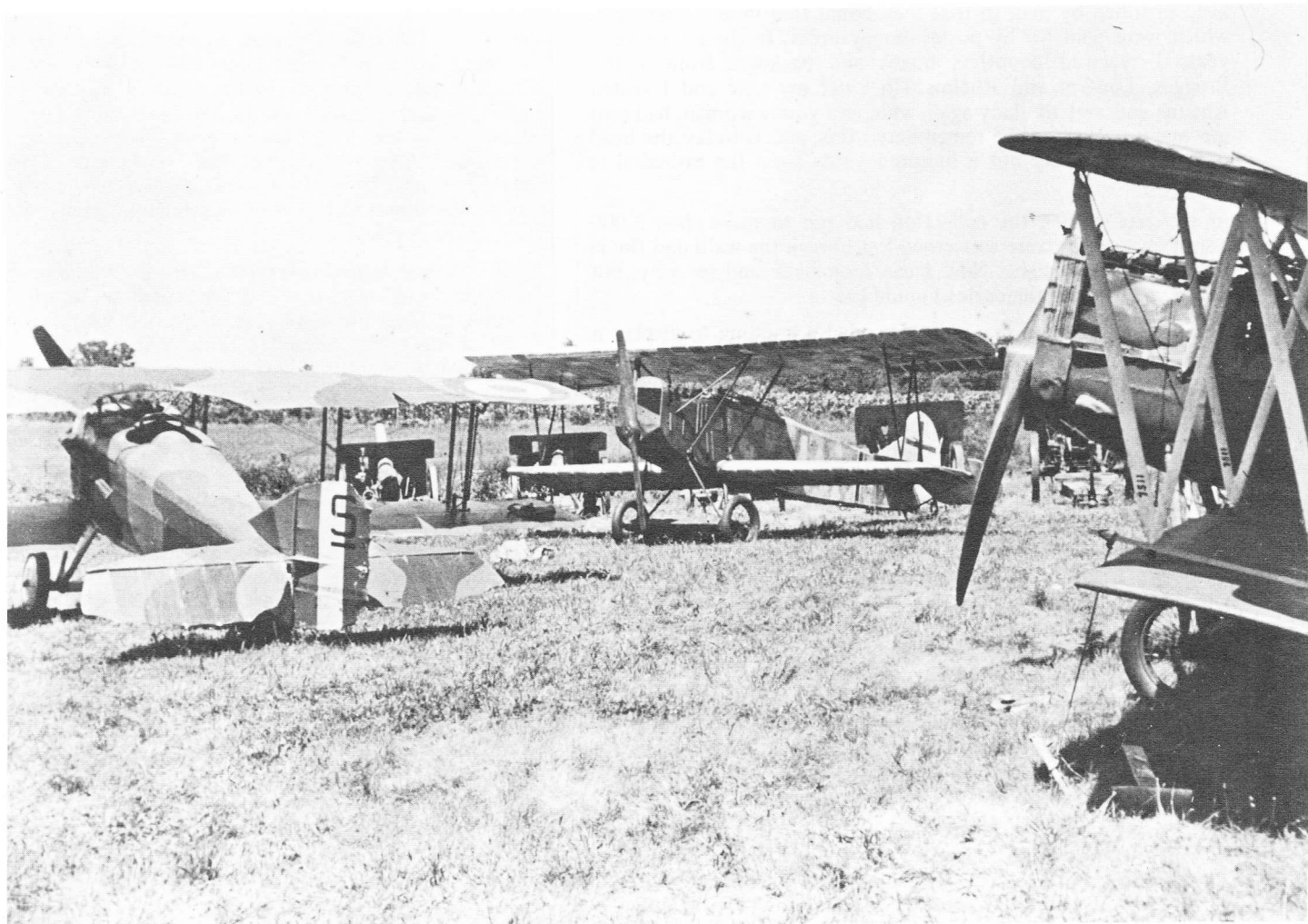




The First Museum

BY COL. G.B. JARRETT, USAR (Ret)

The first "private" aviation museum was begun soon after the end of World War I by G.B. Jarrett. The years since have seen a wide proliferation of public and private collections, each of them growing more valuable by the year. The forthcoming A.A.H.S. book, *Museum & Display Aircraft of the United States*, coming soon after this issue of the *JOURNAL*, provides a detailed view of the growth of this important cultural heritage.

