

May 20, 2020 - Arcadia Airport - One of "*The Greatest Generation*" at 95 years of age

When I was a youth attending high school and later college, back in the '50's, every male was obligated to perform military service. Back then there were 3 ways that you could fulfill that requirement. First was to simply wait until you were drafted into the Army and then expect to spend **2 years** doing whatever they chose for you. Second, you could join the specific military branch which you desired and, depending on your negotiating skills, pick your field of endeavor for the next **3 years**. And, finally, you could seek out a National Guard or Army Reserve unit that still had openings and join for a total of **6 years**, the first 6 months of which would be on active duty and 2 weeks each year at "summer camp" somewhere. Of course there would also be need to attend a reserve weekend obligation once every month for the remaining duration of your enlistment. It was this last option that I selected and, following my deferment while attending Fairleigh Dickinson University, I went off for tank crewman training at Fort Knox, Kentucky after which I returned to my Battalion unit in New Jersey's 50th Armored Division. After 2 years of struggling with noisy, dirty and uncomfortable tanks I was made Company Clerk when their current clerk was honorably discharged. This was simply on the basis that I could touch type quite proficiently thanks to my taking it as an elective for 2 years in high school instead of the shop class that most males took back then. Because of that single skill my remaining military time was spent in either an air-conditioned office back at the armory or in an air conditioned tent while in the field, typing up morning reports, supplemental daily orders or driving the company jeep to pick up mail. The point being, that thanks to both attained skills and timing I was able to enjoy a quiet and peaceful military career with no one shooting at me. I was too late for Korea and too early for Viet Nam. It was the perfect time to be in the military.



This was NOT the case for Arnie Hanson, who was celebrating his 95 birthday when I flew into the Arcadia Airport for my bi-monthly gas fill-up this afternoon. When I arrived, I found a dozen or more pilots gathered in the FBO office lounge in some sort of celebratory mode. There were pizza boxes and empty soda cans littering the tables and people simply enjoying the moment. When I inquired as to the event I learned of it being Mr. Hanson's 95 birthday and, also, that he was a bombardier on a B-17 during WWII in Europe. Now that fact that he had successfully attained the ripe old age of 95 was reason to be celebrated, but if you add that he spent most of his military years aboard bombers flying over Germany and had not died was, in itself, a great accomplishment. Almost half of those who did never returned. When I lived in West Palm Beach I had a neighbor who had been a navigator on several shot-up B-17's, and who managed to survive the 25 missions required before being able to transfer home and out of harm's way. My friend, Jim Caslisto, went on to live to be 97 and was clear headed and healthy for all but the last 2 years of his life. I always enjoyed hearing about his experiences in the B-17 and it was because of those talks that I went on, in October of 2010, to take a flight in *The Aluminum Overcast*, the EAA's B-17 which was giving tours while in Greenville, SC. I wrote a blog article about that experience of a lifetime.

Unfortunately I was not able to speak in depth to Arnie Hanson, about his experiences, and I would have like to have done so. Our brief conversation was while he was at the front line of the Arcadia Airport runway, on a golf cart being driven by its manager, Shelley Peacock, to view a commemorative fly by honoring him. I learned that he qualified as pilot, navigator **and** bombardier but was selected for the latter, while he would have much rather it have been the former. After the war, he went on to fulfill his desire to be a pilot and amassed in excess 400 hours in a myriad of small general aviation airplanes, including the Ercoupe and Cessna Skyhawk. I also owned flew these two particular airplanes and greatly enjoyed them both. And while Arnie is no longer an active general aviation pilot, at 95 he still has the memories of the years in which he was and the experience of having lived as a part of *Our Greatest Generation*. I certainly wish him the very best of his remaining years, and wouldn't it be great if we could meet again in 5 years to help him celebrate his 100th Birthday?



This upper photo is of Arnie and Shelley on the front line of runway 6-24 watching a low flyby of 3 of the 5 aircraft which came out to honor this World War II veteran B-17 bombardier. In front is the Beechcraft Model 18 Expeditor, which was a 8 to 10 seat twin engine transport built from 1937 to 1969 with over 9,000 produced, making it one of the world's most widely used light aircraft. Behind it is the combat green colored Cessna L-19, Bird Dog which was used for liaison and observation in the late '40's through the mid '70's. Almost 3 and 1/2 thousand were built as a variant of the civilian C-170 model. And, to the rear, is the venerable Stearman Model 75, the military P-17 version of which was used for primary pilot training during WW-II. Over 10 1/2 thousand were build. While none of the above were technically "war birds", in that they generally did not carry armament, they were, none the less, essential to the military effort during "the War to End All Wars".

However the airplane just below **IS** a "warbird". The North American P-51 Mustang was a long range single seat fighter that saw extensive use during WWII and Korea. Of the 15 thousand produced, there are less than 250 still around. Interesting note, at my home field in Indiantown is one of the few shops dedicated to keeping this classic airplane alive and flying. In this photo it is flying just above the Stearman and L-19, with its landing gear down so as to "keep up".

