



# **THE LAST FLIGHT**

**NAPOLEON'S NAVY CORSAIR F4U-1D BUREAU # 57608  
MAY 1946**

**By Herb Huddle – 2018**

## COVER PICTURE DETAILS

Lt. Ben Brown landed the plane in Marvin Fahringer's alfalfa field and taxied it up on the highway. The highway was made of concrete called the Adrian Pike, now Oakwood Avenue. He started to taxi the plane with the wings down, which didn't work because of telephone, light poles and trees. He raised the wings and kept going. The plane was pulled forward by the spinning 2000 horsepower, three blade propeller. He had to steer it with the brakes, which he later told me his legs were worn out using the brake pedals.

The boys running in front of the plane were Industrial Arts students. This took place on a Saturday morning. Apparently the boys didn't realize how dangerous the situation was because the pilot had very little vision in front of him. He only had vision on either side. But they did help him through close quarters.

He traveled from landing the plane to the DT&I railroad by Gerken's concrete supply for approximately two miles.

The cover picture was taken adjacent to Bauman's Addition which wasn't there at the time. This is how the road looked in 1946 at that location. Note the telephone pole obstruction at the plane's left wing joint. A person is crouched down signaling to Ben its okay, but a close call. That could have been a real problem since there's no backing up.

When he reached the DT&I railroad we hooked Snyder's car dealership wrecker on it to pull it through town. Law enforcement to direct traffic was practically nil in those days.

The picking of the landing site was made by Mr. Miller and unknown to Lt. Brown. It was a long field with clover and hard, firm soil north of Napoleon, with the access road. Two white bed sheets were placed in the middle of the field. It's a miracle that Lt. Brown taxied the plane to Napoleon without a hitch. No backup Plan B was in effect. No tools to cut tree limbs or vehicle to pull it backwards if it got stuck or off course. Luckily nobody was injured riding on the wings initially and the six boys running in front of the airplane directing his path.

Right to left in the photo below: Bruce Honeck, \_\_\_\_\_, Dick Bell, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_. Clayton Vorwerk was in the Hudson car behind the Corsair. There were no sightseers along the way because it was an unannounced event. There were very few houses along the farm road in those days.

The rest of the Corsair story from start to finish will appear later in the book.



*At left, Oakwood Avenue in 1946; at right, Oakwood Avenue in 2018. Photos taken at same location.*

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## **I. Preface**

We write the story of the Napoleon F4U Navy Corsair WW II airplane to preserve the history of this war bird. Most WW II airplanes were scrapped after the war, but this airplane was unique and at least preserved for a period of time.

## **II. Dedication**

This book is dedicated to the two main people in this story: Mr. Lewis B. Miller, the Napoleon Public School Industrial Arts teacher, my mentor and Lt. Benjamin Brown. He was a world class pilot who never had an airplane accident. We also dedicate this book to every veteran pilot who flew F4U Corsair airplanes to protect our country during WW II.

## **III. Events Leading Up To The Purchase Of A WW II Airplane**

The establishment of an Industrial Arts training facility which was a paragon model for all schools in the state of Ohio to pattern after. After WW II all kinds of surplus equipment became available for schools.

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During the time period of early 1945 through early 1947 and beyond for the Corsair.

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### III. EVENTS LEADING UP TO THE PURCHASE OF A WW II AIRPLANE

I begin this story about the author, Herb Huddle, born in 1930, in 1944 as a freshman at Napoleon, Ohio public school. Being raised on a farm we knew the hard work required to make a living. We were much better off than most city folks having raised most of our food on the farm, including fruit, vegetables, milk, meat, eggs, and flour and having survived the Great Depression.

During WW II farm boys could get a restricted driver's license for farm use at the age of 14. So I had one and drove for a lot of farm errands.

The war tide was turning in favor of America and its allies, both in Europe and in the Pacific theater by late 1944 and early 1945. The Napoleon public school Industrial Arts department developed by Mr. Secrest and Lewis B. Miller became a model for all Ohio schools. The Industrial Arts department occupied the entire basement of the old Central School on Main Street, containing some 8,000 square feet. Mr. Secrest left the school system after completing the model system. The advisor for the program was Dr. William E. Warner with The Ohio State University.

The department had the following training categories: woodworking, machine shop, automotive, aeronautical, electrical, radio, welding, sheet metal, drafting, photography, and a library. There was one major problem, Mr. Miller was the lone teacher for all of these departments which limited one-on-one training for high school students. However, he did a super job under the circumstances. Mr. Miller opened the shop two nights a week for those desiring additional training. I took advantage of this and became a close friend of Mr. Miller. I took up the night training with brief periods in each area. I spent most of my training in radio and photography. We could get excused from study hall periods and spend that time in the shop, and I rarely went to study hall periods.

After WW II ended, schools could get all kinds of war surplus equipment and Mr. Miller took advantage of that because it was free or at very little cost. He received

welders, engines, lathes, drill presses, radio equipment, and a Link Trainer that simulated flying an airplane.

The following are pictures of different occupation and training categories in the model Industrial Arts shop.



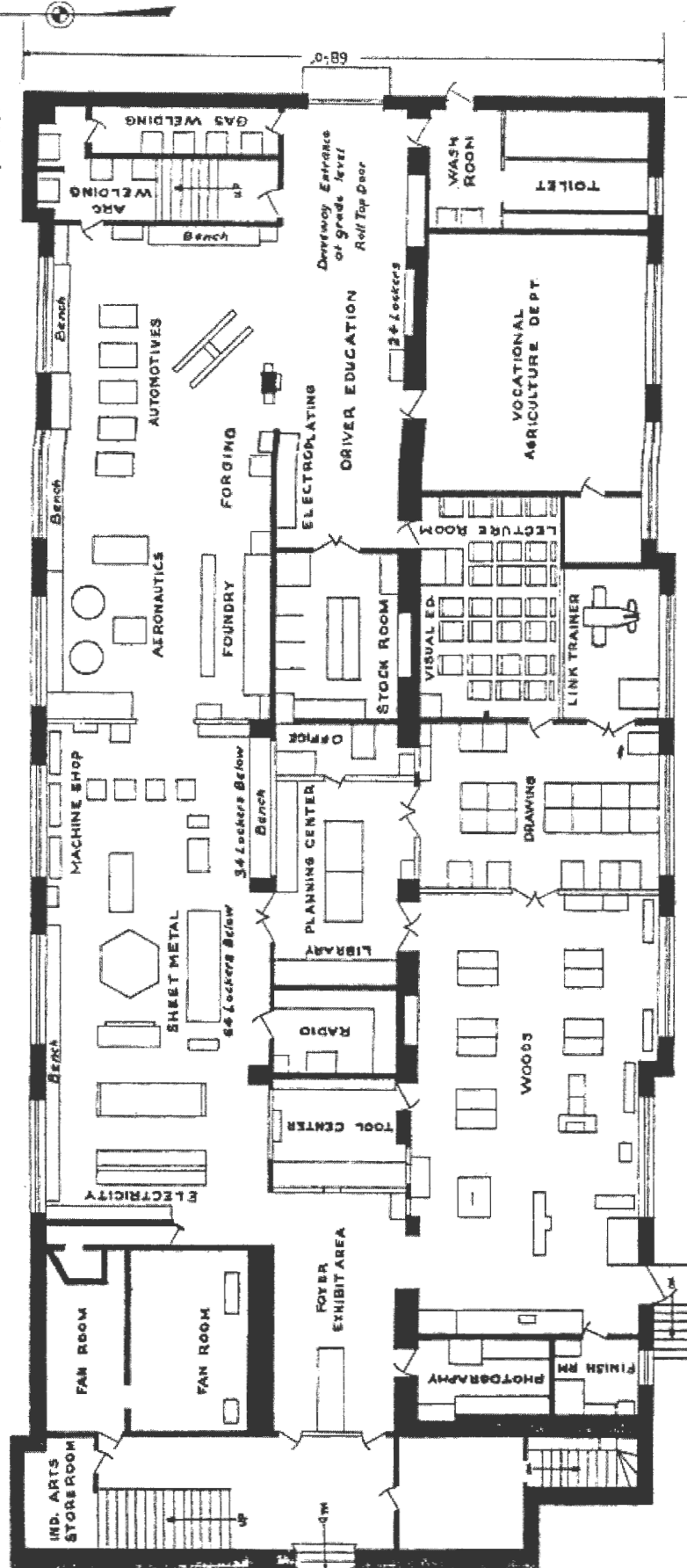
*AERONAUTICS – A group of students flew to Columbus, OH in a DC3 and toured a PBY amphibian WW II Navy search plane. Students and instructors, left to right, Bruce Honeck, John Creager, Herb Huddle, Jack Schied, Chalmer Bauman, Lowell Rausch, teacher Clayton Styder, and DC3 pilot.*