This story of the first effort by Col. G. B. Jarrett, USA (Ret), is typical of the trials of all private venture museums. It will likewise be recognized by all of those whose work in the museum field, both public and private, has been an uphill battle.

This is a late date to start writing about my former collection of aircraft from World War One, but while it touches on nostalgia, it is nevertheless a keen topic, and today there are many private and national collections of these old craft both here and abroad.

My collection of curios and artifacts from WWI began in 1915. A young man from my hometown had gone to France with the American Ambulance Unit, and he sent me buttons from French and German uniforms which led to, eventually, what was probably the largest collection of material from WWI in private hands. It went from the two buttons in 1915 to some 76 tons in 1939.

In 1922 I had the good fortune to tour European battlefields. A day spent in only Ypres, Belgium yielded all sorts of treasures which were dragged home. Later I was able to see St. Quentin, Rheims, Verdun and Chateau Thierry, and by the time I reached Paris I had found so much that an errand to the American Express office was necessary to arrange shipment home for these amazing relics. I was also able to contact individuals who would

keep in touch by mail so that they could find items to send me, which were paid for by postal money order. In the next several years I received countless boxes and packages from Ypres, Brugges, London and Rheims. (In 1962 my wife and I visited Rheims and met the lady again who, as a young woman, had sent me many packages. She remembered this, and is today the head of a large gift shop but a hundred yards from the cathedral at Rheims.)

In the late 1920's the collection had run to more than 3,000 items; my parents were concerned lest I break the walls and floors from the sheer weight. Now I can look back and see why, but then I was after all the curios I could locate.

The accumulation of material demanded a building to display it in properly. At Atlantic City was the famous Steel Pier, and I went to the manager claiming that they had the building I needed and I had the collection to put in it, which led to a contract that stretched for ten years until 1939. Part of the collection was a group of machine guns in various forms, each developed for some special need, and the variety was amazing. Since all machine guns require some sort of mount, those intended for aircraft were particularly intriguing. What was needed, of course, were the proper airplanes on which to mount them.

On a day in 1931 I learned that Mr. Gravatt, the owner of Steel Pier, had signed a contract with a young aviator to crash his airplane in the ocean off the stage end of the Pier, half a mile to sea. The aviator had found an old airplane in North Jersey and had flown it to Atlantic City Airport. One look at it and I nearly exploded with the thought that "here was a genuine WWI airplane which was to be wrecked." It was a LeRhône powered Thomas Morse S-4C, with the Marlin m.g. mount still in place and part of the interrupter gear on the back of the engine.

One can imagine how I tore back to Mr. Gravatt to beg him to turn over the airplane to me for display and to have Bill Swan, the pilot, get another. To shorten the story I won out, and with loving care the Tommy was put on display with a Marlin Gun.

A guard on the Pier, named Kelly, a chap with a short experience in France with the R.F.C., knew of the airplanes around the Hasbrouck Heights area of New Jersey, and he insisted that Clarence Chamberlin had an old Camel. I lit the fuse of inquiry, and wrote to Chamberlin at his Jersey City address. Quickly a reply came that he did indeed have a Sopwith Camel, formerly sold to a man who could not pay for it, and he would sell it to me for \$100 if I would come and take it from the garage. My brother-in-law was in the trucking business in Moorestown, and I asked him to get it pronto. He did, and one day in 1931 it showed up at the Pier, a genuine Camel, with two gun mounts and the gun gear still on the engine.

At that time the article about von Richthofen, by Floyd Gibbons, then published in *Liberty* Magazine, was the only one available, and it stressed the story that Capt. Roy Brown had shot him down. It was profusely illustrated, and suggested to me that I should contact Brown. He lived in Toronto then, and I asked for permission to refinish this Camel as his had been. The photo of him that I sent, also asking him to autograph, showed Capt. Brown in such a position that the forward one of three stripes on the side of his Camel, for No. 209 Squadron, was hidden. I painted on two stripes and the proper roundels and tail markings, and had a very large photo of Brown and his Camel made to display alongside the airplane. The pair of British .303 Vickers guns went on top where they belonged. It attracted an enormous amount of attention.

