also began organizing and cleaning up our aircraft files. It is another tedious and time-consuming project, but one that will make research and data collection for our museum aircraft much easier once completed.

Another project we started this month is cleaning out one of the Curator's storage areas. We removed old furniture that was no longer needed and will be replacing it with shelving units and a restored Link Trainer desk. Our plan is to eventually display all of the components of the Link Trainer system as they would have appeared when it served as the primary flight simulator for training new pilots. This storage area will also house the books and other non-artifact materials that will be available for purchase during Castle Air Museum's next Open Cockpit event.

I am so glad to welcome Pat Holloway back to the Curator's Office. She has returned from an extended personal leave and has already jumped back into entering artifacts into the PastPerfect database. I know I missed her expertise and assistance in the Curator's Office, and everyone missed her warm demeanor and welcoming smile!

VOLUNTEER SERVICES

BOB SCOBLE, VOLUNTEER COORDINATOR

This month, I am adding a new element to the Volunteer Services section by introducing our newest volunteers. Let's start by welcoming those who have recently joined the Castle Air Museum family:

- Amada Holcomb
- Isabell-Mae Holcomb
- Jesus Sanchez-Ureno
- Tony Quartaro
- Russell Vera
- Victoria Batey
- Jeremiah Aborode

Welcome to the team! We appreciate your willingness to volunteer your time and talents in support of Castle Air Museum.
Our recent Open Cockpit Day also provided a great opportunity to recognize the tremendous support provided by our volunteers. While I did not obtain an exact volunteer count, below is an informal estimate by group:

- 33 Crew Chiefs, most of whom brought one to four assistants, adding an estimated 60 to 70 additional volunteers.
- 45 youth volunteers from two outstanding organizations:
  - Merced County Sheriff's Explorers – 15 Explorers
  - Civil Air Patrol – 30 cadets, several of whom arrived before 6:00 a.m. to assist with vendor gate traffic.
- 10 Special Events volunteers, who managed cashiering and entrance gate operations.
- 4 Board of Directors members (who were not also serving as Crew Chiefs), assisting with event operations throughout the museum grounds.

Castle Air Museum also welcomed Merced County residents for our 45th Anniversary Celebration, offering free admission to the museum. Six of our Special Events volunteers generously donated their time to help support that event.

To every volunteer who contributed to these successful events—thank you. Your dedication, enthusiasm, and willingness to serve make Castle Air Museum the special place it is.

AIRCRAFT OF THE MONTH

RUSTY WYNN, CURATOR

Aircraft of the Month: McDonnell Douglas F/A-18C Hornet "Blue Angel 2"

Last month we selected our F-4C Phantom II "Thunderbird 5" as a patriotic symbol celebrating the United States' 250th birthday. Continuing that patriotic theme, we would be remiss not to feature our F/A-18C Hornet "Blue Angel 2."

163429 at Naval Weapons Center, China Lake NAWS

Castle Air Museum's F/A-18C Hornet was constructed in 1987 by McDonnell Douglas Aircraft Corporation in St. Louis, Missouri—interestingly, at the same plant where our F-4C Phantom II was built in 1966. It was completed as F/A-18C-23-MC (Construction Number 622/C003—the third F/A-18C built) and was assigned Bureau Number (BuNo) 163429 upon acceptance into service with the United States Navy.

In March 1991, BuNo 163429 was assigned to the Naval Weapons Center (NWC) flight test organization at Naval Air Weapons Station (NAWS) China Lake, California. Assigned Modex 108, it served as a test and evaluation aircraft, supporting advanced ordnance integration programs, including the AIM-9 Sidewinder missile and the AGM-88 High-speed Anti-Radiation Missile (HARM).

While stationed at China Lake, BuNo 163429 transferred to Air Test and Evaluation Squadron 31 (VX-31 "Dust Devils"), carrying the call sign "DD-108." It served as a weapons research and systems testbed, evaluating everything from variants of the AIM-9 Sidewinder air-to-air missile to conventional iron bombs. In addition, the aircraft flew missions validating software-intensive hybrid systems, integrated targeting suites, and Operational Flight Programs (OFPs).