# THE ARTS AND INDUSTRIES PROGRAM AT NAPOLEON OHIO EXPERIMENTAL DEMONSTRATION OF INDUSTRIAL ARTS IN NORTHWESTERN OHIO

BOARD OF EDUCATION OF  
Dr. E. M. De Troy - President  
E. A. Yeager  
E. B. Vetter  
Robert Cochran  
J. To Winters  
Paul Hoy - Clerk

Developed in Cooperation with the  
Ohio Committee on Industrial Arts Education  
and the State Department of Education  
by Lawrence C. Seacrest 1939-1942  
and Lewis A. Miller 1941-1947

ADMINISTRATION OF  
C. D. Beilhart, Dept of Schools  
E. W. Tins, Principal  
INDUSTRIAL ARTS STAFF OF  
Lewis B. Miller, Supervisor  
Marilyn A. Huddle, Secretary  
Dr. William E. Warner, O.S.U. Advisor



AREAS EQUIPPED WITH  
Planning Center and Library  
Drawing, Foyer and Exhibit Area  
Office and Lecture Room  
Electricity and Radio  
Driver Education and Automobiles  
Woods: Bench, Mill and Finishing  
Visual and Photography  
Aeronautics  
Welding: Electric and Gas  
Metals: Foundry, Forging, Sheet and Machine

Partitions: Panel up 42" glass to ceiling  
Tables: An organized Tool Center  
Supplies: Distributed from Stock Room  
Color Scheme: Light green and tan with  
Some areas sprayed aluminum

Lighting: Fluorescent and indirect type  
Service Features: Gas, Air, Water  
outside throughout the Laboratory

## AERONAUTICS

*A war surplus Link Trainer with students, left to right, Dick Mengerink and Jack Schied at the bug recording desk. Pilots used this unit to learn to fly by instruments.*



*Herb Huddle working on radio project in the Industrial Arts shop in 1946. From the radio training I later got an amateur radio license in 1957.*



*Here are two students practicing the Morse Code in the Radio room. Notice the WW II surplus radio receivers on the shelf.*

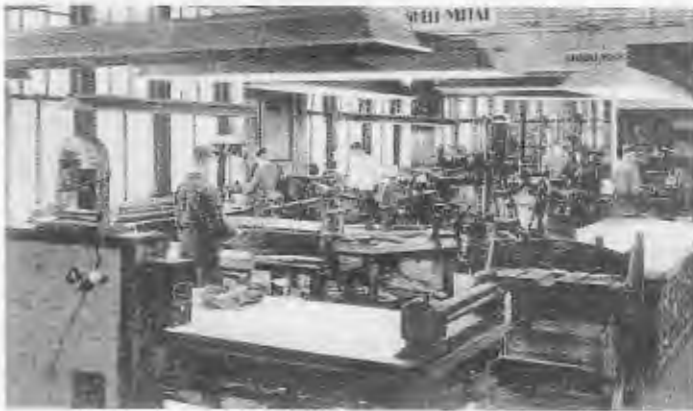


*In the 1947-48 school year the Board of Education initiated a student driver training program. The local Ford dealer, Bill Travis Motor Sales, supplied a new 1947 dual control car. Standing beside the car, left to right, is Clayton Stryder, the Industrial Arts teacher, who would house and maintain the car. Next to him is Charles Buckenmeyer, the assistant football and basketball coach. He would handle the student driver training program. Jack Schied, Roger Jaqua, and myself would drive the car many times in parades and for errands since we all had our driver's licenses.*

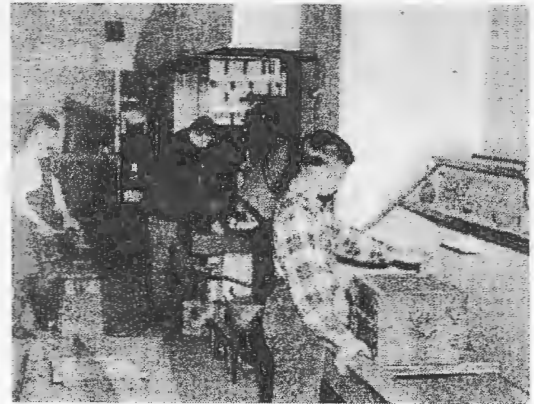


*I studied photography in the shop and I set up my own darkroom at home. I built a print box and used the bellows camera for my enlarger in the photo at left. I made prints and enlargements from pictures I took.*

We continue with areas in the Industrial Arts shop.



*Sheet Metal*



*Foundry*



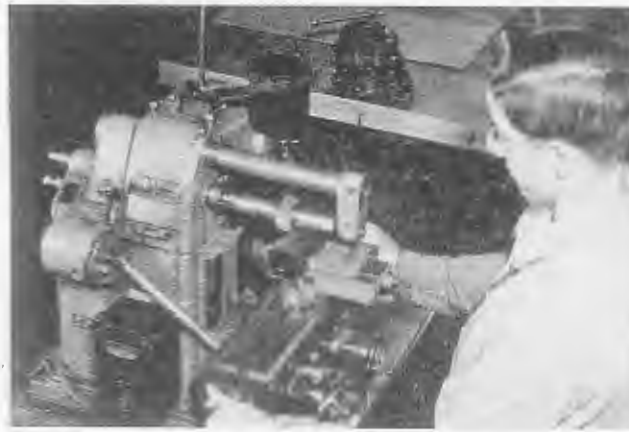
*Gas Welding*



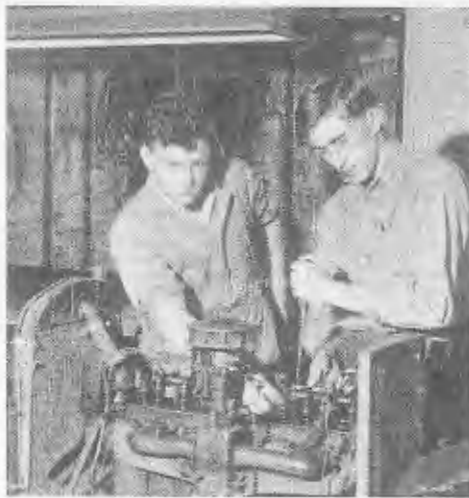
*Arc Welding*



*Woodworking*



*Machine Shop*



*Automotive*



*Mr. Stryder helping a student in the Drafting Department.*



*Inverted Ranger V-12 airplane engine developed by the Ranger Aircraft Division of the Fairchild Engine and Aircraft Corp. in the early 1930s. Cost \$11,000-1944, used in the Fairchild AT-21 and Curtis 503C Searmen. Specs: V-770 750 hp, 725 lbs., air cooled.*

We had a completely stocked tool room, large library, and a supply stock room of lumber and materials. Students learned how to requisition material and pay for it. This made them responsible for their own property. They also had to requisition tools from the tool crib and check them back in, which made them responsible for their care while using them.





*Herb in his amateur radio shack in 1965.*

*Amateur radio  
call letters Herb  
obtained in 1957:*

**W8UPL**



*Herb's 1955 Chevy with 6 meter antenna on the rear fender called a HALO for mobile operation in 1958 to talk to local hams in our amateur radio club and others.*

Things the author made in the Industrial Arts shop in my junior and senior year which I still have today. We still occasionally refer to my high school Physics and Chemistry books because certain laws don't change. Matter only changes from one form to another nor is it created or destroyed.