Now I needed a Fokker Triplane, such as von R. was shot down in, and since none was available, anywhere, I decided to build one. It was ambitious, but I had met Stockton R. Ferris whose drawings had appeared in *Model Airplane News*, and I was able to use a set of his plans. The ace in the hole was that the airplane

In April 1966 there retired from the Aberdeen Proving Ground a man who must surely be one of the earliest and most dedicated persons in the field of aviation museum work. Indeed, the work of Col. George Burling Jarrett, Col., USA (Ret) has long been known; his founding of the Aviation Museum on Steel Pier in Atlantic City, New Jersey, dates from 1930, and in the ten years of its existence there, Col. Jarrett was host to nearly a million visitors each year.

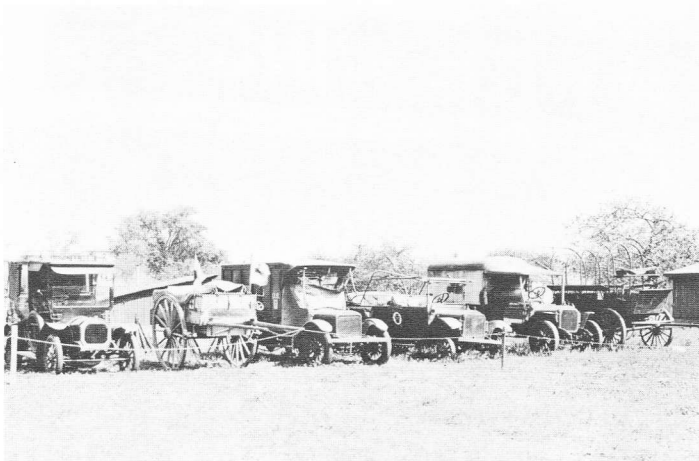
Col. Jarrett retired from the Army Ordnance Proving Ground, but not from active support to the Army Ordnance Museum, and in the intervening years he has been one of the prime-movers to bring that museum to its full potential. Among its prized collection are many items that he first laid hands on in the middle Twenties. The Ordnance Museum was opened to the public finally on May 19th, 1973, and a few days later he was given a rare honor, the Army's Certificate of Appreciation for Patriotic Service.¹

Col. Jarrett told the story of the founding of "The Jarrett Museum of World War One History" in the *JOURNAL of AAHS*, Vol. 3, No. 1, (Spring 1958). The distinguished author and military analyst, Hanson W. Baldwin, gave a succinct tribute to him for the founding of the Ordnance Museum. Writing in *Ordnance Magazine*:

"... I am delighted that Col. Jarrett's single-minded devotion over many years has at last paid off in a new building for the Ordnance Museum at Aberdeen Proving Ground. I well remember the days when Col. Jarrett, a born collector of ordnance of any kind, was fighting a lonely struggle for recognition of the importance of such a museum. For years the "museum" was his own back yard; *only* Col. Jarrett's perseverance overcame official indifference — and even opposition — lack of funds, and apathy."

Out of his deep interest in ordnance came an expertise that was put to use in North Africa during the War; he became intelligence and ammunition advisor to the British Forces (on assignment from the U.S. Army) and devised means to use Italian and German ammunition in British guns as one achievement. For this he was awarded the Legion of Merit, and the British Order of the British Empire. Col. Jarrett retired — again — in May 1973 from his post as Curator of the APG Museum, but with him, retirement was only a word. He has given active support ever since to APG in the never-ending task of research, a lifelong study, vocation, and avocation.²





The main impetus to the founding of the Jarrett Museum of World War One History, which occurred on Steel Pier in Atlantic City, New Jersey in 1929, was the collection of WWI armament such as the machine guns shown below. Wanting to find the "mounts" for these, Jarrett went on a hunt for original airplanes in this country. In the course of his search, many types of vehicles came into the collection, such as those shown above

left. All were exhibited at Steel Pier for several years, then were moved to Jarrett's farm near Moorestown, New Jersey, where they stayed until WWII. The airplanes were placed in a setting resembling airfields in France in WWI, but the elements took their toll and they deteriorated rapidly. Shown above are the Camel, Nieuport 28, SPAD, and Pfalz D.XII, with a specimen (horsedrawn) oil supply cart.



