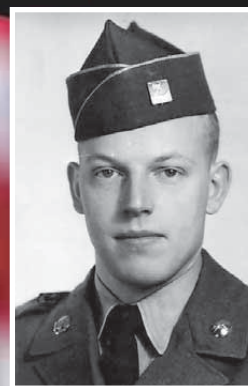


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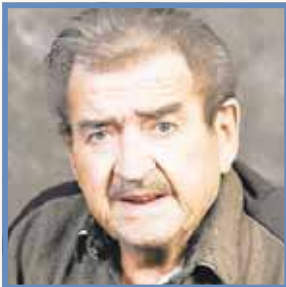
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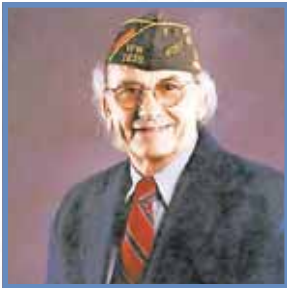


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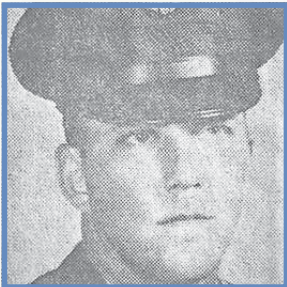
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Life really should be a 'Beach'

I met him in the fall of 2006 when we were starting to plan the very first WDAY Honor Flight to send World War II veterans on free trips to Washington, D.C.

He came up to the table at one of our earliest fundraisers with a huge smile on his face.

"Hi, my name is Bob Beach and I think I might be going on your trip. I signed up. Did you get my application?"

In the beginning, we speculated that we'd have room for about 100 veterans on that first flight in May 2007. A lot depended upon how many volunteers and medical staff were needed. Veterans who applied were chosen on a first-come, first-served basis.

I had the spreadsheet in front of me and my heart sank when I saw Bob's position on it. He was No. 103. It was very likely he wouldn't go on this first trip. When I broke the bad news to him, his smile didn't



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fade one bit. He just said he'd hope for the best. His positive

attitude struck me immediately, especially since he was a guy who could have really used a break.

Bob's story

Bob Beach joined the Navy right after he graduated from high school in Ashby, Minnesota. He was assigned to an aircraft carrier in the Pacific and fought in the Battle of Okinawa.

When he came home, he married Darlene "Sis" Hendricksen and they had three children. Their baby girl, Bonnie Lynn, died in infancy. But sons Lonny and Rick, both of whom happened to have cerebral palsy, were the apple of Bob's eye. During the time of the flight, Darlene

and the boys were all confined to wheelchairs and Bob was tasked with much of their care. He admitted his plate was pretty full, but he wasn't complaining.

We all would have loved to take him away for a weekend in Washington, but as the weeks wore on, it still didn't look good. Just a couple of weeks before the flight, we crunched the numbers more and learned that Bob would get to be on that first flight.

I'll never forget watching him on that trip. I don't think he ever stopped smiling.

But the next few years would be tough for Bob. In the summer of 2012, his beloved wife Darlene died. Just a month later, Rick died, and two years later on Christmas Day, Lonny died. Bob was all alone. When I'd run into him occasionally and ask how he was doing, he'd admit he was sad, but tried to remember the

good times. And he kept on smiling.

The last time I saw him was when he agreed to do another video interview with us to promote the Honor Flight program. But we became worried when we showed up at his house and he didn't answer the door. We decided to walk around to the back of his house to see if he was there. He was — sitting in a lawn chair, dozing in the sun.

A few days later, I received not one, but two "I'm sorry" Hallmark cards. That was Bob. He had nothing to be sorry for, but he always thought of others before himself.

I attended his funeral in August. It was full of people who had similar stories to tell about this wonderful man. As much as we miss his smile, I'd like to think he's up there sitting in that lawn chair, soaking up the sun and not apologizing to anyone for doing so.

Readers can reach Tracy Briggs at tracy.briggs@forumcomm.com.

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Contributed / Scott Guyette / Sleeping Dog Productions
Steve Hinton Jr. pilots "Death 'N Destruction," a restored Grumman F6F-5 Hellcat fighter from World War II (foreground), accompanied by Evan Fagen of Fagen Fighters Restoration in the "Sweet Revenge," a P51 fighter, in March 2021. The Hellcat won a Gold Lindy award at the EAA AirVenture 2021 in Oshkosh, Wisconsin, in July 2021.



Fagen Fighters debuts new WWII fighter plane acquisition at EAA AirVenture Oshkosh 2021, earns Gold Lindy award

By Kit Grode
West Central Tribune

The Fagen Fighters WWII Museum in Granite Falls, Minnesota, has another footnote to add to its history books. This summer, at the Experimental Aircraft Association's EAA AirVenture Oshkosh 2021 in Oshkosh, Wisconsin, the museum picked up a Gold Lindy award for its entry in the World War II Warbirds category: a Grumman F6F-5 Hellcat. The Grumman F6F Hellcat is a

single-person, carrier-based fighter aircraft built between 1943 and 1945, and was used by the United States Navy and Marine Corps primarily in the second half of the Pacific War. It was designed to replace the F4F Wildcat, and 12,275 were built over two years. The Fagen Fighters' plane is a variant of the standard F6F design — the F6F-5 Hellcat is also known as a British Hellcat F. Mk. II — and is one of seven of its kind known to be in airworthy condition in the United States.