*Metal tool box with retractable shelf and lead ash tray made in the Shop. I still have my 1947 Chemistry book, my 1948 Physics book, and my WW II electrical book for beginners, which I studied.*



*Vinyl record cutter and player, radio, PA system, and amplifier. I designed and built this combination unit in my senior year. There was nothing on the market like it until years later.*

## IV. RELATED STORIES AND PHOTOS OF MR. MILLER AND THE AUTHOR

I have included some side stories I experienced with Mr. Miller as my mentor. One Saturday Mr. Miller, my sister Marilyn, and myself drove to Butler, PA and picked up several war surplus welders with his 1938 Ford coupe car and trailer.

He obtained a rather new radial drill press from a local company whom the government had loaned to make war items. That drill press changed owners after the shop was shut down. My nephew now owns the press. Originally it was a \$10,000 piece of equipment.

Mr. Miller would haul ear popcorn to Delaware and Bloomdale, OH in the fall with dad's newly purchased 1-1/2 ton 1946 Dodge truck. He would come out on Saturdays and hunt pheasants in season with us.

When he had the shop open in the evenings he would tell Ruben (Johnson) and I to take his car to Cedars Restaurant at Damascus Bridge and get some fish sandwiches. Ruben's father was the cook there. Sometimes we had watermelon and other things before he closed the shop at 10:30 p.m. There were no pizza shops in Napoleon back then.

Mr. Miller also drove a school bus on our route and picked up Mrs. Holzer and us kids. He would drop Mrs. Holzer (who was my physics and chemistry teacher) and myself off at the corner of Meekison and Appian Streets. We would walk to the end of Meekison Street (about 1/3 mile) and pick up Mr. Miller's car and I would drive Mrs. Holzer to school. His car was where he picked up the school bus in a large garage. This allowed Mrs. Holzer to get to school early while he continued his bus route. He would use his car to go home for lunch and I would drive it back when school was out to the bus garage area. He would pick me back up on the bus. This arrangement went on for most of the school year.

Another interesting story is that he would give me the school bus keys during class and tell me to take it up to E.V. Austermiller's garage and fill it up with gas. I would then park it in front of the school on Main Street ready when school was out. Can you visualize that happening today? This was a different period of time and a hamburger or two hot dogs on rye at Spenglers were 10 cents.

When Mr. Miller died I gave the eulogy at his funeral and told the bus story and driving his car every day. His wife, Edna, talked to me afterwards and said she never knew I was driving their car at 16 years old every school day.

Later that year my dad, my brother, and I purchased a new 1946 Willy's jeep which I drove to school part time in my senior year. We sure had fun driving that vehicle and using it on the farm. We were the envy of our school because only about two or three kids drove cars to school back then, not like today.

We continue with more school shop stories.

One evening Mr. Chalmer Yackee, an electronic engineer from the Farnworth TV Company in Fort Wayne, visited. Mr. Miller told him we would like to install a P.A. system in every room of the high school. Mr. Yackee said he would help with our plans. He sat down at a table in the shop library and drew a schematic layout of the power supply, amplifier and speaker connections all from memory. Mr. Miller ordered all the parts and I, along with another student, built the power supply and amplifier. Mr. Miller challenged myself and three other students to install the system. We worked at night and weekends installing all the wiring through the duct work to each room. When finished it worked perfectly and the school principal used it every day to make pertinent announcements.

Mr. Miller even had a car hoist installed in the automotive area. He had an agreement with the local Chevrolet dealer (Snyder's) to service every new car they sold by the students in the automotive shop. We would grease the car, set engine tappots, check the antifreeze, tire pressure, engine oil and idle adjustment. We would also install the radio and the antenna if needed. There was a complete list of things to check and adjust. The shop was paid a fee for each car depending on the work and accessories installed.

The school owned a Chevrolet truck, which the shop used for various things. One day Mr. Miller said that Mrs. Ort (Miss Love), a teacher who had just gotten married to Virgil Ort, wanted a piano moved to their house. She had gotten the piano from the school which was no longer needed. A bunch of us shop students loaded it on the truck. I drove the truck to their house in the country on Road 12 north of town. We backed the truck into the ditch bank blocking the road and we were able to unload the piano and get it into the house. That was a big job for a bunch of boys to handle to keep it from being damaged and keeping it secure on the flatbed truck going down the highway.

With the war winding down and war production jobs disappearing, the need for post war jobs were changing. Mr. Miller and Mr. Stryder were visionaries in preparing students with skills and training for jobs if they weren't going to college. College wasn't a necessity then as it is today. After WW II jobs were scarce even for college graduates. Times were changing and veterans were going to college on the G.I. bill.

Mr. Miller always wore a white shirt and necktie at school. In the shop he always wore a nice clean pressed white shop coat that was trimmed in blue. He was always neat as a pin and I never heard any vulgar language. He was a first class man with a positive attitude.

This is where the F4U Corsair airplane comes into the picture.

Marilyn (Huddle) Leaders in her own words:

“When I was a senior in Napoleon High School I was enrolled in the secretarial classes and we were able to work in an office to gain experience along with our classes. I was assigned to work in the Industrial Arts office for Mr. Lewis Miller. Later, after I graduated, I was hired by the board of education to continue to work in that office during the school term writing letters, bookkeeping and other secretarial jobs, and although it has been over seventy years ago, probably some of those letters were concerning the acquisition of the Corsair. There was also one day when we - Mr. Brillhart, the superintendent of the school, Mr. Miller and myself - went to Cincinnati to some office which I presume was in regard to acquiring this plane. After a lot of paperwork and telephone calls the day finally came and what excitement there was to see this plane coming down the Adrian Pike into Napoleon. What a thrill for the Industrial Arts students to have this airplane sitting behind the school just waiting to be studied and enjoyed - probably the biggest and best item that the department ever had. And so, the saga continues with this story despite the sad demise of this plane.

I was privy to every aspect of acquiring the Corsair to its final location behind the Napoleon High School. I was a witness as to one of the first from Napoleon to see it at Metcalf Field in Rossford. My father drove Mr. Miller, myself, my two brothers Herb and Jay, to see the Corsair after Mr. Miller had received word that it had landed at the airport. From that time on it was the school's ownership and responsibility.”

— Sister Marilyn wrote this to Herb Huddle



*This photo was taken by Mr. Miller during the 1946-47 school year. It is my sister Marilyn, who was Mr. Miller's secretary, and Herb Huddle (myself) sitting in Mr. Miller's chair in his shop office. I was a junior in high school at the time.*



## V. STORIES OF LT. BEN BROWN AND THE CORSAIR AIRPLANE

I will do my best to correct and set the record straight, since my sister Marilyn and I were eye witnesses for the entire events of the Napoleon, Ohio high school Corsair F4U airplane obtained after WW II in 1946. Marilyn was Mr. Miller's secretary and I was a student. Some accounts I've read were exaggerated or misleading, to make a good story sound better.

This story begins with Mr. Lewis B. Miller, who wrote to the government requesting an airplane for his Industrial Arts Aeronautical class. Mr. Miller had been receiving government surplus items for the school, as mentioned earlier, and he hoped he would be granted a Piper Cub, or some such small surplus airplane. A few days after the request he received acknowledgment that the school could have a Corsair F4U, a Navy fighter plane for the sum of \$150.00. Excited and overwhelmed, he went to the School Board and requested the \$150.00 to purchase the airplane. They rejected the request. Determined to get the plane, he approached a local jeweler by the name of Pete Riechert, and he said, "What are you waiting for? Here is the \$150.00." Mr. Miller sent the money in and waited for a reply.

The government agency acknowledged receipt of the money, and made plans to fly it to the Napoleon area. Since Metcalf Airport near Toledo was the closest airport to Napoleon, that would be the landing place. Days later word was received that the plane had arrived at the airport, and it was the school's responsibility to get it to Napoleon. The instructions given by the government were that it was never to be flown again. Nobody from Napoleon was there at Metcalf Airport when it landed.