The Jarrett Nieuport 28 was refurbished as a "Men With Wings" airplane briefly as publicity for the movie in 1938 and displayed on Steel Pier.

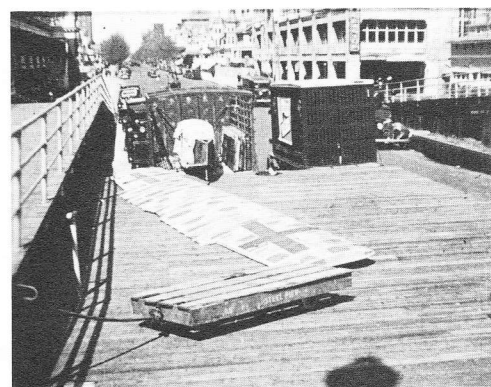


would not be intended to fly and therefore I had not the aviation department inspectors to fuss with. It was assembled in a few weeks, with a Tommy Morse cowl and fake cylinders. Also, we didn't know at that time that von R. had not been shot down in his first Triplane, so this one had the old stype crosses on the wings and fuselage and 102/17 as the number. Be that as it may, the Triplane just a few feet away from the Sopwith Camel was a terrific show and caused much comment. Although it was clearly marked as a replica, I had to recover the rudder three times the first summer, and the wingtips were replaced — the kids continued to swipe parts of the "von Richthofen" airplane.

A special job in process for the Pier took me to Hollywood in connection with the motion picture industry. Since the studios were the very ones making films with wartime themes, they required enormous amounts of artifacts which, for the main part, were the real thing and not copies. There were all sorts of trucks, cannons and uniforms galore, but best of all was a large collection of WWI airplanes, in conditions from wrecked to good for display. None were flyable, and no one in right mind would even attempt to wind up the prop.

Near Hollywood was a character, now deceased, named Arrigo Balboni, who called himself the Flying Junkman. He bought anything that even resembled an aircraft part, or even a whole airplane. He had cleaned up many a crash site and hauled the bits and pieces to his junkyard. I bought my first SPAD from Balboni, sadly missing many parts, for \$25 and towed it behind an old Chevy to the dockside at San Pedro for shipment to Jersey City by the Munson Line freighter. Balboni always insisted that this airplane was one used in the movie, *Wings*.

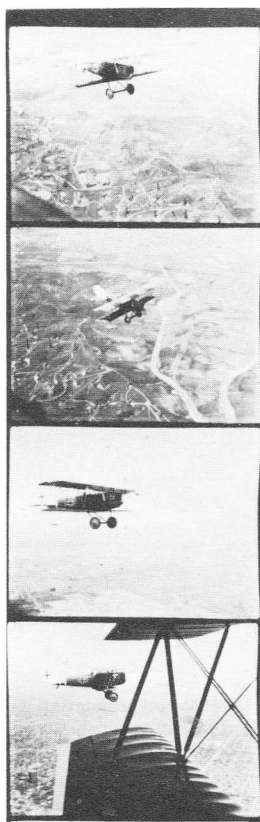
A year later I met Garland Lincoln again. Knowing I wanted a Fokker D.VII, he said he knew where I could get one, "as is and how is." He took me out to Alhambra to see it. The engine bed had been changed to accept a Hisso engine, and a rear seat was added. The pilot (or at least he thought he was) had somehow fouled up and flown it into the ground, killing himself and a passenger. I was told I might have it for \$7. It was trucked also to



Above — Where it all began, on Steel Pier. Atlantic City, New Jersey, c. 1933.

Below is the Jarrett Sopwith Camel many years later, on display in New York City, having passed from Jarrett to Tallman to Aeroflex. On opposite page, Buck Kennell with the rebuilt Pfalz D.XII at Dyer Airport, Los Angeles, and stills from the movies made by Jarrett and Kennell over Hollywood. Circa 1939.