In September 2007, BuNo 163429 transitioned to active fleet service with Strike Fighter Squadron 136 (VFA-136) "Knighthawks". Assigned to Carrier Air Wing One (CVW-1) aboard USS Enterprise (CVN-65), the aircraft supported both Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom. VFA-136 flew numerous combat sorties over Iraq during the Global War on Terrorism, providing close air support for U.S. and coalition ground forces.

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163429 with Blue Angels Demonstration Team
Photographer: dimitrivrettos

In 2011, BuNo 163429 was reassigned to Strike Fighter Squadron 106 (VFA-106 "Gladiators") at Naval Air Station Oceana, Virginia, where it carried Modex AD-325. As part of the Fleet Replacement Squadron, the aircraft played an important role in training the Navy's newest F/A-18 pilots.

From 2014 through 2018, BuNo 163429 continued serving with VFA-106, now carrying Modex AD-301. During this period, it became a familiar sight on the air show circuit as part of the VFA-106 Tactical Demonstration Team (East Coast TAC Demo Team), performing at numerous air shows across North America, including:

- EAA AirVenture Oshkosh
- NAS Oceana Open House, Virginia Beach, VA
- NAS Pensacola
- Los Angeles County Air Show

(Continued on page 5)

AIRCRAFT OF THE MONTH

RUSTY WYNN, CURATOR

(Continued from page 4)

In 2019, BuNo 163429 joined the U.S. Navy Flight Demonstration Squadron, the Blue Angels, where it would serve for two air show seasons. Interestingly, as the third F/A-18C Hornet ever built, it was also the oldest "Legacy" C-model Hornet still serving in the U.S. Navy while assigned to the Blue Angels.

Feb 14, 2020 at El Centro, CA as Blue Angels #3

During the 2019 air show season, the Blue Angels flew 61 flight demonstrations at 32 locations. Two of those performances were conducted jointly with the U.S. Air Force Air Demonstration Squadron, the Thunderbirds.

Unfortunately, the 2020 air show season was severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in the cancellation of nearly all scheduled public performances, including the Pensacola Beach Air Show and the season-ending Homecoming Air Show at NAS Pensacola.

With traditional air shows grounded, the Blue Angels and the Thunderbirds joined forces for the "America Strong" flyover tour, honoring healthcare workers and first responders across the nation. Together, the two demonstration teams conducted 16 joint flyovers throughout the United States.

The 2020 season was also historically significant, marking the Blue Angels' final year flying the McDonnell Douglas F/A-18C Legacy Hornet before transitioning to the Boeing F/A-18E/F Super Hornet.

Following the conclusion of the 2020 season, BuNo 163429 was retired from military service and transferred to the National Naval Aviation Museum in Pensacola, FL.

In 2022, the aircraft made its journey by road from the National Naval Aviation Museum to Castle Air Museum, arriving on August 24, 2022.

Photographer: Rusty Wynn

Lieutenant Commander James "Rocket" Haley is memorialized with his name painted beneath the cockpit. LCDR Haley is a highly decorated U.S. Navy aviator who flew BuNo 163429 while assigned to VFA-106 "Gladiators" before piloting the same aircraft as Blue Angels #2, the Right Wingman, during the 2019 and 2020 demonstration seasons.

At Castle Air Museum's Fall Open Cockpit event on October 8, 2022, the McDonnell Douglas F/A-18C Hornet was officially unveiled to the public in its Blue Angels livery as Blue Angels #2, the famed Right Wingman.

MEMBERSHIP SERVICES

JOHN MARSHALL - MEMBERSHIP DIRECTOR

Renewals: Go online to complete the form or contact John Marshall at: membership@castleairmuseum.org

Membership Credentials: Stop by or contact the Gift Shop at 209-723-2182

Legacy Giving: Make the museum a part of your estate or reduce your current taxable income with an RMD from your IRA directly to the museum. Contact: membership@castleairmuseum.org

GIFT SHOP

LUCY SILVA, RETAIL SALES MANAGER

The gift shop is the central hub for anyone making contact with the museum. Membership credentials, tours, RV park reservations, mail, phone inquiries, donations...They do it all! And they sell tickets, greet guests, and keep the gift shop clean and ready, too. They are the face of the museum and a vital part of the operation. Come by and meet the team.