That evening Mr. Miller, my father, sister Marilyn, myself, and brother Jay went to the airport to see the plane. What a beautiful sight to see – a beautiful F4U Corsair plane! Later we learned it only had 30 hours on the log book located in the plane. It was fully equipped with radio equipment. It had no guns, but the mounting places were there.

The one big problem was how we were going to get it to Napoleon. Several ideas were floated, like towing it to town, or trucking it, and none seemed very workable. Finally, a local man in Napoleon said he knew a pilot by the name of Lt. Ben L. Brown, who had been in the Air Transport Command. Ben had flown 55 different types of aircraft from the factories all over the country. We have included in this book the story and experiences of Lt. Ben L. Brown during WW II and beyond.

Other trips had been made to the airport to see the plane, and on one occasion somebody was in the cockpit and pulled a lever that raised the wheels, and damaged the wheel doors and severed a hydraulic hose. It was bad news because the plane lowered itself, and the propeller went into the dirt about a foot. Fortunately, the plane

was sitting on a strip of grass and not on the blacktop.

Mr. Miller was worried that it could have damaged the prop and the engine could not be run again. Arrangements were made to get a wrecker to raise the airplane. They put a log chain around the propeller shaft and raised the plane. A maintenance man from the airport repaired the wheel doors and replaced the damaged hydraulic hose. He replenished the hydraulic fluid, and operated an accessory hand pump in the cockpit lowering the wheels. So far, so good – and the wrecker lowered the plane back on its wheels after they had been locked in place.

One evening days later Mr. Miller and some of us met with Mr. Brown at the airport. He said he had flown an F4U one time. Ben started the engine up, and fortunately, the prop was not damaged and everything seemed okay. What a relief that must have been to Mr. Miller! Ben waved to us that he was going to take it down the runway. Not only did he take it down the runway, after his flight checks, he took off! He circled the field, landed the plane and taxied it over to us. He got out of the cockpit and said, “When do you want it flown to Napoleon?” Wow! Who could ask for anything better than that? He said he had enough fuel to fly to Napoleon.



*Several days after the Corsair was delivered to Metcalf Airport in Rossford, Mr. Miller took a picture of Lt. Brown in the cockpit after he agreed to fly it to Napoleon.*

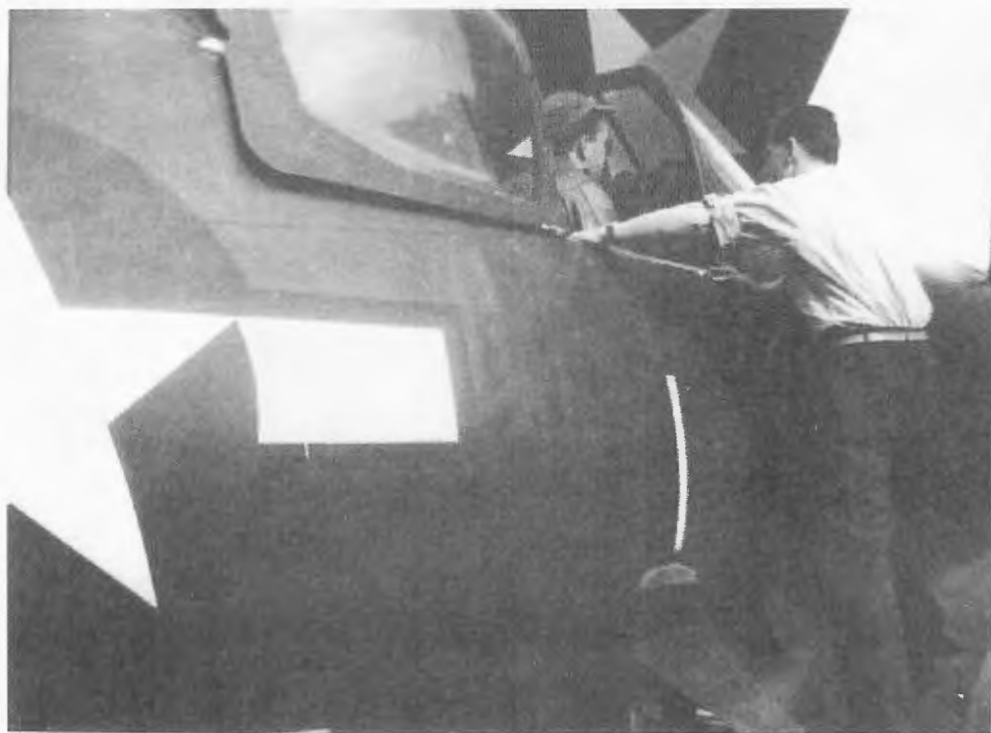
Mr. Miller asked him if he could land it in a field that we marked with white sheets, and he said, “yes”. Mr. Miller told him he would make the arrangements and let him know. Mr. Miller located a large solid alfalfa field north of town along the Adrian Pike (Oakwood Avenue), which was a good concrete two lane highway leading into Napoleon. Mr. Brown was informed of the arrangements for the next Saturday morning. Sure enough, everything went according to plan.

It was a beautiful day in May of 1946 and everything was going according to plan. Mr. Miller had previously made the arrangement for the landing field. The farm was owned by Mr. Ireland or Mr. Fruth, I kinda forgot which. Marvin Phragener farms the farm. Permission was received from all of them by Mr. Miller. The field was hard clayu soil and the clover crop was just right for a solid landing of a heavy aircraft.

Sure enough Mr. Brown had left the airport and was right on schedule over Napoleon. Mr. Brown told me later that the engine had sputtered over Napoleon and he switched to the reserve gasoline tanks. Heading north he spotted the white sheets in the large alfalfa field. Since there was no wind he circled the field and landed east to west heading to where the highway was located. You must remember there were no cell phones or two-way radios for communications. The landing was perfect with no problems. He taxied it up to the highway. Mr. Miller climbed up on the wing to talk with Mr. Brown. The decision was made that he would taxi upon the concrete highway and on into Napoleon, about two miles, under the airplane's own power with the propeller turning.

IN OTHER WORDS, GO FOR IT.

*Lt. Brown in the  
cockpit and L.B.  
Miller talking  
to him.*





*Ben just got up on the highway and two shop students got on the wing tips to help direct him down the highway.*



*The idea of shop students on the wings didn't work, so they ran in front of the plane with the wings down.*





*Here Ben put the wings up for better maneuvering.  
These three photos all took place in about the first 300 feet of entering the highway.*

With a disregard for safety, several boys ran in front of the plane with the propeller spinning, helping him past obstacles. I really don't know if that helped the pilot or not. Apparently it did because they ran in front of the plane all the way to Napoleon. I recall several of the people in front of the plan at this point. There was Bruce Honeck, Dick Bell, and Tom Hardy. The pilot had poor visibility in front, he could only see well to the sides. There was no Plan B for back up if a problem was encountered along the way. It was just go full speed ahead all the way and come what may.



*This photo was taken where  
the new Ohio Route 24 bypass  
is now with the overpass.*



*This photo was taken across from the Henry County Office Complex, which was the former Wal-Mart location.*

*This photo was taken across from the new Napoleon City solar panel field. Formerly this was the Hogrefe city dump site.*

***Special Note:*** *this is where Bob Hogrefe buried the Corsair airplane cut into small pieces about 10 feet deep. It's ironic the Corsair went by its final resting place five years earlier.*





*This photo was taken across from Charlie Bauman's lake, his stockyard and private airport. Now it's all a housing development, a nursing home, and several small businesses.*

The man-made lake, Charlie Bauman's stockyard and private airport were to the left of the above airplane action photo, along the highway across from the Napoleon Oakwood park. Today the stockyard and airport no longer exist. **NOTE:** A few years later Mr. Dick Brubaker and Tom Hardy took off in a light airplane from this airport heading west. They made a left turn and lost air speed and crashed next to the present day Hill's Restaurant. It was an open field then. They were only minutes from takeoff. Mr. Brubaker was killed and Tom fractured a leg. Tom was the same guy sitting on the Corsair airplane wing earlier.