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Half a dozen others are on display throughout the country — and another is on display at the Royal Navy Fleet Air Arm Museum in the United Kingdom — and still more are either in storage or undergoing restoration.

The Fagen Fighters WWII Museum first announced its acquisition of the Hellcat from the Yanks Air Museum in Chino, California, in 2018. The Hellcat had been on display — fully restored and maintained as airworthy — in Chino for 40 years, but had only been flown a handful of times in that time, according to WarbirdRegistry.org.

Evan Fagen of Fagen Fighters Restoration said the process of acquiring the Hellcat took more than two years of inquiries to the plane's former owner.

"I had visited that museum (Yanks Air Museum) a few years before we had purchased it (the Hellcat) and saw the airplane sitting in there, and from the time I saw it until the time



Contributed / Scott Slocum / EAA
This Grumman F6F-5 Hellcat takes to the sky at the EAA AirVenture 2021 in Oshkosh, Wisconsin, in July. The aircraft is one of many restored planes on display at the Fagen Fighters WWII Museum in Granite Falls, Minnesota.

we purchased it, I probably called the owner a half-dozen times just finding out if there was any interest in selling it, which at the time there was not," Fagen said.

The owner's hesitation to sell was wrapped up in the availability of a similar aircraft — of which there are few, Fagen explained. "The Hellcat is a rare airplane, and just nothing they were interested in selling."

But Fagen was persistent, checking back in every few months to see if anything had changed.

"One day all of a sudden he called me and said 'I'll sell it, but you've got to buy it today,'" Fagen said, "so it happened very spur-of-the-moment, although it took a long time to get there."

Once acquired, the plane was taken to Fighter Rebuilders, also in Chino, California, to be restored by the father-son team of Steve Hinton and Steve Hinton Jr. The restoration process involved not only making sure the Hellcat was returned to airworthy condition but also included overhauling its paint job and design.

WWII Naval Ace contributes to aircraft's overhaul

"The unique part of this airplane," Fagen explained, "is not just the actual history of the actual airframe but the airplane we painted it to represent, which is that of WWII ace Don McPherson, who is alive and well and lives in Adams, Nebraska."

While researching possible designs for the aircraft's appearance even before the owner had agreed to sell it, Fagen happened upon that of McPherson's former plane. He then reached out to McPherson with the help of Fagen's wife, Melissa.

McPherson, through the course of several phone calls, gave permission for his plane's design to be used in the event that Fagen acquired the Hellcat.

And, after the Hellcat was officially acquired, McPherson became an integral part of the restoration process, supplying stories of his combat experience and also providing photographs of the original plane — a Hellcat dubbed "Death 'N Destruction" — Fagen's Hellcat was to reflect.

"It became a very real mission, so to speak, to get this plane restored while Don was able to be part of the process," Fagen said. "To find a Naval ace that flew Hellcats is very rare. He's 99 years old, and he's extremely sharp and remembers all the details of his missions and his service and the locations he served and fought. Bringing Don into the mix really added a really neat element to the airplane and the restoration process because he was a big part of it."

FAGEN: Page 9



Veteran Ensign Donald M. McPherson became a World War II Naval Ace flying the Hellcat "Death N' Destruction." He's credited with shooting down five enemy aircraft in aerial combat. He was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross — awarded for actions during WWII with Fighter Squadron VF-83.

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FAGEN

From Page 7

The restoration, begun immediately upon acquisition, was nearly finished in January 2021, when Steve Hinton Jr. took the Hellcat up for a test flight Jan. 3. From there, it was a matter of months — and a few tweaks here and there to get things in order — until the plane was ready for a cross-country flight to its new home in Granite Falls, Minnesota.

As a special touch, Steve Hinton Jr. took a slight detour on the Minnesota-bound flight in March 2021, touching down in Beatrice, Nebraska, for McPherson to see the plane in person for the first time. “Don had a homecoming with it. The Legion Riders were there; there were probably 250 people at the airport,” Fagen said. “I flew down in one of our fighters and met Steve (Jr.) who flew it out there, so I was with Don when the Hellcat flew in. It was a pretty neat moment to be with him when he got to



Evan Fagen, left, Don McPherson and Steve Hinton Jr. pose for a photo with a restored F6F-5 Hellcat, restored in the image of McPherson's own plane from his days as a naval ace during World War II. The plane stopped in Beatrice, Nebraska, in March 2021, en route to its new home at the Fagen Fighters WWII Museum in Granite Falls, Minnesota.

see this airplane for the first time in person.”