San Pedro and so back to the Steel Pier. In the winter I rebuilt it, working for days in freezing weather in the Pier ballroom.

For many years a fine man, Karl Ort, had maintained an airplane supply business outside York, Pennsylvania, and I had bought many parts from him to rebuild this fleet, now including faired steel tubing such as that used in the Fokker D.VII, and fabric and dope. The pattern on the fabric presented a special problem, since we did not have the benefit of the research such as done by Don Hastings, so I covered the frame of the Fokker with muslin and laid out a lozenge pattern, carefully painting the sections to "dye" properly. The effect, after doping, was satisfactory, but it took a lot of time.

A Mercedes engine could not be found anywhere, so again, back to the work box. I had a number of Liberty engine cylinders and exhaust stacks, so I made, from wood, an engine crankcase and gradually developed what appeared to be a Mercedes engine for the D.VII. Fortunately the cowling hid much of it, and though the Liberty shaft stuck out in front, to which was attached a prop, it is well that no one tried to start that engine; it was for show, and I was satisfied.

In a visit to Hollywood in 1936 I obtained another SPAD VII remains, and two Pfalz D.XII's from a chap named Crawford in nearby Venice. Buck Kennell was then head of Paramount Studios electrical department, and a flying man, much interested in the D.XII. He bought the better one, and moved it out to the San Fernando Valley to a vocational school. There he managed to arouse interest in the faculty and students for rebuilding this airplane, which was done at considerable expense, all borne by Buck. I helped with such details as I had, as did the late Joseph E. Aiken and his son, Bill, both WWI airplane buffs. In the Spring of 1939 Buck Kennell's Pfalz was finished, flyable, and we decided to make a movie of it on the ground and in the air. We rented a Fleetwing and the air sequences were made over Hollywood on a clear, beautiful day. The film, for a couple of hams, turned out wonderfully.

The other SPAD and Pfalz were shipped to Moorestown, costing

about \$600. Where the money came from I don't know, but these now belonged to me fair and square. I made one decent SPAD out of the two. The Pfalz had been used in the film, *Dawn Patrol*, with checkerboard paint scheme, a typical movie treatment with water colors. For about a day I scrubbed the surfaces and nearly all the waterpaint came off. After the broken woodwork was repaired it was then refinished in the brown paint scheme as it had had when it left the Pfalz factory in 1918. There were only two pieces of the original German camouflage fabric, these on the horizontal stabilizer.

The upper wing, which all Pfalz D.XII modelers know, was of one-piece construction, but to get it home from San Pedro, it had to go in one package. I asked Joe Aiken to saw it in two, to go in the package aboard ship. Though it made me shudder, I asked him not to think about it but to saw it, inside the center section fittings. Saw away he did, and later I was able to repair it enough for display. From the aircraftsman's angle the repair would not have passed the inspector's eye, but it stayed together and we could move it about the field for display. It was complete, with a pair of lovely Spandau guns on the fuselage.

In 1935 I learned of a Nieuport 28, purchased from the Air Service at Wright Field shortly after WWI, that had wound up in Florida. The owner was delighted that some nut would want to pay him cash for it. In December a friend, with his truck, and I drove to Lakeland, Fla. where we found the airplane, standing on its nose. Children had used it as an "oil derrick," climbing up one side and down the other. Thus the fairing and the fabric had long since gone, but the wings, though complete, were stored in a garage. We brought the N.28 back to Moorestown, and it was easily repaired for display, becoming a prize exhibit. I appealed to Edwin C. Parsons, one of the Lafayette Escadrille members, to allow me to refinish it in markings he had used. He agreed, and it was painted silver with black nose, and his initials on the fuselage side — "E.C.P."