*Bauman Stockyard*



When he got to Napoleon by the D.T.&I. Railroad, which was about two miles, we hooked Snyder's wrecker onto it, after shutting the engine off – presumably for the last time. Mr. Kelly of the City Light Plant got on top of the fuselage to lift any light or telephone wires over the wings that they might encounter along the route in town. The route taken through Napoleon was Oakwood Avenue, Perry Street, Clinton Street, then to Webster Street, where it was parked on the right side near Main Street in front of the school next to the Presbyterian Church parsonage. A wooden platform was later built so everybody could look inside the cockpit.



*Just before reaching its final parking place on Webster Street in front of the Presbyterian Church parsonage. Standing on the fender is Clayton Vorwerk and Bob Gilbert. Standing on top of the plane is Mr. Kelly from Napoleon Power and Light Company. Driving the wrecker is yours truly.*

*Photo colorized by Steve Miller*



*Pilot Lt. Ben Brown and L.B. Miller in front of the high school on Webster Street after parking the Corsair there for all to see.*

*Photo colorized by Steve Miller*



After the platform was built for people to look inside the cockpit, this is how the instrument panel looked. It was simple but adequate for the time period. There were no computers or highly technical stuff like today's jet airplanes. You flew by feel and sight, keeping an eye on the instruments.

### Corsair F4U Specifications

Napoleon's Corsair Built ..... March 1944  
 Production ..... 3861  
 Speed mph ..... 425  
 .50 Cal Armament ..... 6  
 Bomb Weight ..... 2000 lb.  
 Engine ..... Prat & Whitney R-2800-SW  
 Two row Bank ..... 9 cylinder each  
 Horsepower ..... 2250  
 Climb Feet/Min. .... 3250  
 Ceiling Feet..... 33,900  
 Range in Miles ..... 1019  
 Extended Range ..... 1562  
 Empty Weight ..... 8694 lbs.  
 Loaded Weight ..... 12,093 lbs.  
 Max. Weight ..... 13,120 lbs.  
 Crew ..... 1  
 Other Name ..... MK II



### Top Aces During WW II ... Kills

Robert M. Hanson..... 25	} Medal of Honor Recipients
"Pappy Boyington..... 22	
Kenny Walsh..... 21	

### Recommended Reading

*"Corsair Aces of WW II"*

*"War Planes to Alaska" by Blake Smith*

The F4U was designed by Vought-Sikorsky and they built it around the Pratt Whitney R2800 engine. They were built from 1942-1953 and there were different versions of the planes. Napoleon's Corsair was licensed by Goodyear and built in Akron, Ohio.

There were only two actual F4U-1D type that survived the Navy's massive scrapping program after WW II. Ours was a rare breed by the standards of the time.

*Reference: Rob C. Mears of Shreveport, LA; Historian. Rob is writing a book on Corsair aircraft, but it has no name and is not published yet.*



*This is where the Corsair was parked for public view. You can see the high school building far left. The Presbyterian Church parsonage at right. Then two emergency coal oil pots were lit at night as a traffic precaution.  
The platform used for public view of the cockpit.*



*Notice the old pickup trucks and cars in the photo. They weren't too old then and new vehicles were hard to come by in 1946 because you had to put your name on a waiting list.*

That afternoon Mr. Miller paid Mr. Brown \$25.00 for flying the Corsair to Napoleon. My sister Marilyn and Mr. Miller took him back to Rossford from which he came.

Mr. Miller decided after several weeks of the Corsair sitting on the street, that it should be moved to its permanent location. He again borrowed the wrecker truck from Snyder's Chevrolet dealership to tow the Corsair. I again had the privilege to drive the truck. We removed the wooden visitor's platform and hooked a chain to each wheel strut. Mr. Miller got in the cockpit to get the feel of the wheel brake pedals. We pulled it ahead and he tried the brakes for steering and they seemed to operate okay for him. We proceeded down Main Street to Scott Street. Everything was okay so far and we turned right onto Scott Street, which was downhill. He was able to hold the chains taut to keep from hitting the propeller into the wrecker boom. We made it to the site location by the high school tennis court with no problem. We then maneuvered it to the proper location.



*This photo identifies the Corsair location without question because of the Henry County Courthouse in the foreground. The platform stairs were reinstalled for all to look inside the cockpit.*





*Summer of 1946, left to right: Marilyn (Huddle) Leaders, C.D. Brillhart - Superintendent of Napoleon Schools, Richard Johnson, Herb Huddle, Bruce Honeck  
Photo colorized by Steve Miller*

Later in the summer of 1946 Mr. Miller took the above photo. All photos in this book of the Corsair airplane were taken by Mr. Miller or myself, with a few exceptions. Mr. Miller used a graphic camera with a film pack.

Not long after the Corsair arrived in Napoleon, Mr. Miller received a call from an office at Selfreg Air Force Base in Michigan. The officer said, "We understand you just got an F4U Corsair airplane from the government." Mr. Miller said yes and asked if there was a problem. The officer said that the plane had the latest classified radio equipment in it. He said they had to come down and remove the radio gear, and Mr. Miller said okay. Come to find out the first call was made by an imposter. Several weeks later an officer from the Air Force base called again. He said, "Are you missing the radio equipment from your F4U Corsair plane?" Mr. Miller said, "yes, why?" The officer said, "Well, we have the equipment and the persons who have stolen it. What do you want us to do with it?" Mr. Miller said, "Bring it back and reinstall it," and they did.

During the school year 1946-47 the Corsair engine was started up and ran several times by the aeronautical class and by Mr. Miller. First they would turn the propeller



several revolutions by hand to clear the cylinders of oil. Next they hooked several extra lead acid batteries in series to augment the plane's batteries. The tail hook was secured to a stake driven into the ground. The engine was then started by Mr. Miller. This process was used several times during the year in warm weather.

Mr. Miller left the school system in 1947 and went to work managing the 7-Up Bottling Company in Napoleon. His successor, Mr. Clayton Stryder, took over teaching the following year 1947-48.

The following photos were taken and archived for history where it was parked before it was scrapped.



*This photo is behind the Main Street high school, beside the tennis court, which has since been made into a parking lot. When I was growing up they would fill it with water in the winter time as an ice skating rink. The court was made with about six inch sides, and then in the spring they would drain the water out.*

**NOTE:** We want to thank Steve Miller, Lew's son, for using a program on his computer to colorize some of the previous photos. Color film was practically non-existent back in 1946.



*This photo shows the engine covered up with a canvas to protect it from the winter weather and spring rains. The plane was not all aluminum covered. Some areas were covered with fabric and it was starting to deteriorate.*



By 1951 everyone was losing interest in the Corsair. WW II was over about five years ago and people were thinking about and interested in other things.

The school board felt it was time to get rid of the Corsair. They decided to have the Hogrefe Salvage scrap it, which they did. The board didn't want it to get into enemy hands, which was a little farfetched. Hindsight is always better than foresight. If the Corsair was put in storage, like in a barn, it would be worth in excess of a million dollars today. Not a bad return for paying only \$150.00 for it.



*What's left of the Corsair at Napoleon High School, May 1951.*

In talking to Bob Hogrefe years later, he said he cut it up into small enough pieces to haul it all away in a pickup truck. He buried it in their landfill on Oakwood Avenue.

This truck in the picture was the one used to deliver the piano to Mrs. Ort's home, mentioned earlier in the book.

It's sad to see the almost new 2000 horsepower engine laying there. The propeller was cut into three pieces.

What an ending!! I can't look at it any more! Can you?

When I heard about the Corsair being scrapped it was too late or I would have tried to talk the school board out of doing what they did, and put it in storage.

Before the salvage yard started to cut up the Corsair, the students in the Industrial Arts class were allowed to take anything they wanted from it. My brother removed all (9) cylinders and hoses including the wings' fold-up cylinders. He also removed the fuel pump and the plane tie-down hooks. Some of the things he still has today. He did give a wheel strut cylinder to Lt. Ben Brown as a souvenir some 40 years later when he gave a talk at the Henry County fair. Other students removed items also.

4-6-87

Hi Herb & Betty:

What a nice surprise to hear from you. Received your letter and copies of the article about the Napoleon Corsair today. (will try to find a copy of "Air Classics", April 1987).