And in July, at the EAA AirVenture 2021, when the Hellcat was revealed to aviation enthusiasts from around the country and the world, McPherson was able to make the trip and participate in a special program called “Warbirds in Review” with the Hellcat as a backdrop.

“To get this airplane back out, not only outside and flying again but representing a living ace from the Midwest, and having it in front of a bunch of people, it was great to see it there,” Fagen said. “Steve and I had talked and talked about different aspects of the restoration and how we wanted it to look, and it just turned out better than we could

have imagined. And to have other people recognize that and appreciate it was really cool.”

Fagen credits some of the overwhelming positive response to the fact that there simply aren't many Hellcats around: “There's probably been two Hellcats at the AirVenture in Oshkosh in the last 20 years.”

Gold Lindy awarded in recognition of outstanding restoration

All aircraft that attend the EAA AirVenture are eligible to enter the judging portion of the event, provided they have not previously won in a seven-year period. There are six overarching show plane categories — Homebuilt Aircraft, Vintage Aircraft, Warbirds, Ultralights/Light-Sport Aircraft, Rotorcraft and Seaplanes — and multiple awards given out within each category.

FAGEN: Page 12

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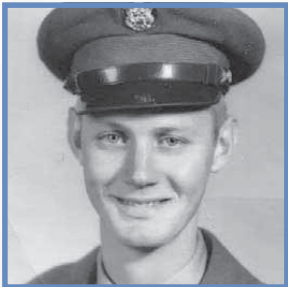
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FAGEN

From Page 9

“When people fill out the entry form, they include all background detail: the aircraft’s make and model, who might have owned the aircraft, who might have restored the aircraft,” said Bill Fischer, executive director of the EAA Warbirds of America.

“And then there’s a set of criteria that people go through and the judges rate.”

Judges are carefully selected for their specific area of expertise — for example, all judges for the Warbird category are required to be EAA Warbirds of America in good standing — and their experience should include “actual flying experience, maintenance, or restoration of Warbird Aircraft. Qualifications may also include historical research or experience as a licensed aircraft and power plant mechanic or aircraft inspector,” according to the EAA judging standards manual.

The eight main categories considered include general appearance, fuselage, landing gear and wheel wells, wings and tail surfaces, engine and accessory section, cockpit, authenticity and the depth of restoration. Bonus difficulty points may also be earned for aircraft based on the level of complication involved in the restoration of certain models.

“Some (aircraft) are very simple in scope, and others are very

complex in scope,” Fischer said. “So depending on where that lies, you can add some difficulty points — between one and five points. So the Hellcat that the Fagen museum had, that has three difficulty points. It’s not a very simple aircraft, but there’s a few others that are more complex.”

Fagen Fighters’ WWII Museum earned a Gold Lindy — the grand champion award of the Warbird category for 2021 — and Fighter Rebuilders earned a Gold Wrench for its restoration work.

“Participation levels over the years have grown,” Fischer said. “It started off with maybe just a handful of aircraft back in 1953, but nowadays we get close to 400 just in the

Warbird area.”

And the competition has grown to match the entries, in Fischer’s observation.

“The level of detail and restoration I’ve seen in the 20 years I’ve been here has really increased quite a bit,” he said. “And part of that is the ability to go back and to use new systems of computers and things that can document various parts of the aircraft that might become scarce — where can you find parts to make it more authentic. There’s a lot of detail that’s involved in looking at things when you get down to basic bolts and nuts and rivets.”

As a Warbird enthusiast himself, Fischer takes pleasure in following the progress of members’

restoration projects, many of which take years — some even decades — of painstaking research and careful attention to detail before being shared with the wider aircraft appreciation crowd.

“Once those projects become completed, in many cases those people come to Oshkosh to unveil their new restorations, and it gets to be very exciting,” he said. “It can be a very tight competition if you have three, four, five brand-new aircraft that haven’t been flown in many years.”

The Hellcat will be eligible to compete for the Returning Grand Champion award at the EAA AirVenture 2022.

You may contact the author at kgrode@wctrib.com



van Fagen, left, of Fagen Fighters Restoration in Granite Falls, Minnesota, speaks with World War II veteran Don McPherson as they await the arrival of “Death ‘N Destruction,” a restored Grumman F6F-5 Hellcat, at the Beatrice Municipal Airport in March 2021. The Hellcat was painted and renamed after McPherson’s own plane.



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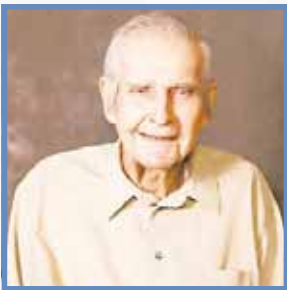
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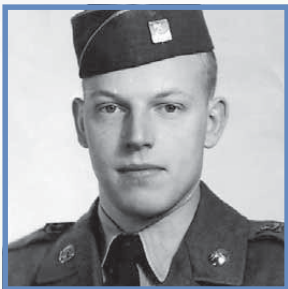
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