In the course of all this accumulation for the "Museum of World War One History" I met many fine people, including Paul Mantz and Jim Barton, both now deceased. I was called into active



The SPAD VII, which went from the Jarrett collection to Frank Tallman, then to Jim Petty, and finally to the National Aeronautical Collection in Canada. Here it is seen as restored by Jim Petty in early 1960's.

service in the Army in 1939, to the Ordnance School at Aberdeen, and the collection was now all moved to the farm at Moorestown, my father-in-law's. He had allowed me to erect more buildings, and the tanks, guns and airplanes were all put away, not to be seen again until 1947. The War intervened, and I stayed in Ordnance until then. We bought a place near Aberdeen, and I began to bring the personal collection there. However, one day I realized that I was now a lot older, with a job running the Army's very large ordnance collection in civilian status. Further, the WWI collection had suffered badly from the weather and other deterioration during the War and needed an enormous amount of repair work.

The airplanes were in dreadful shape, and maintenance costs were much more than in the 1930's: I simply did not have the time for such extensive and expensive work. Disposal of this personal collection was sound thinking, so I began to look for likely buyers. Disposal of the general ordnance was not difficult as for the airplanes, as believe it or not, there was not the craze seen in recent years over these old craft. One day a nice chap came looking for me, and I was surprised. He told me his name was Frank Tallman and he wanted to buy the airplanes, fix them and fly them for the movies.

Tallman eventually came with a truck and took away four of them, the SPAD VII, Pfalz D.XII, Sopwith Camel and Nieuport 28. I remembered that we agreed on the "staggering" price of \$500. They were in terrible shape and not worth much — but that was not today. The Thomas-Morse and Avro (the latter collected in 1939) went to the Thompson Product museum in Cleveland; Charles Hubbell had arranged for that. Parts of the D.H.4, S.E.5a, extras from the SPADs, and the Fokker D.VII were salvaged and sold to various airplane buffs, but the remainder was too far gone. Tallman courageously took the four, and traded off the SPAD and Nieuport for help in rebuilding the Camel and Pfalz.³

Armed Forces Day, held in Washington in 1952 with an ordnance display from Aberdeen, brought a C-54 from Chicago with Frank's Camel. Together we set up a flight over the Capitol, and I flew in an Army L-5 to film it. It has become another of my treasured flight motion pictures of WWI airplanes.

The late Eddie Rickenbacker set up a reunion of WWI airmen at Wright Field in 1961, and again the Air Force brought in old

airplanes from around the country, including Frank's Camel and Pfalz D.VII, and Cole Palen's Nieuport 28 and SPAD XIII. I had seen these before at a 1957 celebration of the Air Force at Bolling Fielding and Andrews AFB at shows staged by Lt Col Kimbrough S. Brown. It was always a thrill to see the WWI airplanes in flight or on display, and especially so to know that a few of them had been mine at one time.

Since disposing of the collection in 1949 I have made with Col. Brown's help, several films of WWI, documentary types. The first was about von Richthofen, and one came later about the Lafayette Escadrille, with help from Brownie and Ted Parsons and Col. Paul Rockwell. Neither of the films can be loaned or rented, but if someone comes here, sure, I'll show them.

The aircraft collection of the Canadian Museum of Science and Industry, called the National Aeronautical Collection, is in superb condition. On a visit there in 1970, walking into a huge hangar, I noticed a SPAD VII. Like a magnet it drew me, and I noted that it had been obtained from one Jim Petty, of Gastonia, N.C. To shorten the story, Petty had taken the SPAD from Frank Tallman in 1951 and rebuilt it. I felt as if I had met an old friend once more.

From time to time I can go to a museum here or there and see many restorations, occasionally one of mine — to again pat its side. However, since I made many motion pictures, now running to over 10,000 feet, I can always run a film for myself or for friends who drop by. Any air film is meat for discussion, anytime, any place. I never tire of looking at them, and it seems that others don't either — so I'll land, taxi up to the line and switch off.

Editor's note: As we go to press we learn that Col. Jarrett has been extremely ill; the Staff wish him a speedy recovery.

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2. Murtz, Harold A. "Jarrett of Aberdeen," *Guns Magazine*, September 1970.
3. For an account of the rebuilding and flying of the Camel, which was done at Greater Peoria Airport by Ned Kensinger, see Tallman, Frank. *Flying the Old Planes*. New York: Doubleday & Co.; 1973, pp.62-72.