It (the article) was very interesting to me and as you know (Lt. Brown at that time) has taken many liberties in writing it. But it makes a good story!!!

You, Rueben Johnson, Dick Bell, Floyd Keller, your sister Marylin and others were privy to the exact happenings as they occurred at that time and knew much of the article is untrue. But that is past history. My goodness 40+ years ago. It is hard to believe it has been that long ago.

It never occurred to me, but the story of the Napoleon Corsair, would really make an interesting BOOK from start to finish.

I shared your excitement at the time since I engineered the whole thing from start to the time I left teaching at Napoleon. Pete Reichert, the jeweler in Napoleon paid for the plane. \$15000 I believe, he gave me the money and I bought it on government surplus.

Well, It is a long story, and as I say, it would make a good BOOK.

OVER



I will look and see what pictures I have of it. I am sure those that were in the article, we gave to Lt. Brown at the time or shortly thereafter.

I have the greatest respect for Lt. Brown for what he did for me and Napoleon H.S. but I myself paid him the \$25.00 he mentions in the article. We did not buy his dinner because Marilyn and I took him back to Toledo airport (the old one) in the middle of the afternoon. I did buy him a couple of beers in Napoleon.

You are right, Snyder's wrecker did tow it from the north edge of Napoleon to Webster St. The state police were never involved only Napoleon city police and Napoleon power light raised the power lines and repaired them after he (Lt. Brown) cut one or two with the prop.

I will see what I can dig up about it. I remember Marilyn made up a scrap book, which I may still have, and anything I can share with you I will be happy to do.

Yes, I remember Norm Kestray, the Vito son. He married Marilyn Gehart. If you see him please thank him for me for having received the article thru you.

Your dad, you and I were (perhaps more) were the first from Napoleon to see the Corsair after I was notified it had landed at Toledo.

Marilyn would be interested in the article since she was directly involved as my secretary at the time. Please say hello to her and her family for me.

Edna + I welcome you and Betty to our place anytime. We plan to be in Napoleon the last of May & early June of this year. As ever,  
Ken Miller

“My father, Lewis Miller, taught Industrial Arts at the Napoleon, Ohio high school. In 1946, I was 4 years old when my dad acquired the F4U Corsair.

I have some recollection of the plane arriving in Napoleon and it being parked on Webster Street across from the Presbyterian pastor’s home. Sometime thereafter it was moved next to the tennis court behind the high school. Dad was concerned about moving it on the dirt to the area where it would be parked. But it was accomplished.

Over the years, I can still visualize it parked there when we used the tennis court or played softball on the ball diamond that was adjacent. Dad even had a Link Trainer in the Industrial Arts Department that pilots had used for training. I am not sure if it was used before and/or after he obtained it. Some time thereafter Dad took a job as a truck driver delivering Pepsi-Cola. Shortly afterward Seven-Up bought the beverage plant and Dad became the manager.”

– Steven A. Miller, OD; son of Lewis B. Miller – Tucson, Arizona

“I was probably about two years old when the F4U Corsair was brought to Napoleon. I guess it was a “big deal.” I didn’t know that then - I just remember this big plane with the wings folded up sitting beside the tennis courts at the high school. By the time I was in junior high (Dad had left teaching by then) I can remember how much he enjoyed talking about the “shop,” the industrial arts room at the high school where he had taught, and the kids he had in his class. He seemed so proud of them all, but the names Bruce Honeck, Ruben Johnson, Herb Huddle, Floyd Keller and Dick Bell always stuck in my mind. Ruben used to stop at our house and visit with Dad up until my parents move to Iowa in the 60s. These guys all played an important part in my Dad’s life. I think it so cool that after all these years I continue to cross paths with one of Dad’s students, Herb Huddle, and we can still reminisce about dad and their connection to the Corsair. Thanks to Herb, he has kept this memory alive through his photos and displays. I was too young at the time to appreciate it all but after looking back at all the old photos and articles about the plane, I know my Dad was instrumental in bringing the Corsair to town and using it as a teaching tool. And yes, it was a “big deal.” Through Dad sharing this thoughts and memories and Herb keeping the Corsair story alive, our family will be forever proud of Dad and his part in getting the Corsair to town, and most of all for the impact this experience and his teaching had on his students.”

– Barbara (Miller) Walker; daughter of Lewis B. Miller – Napoleon, Ohio

**Subject:** Re: F4 U  
**From:** Rob Mears  
**Date:** 4/6/2013 6:20 PM  
**To:** Herb Huddle <jeeppers@bright.net>

That helps tremendously Herb! I can finally include the Napoleon Corsair as part of my master index, which is listed by Bureau Number (57608 was the number assigned to this plane by the Bureau of Aeronautics). It will also allow me to retrieve the US Navy history card and properly research when the plane rolled off of the assembly line, when it was delivered to the Navy, and which units it was assigned to during its very short flying career. Also, number 57608 tells me that this was an **F4U-1D** type Corsair, which was manufactured by the parent company Chance Vought. Pretty much all of the -1D types that survived beyond military service were actually **FG-1D** Corsairs, manufactured under license by Goodyear. I only know of two actual F4U-1D types that survived the Navy's mass scrapping after the war, so the Napoleon Corsair was a rare breed even by the standards of the time.

Thanks so much for helping me solve this mystery! I'm very much looking forward to any other information you might be willing to share.

Best Regards,

Rob

A day back in the late 1980s I was reminiscing about the Corsair airplane, and wondering what ever happened to Lt. Ben Brown. I was looking at various telephone books at work and I came upon lots of B. Browns. One stood out from Monclova, Ohio: Benjamin L. Brown. I called the number and, lo and behold, he answered the phone and we talked. We had not seen or talked since May of 1946. As we talked he said he would fly down to the Henry County Airport and I could meet him there. Weeks later he called and we met at the airport, and I drove him to our house and we had a long visit. I took him back to the airport and we both agreed to have more visits. He loved to tell about his flying experiences. He never told the same story twice, since he had so many to tell.

I have included some of the stories he told me as I remember them. He also supplied me with many photos to back up his stories. We also supplied him with many photos about the Napoleon Corsair experience.

We begin with several articles from his daughter Connie Brown.

Hi, Herb

“My first airplane ride was when I was 13 years old, Dad rented a Cessna. All the friends and relatives got spins around the area. Dad’s “man cave” had a typewriter, desk and file cabinet. From floor to ceiling were aviation themed framed photos and memorabilia. All guests were given the royal tour with Dad explaining each item. He even corresponded with the prominent English speaking Luftwaffe pilot his age who sent him a signed photo and letter. There were photos of British RAF pilots, American pilots, military brass, as well as his parents posing in front of aircraft. He flew down a lot in the 80’s and 90’s to the Marion airport often with things Mom wanted to give me. Once I took him on a tour of the local boyhood home of Warren G. Harding, another time to the beautiful new WW II memorial at the cemetery. He attended dozens of fly-ins in his Grumman, but as time went on there were fewer and fewer people he knew. Congestive heart disease caused the doctor to not renew his pilot’s license and he tearfully sold his airplane. Less than a year later, brain cancer claimed his life. He and Mom made several trips overseas and he delighted in sweet-talking many airline captains into letting him sit with them in the cockpit jumpseat for a few hours during the flight. He sure loved flying!

Dad trained in Terrill, Texas, then went to Great Falls, Montana with the 7th Ferrying Group, who flew aircraft to Alaska for the Lend-lease program with the Russians. Total U.S. planes as 15,000 – unbelievable! P-39s, P-63 King Cobras, B-25s, P-47 Thunderbolts among them. Fairbanks/Whitehorse conditions were primitive and harsh. Occasionally visitors like WW I ace Eddie Rickenbacker or a general visited. Also Japanese Zeros, who bombed the area and were sometimes shot down. Dad’s photos and commentary are in **“Warplanes to Alaska”**, by Blake Smith. 1980s he was a consultant in Alaska for historians looking for wrecked and submerged planes. Made lifelong friend of Canada Air 747 captain Jerry Norberg, who was in search also. In Terrill there were many British RAF pilots training. Dad kept in touch with many the rest of his life. They met at reunions and each others’ homes. There was an Alaskan reunion with Soviet pilots about 1987 too. Dad and Mom married in 1947 and in California he flew for Airlines, then they returned to Toledo. In the 80s/90s he owned two small Grummans and attended numerous fly-ins until 2001. Also wrote countless articles for flying magazines and newspapers.”

– Connie Brown, daughter of Lt. Ben L. Brown, written to Herb Huddle

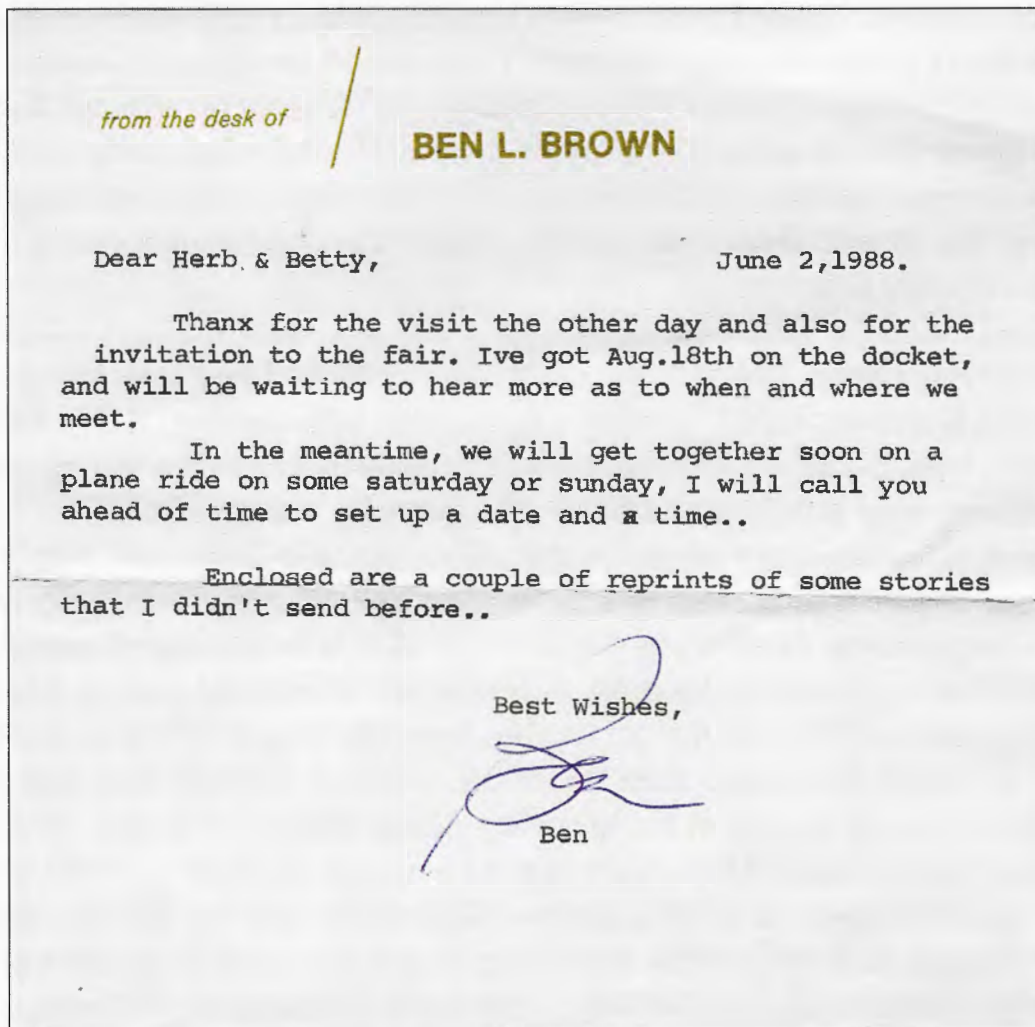


## V. STORIES OF LT. BROWN AND HIS EXTRAORDINARY FLYING CAREER AND EXPERIENCES

I am including letters of related information as to verification of the authenticity of my writings.

**I am not in any way criticizing or finding fault** with Lt. Brown's writing style in *Air Classic* or *Bend of the River* magazines. It's just that some things make the stories sound better in his writings.

As Mr. Miller states in a letter previously, who were privy to the exact happenings as they occurred. They were myself, Ruben Johnson, Dick Bell, Bruce Honeck, Floyd Keller, and my sister Marilyn, during that time period.



In August of 1988 I set up a large display of the Corsair material at the Henry County Fair in the old school house and log cabin area. Lt. Ben Brown was there to talk about his involvement with the Corsair and the ATC - Air Transport Command -



*Lt. Brown and Herb Huddle at the Henry County Fair in 1988 with our display of the Corsair pictures and stories during that event in May of 1946.*

*Lt. Brown was the pilot who flew it to Napoleon.*



*Left to right, Lt. Ben Brown, Herb Huddle, Marilyn (Huddle) Leaders, who was Mr. L.B. Miller's secretary at the time, and Tom Hardy, a student who was sitting on the Corsair's wing after the plane came up onto the highway in an earlier photo. Also who was in the plane crash by Lagrange St.*



*View of the Corsair display including parts removed from the Corsair when it was being scrapped. Display assembled by Herb Huddle along with his WW II military Jeep.*

We continue with Ben's experiences after graduation from Rossford, Ohio High School. Ben learned to fly and spent a lot of time after graduation at the Toledo Metcalf Airport, which was near Rossford where he obtained his pilot's license.

He went to Wichita University in Kansas and went on to flying school with the Royal Air Force in Terrell, Texas, earning his wings in both the RAF and the USAAF. These are his words.

"My introduction to the Bell Airacobra P-39 came about in a rather pedestrian manner. I had gone through flying school in Texas with the Royal Air Force rather than the USAAF. The RAF method of teaching was considerably different and quite rigorous. The top ten students in my class were treated with a few hours in a factory fresh P-51c from the North American plant in Dallas. That was some machine compared to the trainers we had been flying and it was an experience I will never forget. Since I was number two in class standings I was able to get in a few more minutes flight time in the Mustang.

At the RAF school we flew 80 hours in Searmans and then went directly to the AT-6 for 140 hours of flight time. The basic stage with the BT-13 trainer was completely eliminated. Our top ten students comprised four Americans and six Britons. The location was at Terrill, and it was the first such school in the United States that the British had talked the Americans into creating. Other schools were established in Lancaster, California, two in Oklahoma City and one in Florida. We had a terrific navigation program that was as comprehensive as the USAAF's navigator school. We also got to fly long cross-country missions along with plenty of low-level training and night flights.

I began flying P-39Qs late in 1943 and after the usual ground school for flight review, routes, radio frequencies, emergency procedures, we were issued our flight equipment for the Alaska flight. It consisted of a backpack parachute, a .45 caliber automatic and a special pillow-type cushion we sat on that contained all our emergency food rations, extra ammo, and flares. Not much to take with you if you had to jump. In winter, we had big flying boots, parkas, hats, and gloves – all furlined and it was a hell of a job getting into and out of a 39 or 63 while enclosed in all this bulk. Radio equipment was primitive with LF ranges but later on, VHF came into use. Most aircraft had ADF or loop-type ADFs which were fairly accurate, but the further north you flew the worse the radios operated. The major air bases along the route were at Whitehorse and Edmonton. The other refueling stops at first were dirt strips with tents. Later they were updated with hangars and black top and the usual tarpaper shacks and pot-bellied stoves. At first, maps were inaccurate with many major landmarks often shown 15 to 20 miles from their actual



positions and many of the peaks were higher than shown. The Canadian Rockies were always to our left and we followed the Alaskan Highway, or had it in view for about 900 miles out of the 1,935 mile route from Great Falls to Fairbanks.

When ferrying fighters we flew in better weather since we had no wing deicers and we would always fly 500 ft. on top if the weather was poor and would make a flight plan only if our destination was open. But with the other type aircraft we flew in any kind of weather. With luck we made 800 miles the first day, other times we would fly only as far as good weather would allow. A typical trip in Kingcobras would be to leave Great Falls in the morning, land at Edmonton for fuel and lunch and then take off for Fort St John. We would stay overnight there and in the morning we would clear for Whitehorse, refuel and go on into Fairbanks. Sometimes we made the trip in two days but that was rare. After making our delivery to Fairbanks we would catch a C-47 flight back to Great Falls, flown by Western Airlines' pilots under contract to the Army."



*This is a picture of the many P-63 Cobras waiting to be flown to Alaska. A total of 2421 Cobras were transferred to be picked up by Russian pilots for the final journey to Russia. There were many other types of aircraft delivered to the Russians for a total of 15,000.*



This is one of the many stories Lt. Brown told me on his many visits to our house.

After finishing flying school in Texas he had the privilege of flying a new P-51D Mustang fighter aircraft. He was number three in his class but the first ten were given that honor. He was 20 years old and a 2nd Lieutenant in the Army Air Force. His new assignment was to fly from Dallas and deliver the new P-51D to Pittsburgh. Excited and overjoyed to fly a new fighter over his home would be a thrill of a lifetime. He stopped in St. Louis to refuel and he called his folks and said that he would be over Toledo by noon. He stopped again in South Bend for more fuel since it didn't have long wing tanks. Flight time to Toledo was about 30 minutes at 275 M/H.

The Anderson grain elevators soon came into view in Maumee. After passing Maumee-Perrysburg Bridge he followed the river at about 300 feet. He circled around Toledo and thought it would be fun to go under the High Level Bridge even though it was illegal. Under he went with no problems, since he had done it before with a smaller plane. As he headed for Rossford he then flew between the LOF smokestacks and buzzed Rossford very low. He called the Metcalf field operator whom he knew and asked permission to land even though it was illegal since it wasn't an Army base. He buzzed the airport and he was cleared to land. His parents and relatives were there to greet him for a great homecoming. His father asked for a ride and he gave him a mild once in a lifetime ride. His dad said those two rides were fun, his first and last.

Ben realized later it was foolish and that he was lucky and never caught for what he had done. He later continued on to Pittsburgh and delivered the P-51D as instructed.

This airplane saved many lives and bombers when it came upon the scene. It was the first fighter aircraft to escort the bombers deep into Germany and back where previous fighter planes could not.

A typical trip from Great Falls, Montana would take him away from his base for 35 to 45 days. Go to Seattle, Washington and pick up a B-17G and fly it to Egin Field, Florida. Hop on a commercial airline and go to Farmingdale, Long Island. He would pick up a P-47D and fly it to Oakland, California or to Nashville. Pick up a B-24 and fly it to Sacramento. Then pick up a P-51D and deliver it to Newark, New Jersey. Go to Buffalo and take a P-39 or P-63 to a training base in the south. Finally back to his home base to pick up his pay and mail.

In three years of this type of flying Ben was able to check out on 55 various types of military aircraft.



*Ben after landing at Toledo Metcalf Airport  
with his P-51D*



*One of the 55 types of airplanes Ben flew.*

I took notes as Ben told of his experiences and he supplied me with photos. In 1942 President Roosevelt had given top priority to the shipment of aircraft "lend-lease" to the Russians. Shipments had bogged down and the 7th Ferrying group of the Alaskan Division of the Air Transport Command was given that task.

About 15,000 aircraft were delivered to the Russians via Great Falls, Montana; north to Fairbanks, Alaska; on to Moscow with their own pilots on the last leg of the trip.

Ben made 40 such trips to Alaska delivering Bell P-39 and P-63 aircraft. A typical trip with a King Cobra P-63 would take two days. Sometimes two weeks due to bad weather conditions following the Alaskan Highway. It was a 1935 mile trip one way. He would fly back on a C-47. The trip was very dangerous due to changing weather conditions and radio operation.

U.S. aircraft delivered to the Russians from June 1941 to September 1945:

Bell P-39 .....	4924
Bell P-63 .....	2421
Curtiss P-40 .....	2430
Douglas C-47 .....	709
Douglas A-20 .....	3125
N. American B-25 ....	870
Republic P-47 .....	203
Other .....	302

**NOTE:** Russia never paid a dime for them after WW II.

All aircraft going north were winterized at a field called East Bass, which was east of Gore Field at Great Falls, Montana.



*Ben standing in front of a Bell P-39  
at Great Falls, Montana in 1943.*



*Ben prepares to depart with a P-63 for Alaska  
in his cold weather gear.*

In this story told to me by Lt. Brown he was concerned how the U.S. helped Russia's development of the atomic bomb. There was a congressional hearing which was on TV and in newspapers. This all happened during the last year of WW II. A book was written by Major George R. Jordan called "*From Major Jordan's Diaries.*" Lt. Brown is also mentioned in the book as the pilot of one of the unusual ferry flights.

While based at Great Falls, Montana with the 7th Ferrying Group, Ben had ferried various aircraft from Great Falls to Fairbanks, Alaska to be picked up by Russian pilots to fly on to Russia. One night about to enter the Silver Dollar Restaurant in Great Falls he was approached by seven civilian clothed men. They turned out to be Russian and needed help with ordering food and he did help them. Several months later he was assigned to fly a C-47 to Fairbanks and give it to the Russians.

"I discovered two large wooden boxes in the airplane securely fastened down. We were curious and they told us they were spare parts. My co-pilot and I discovered they were full of black powder like coal dust that leaked out. Our intelligence officer told us to fly the plane and not ask questions.

There were four Russian guards with machine guns guarding the boxes 24/7 on the trip. At Fairbanks the Russian pilots took over. The plane was refueled and took off at once with two P-63 King Cobra fighters as escorts on to Moscow.

I wonder if it was Uranium 237. We will never know but it was something very important.

In Fairbanks we had no contact at all with the Russian crews that flew in to pick up their aircraft except for a cockpit check and some ground school sessions with interpreters. The Russians would fly in on C-47s and in a few days perhaps 35 to 50 pilots would be ready to take back all the aircraft that had accumulated over the past few weeks. Then there would be a great assembly of pilots and aircraft with a mass departure. The B-25 was used as the navigator ship and all aircraft would end up flying a loose formation and just follow him back to Russia. Later in the war we saw a number of women pilots who were sent along to do the flying and they flew anything that was on the ground and ready to go.

Weather was our greatest enemy and one problem which we could not control. Summer was the best time from May through October when most days were clear and only the usual summer rain and thunderstorms were seen and avoided.

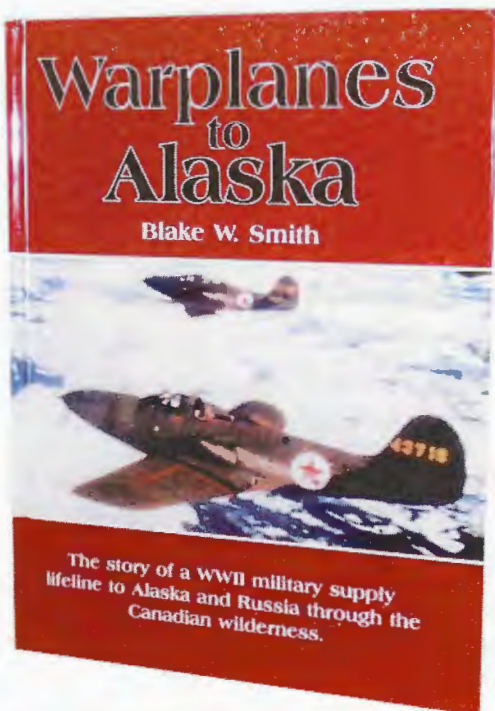
The roughest situation was later on when I took off with a flight leaving Watson Lake. I sprung a coolant leak on takeoff and at 800 ft. had no place to go. I could not make it back to the field at all, trees were everywhere and the engine froze and stopped. I soon found out that a fighter goes nowhere without that big prop turning. This is where the emergency procedures came into use. I merely pulled the emergency door handle, the door fell off and I rolled out the right side and way I went into the blue. When faced with a no-choice situation, you soon learn what to do real quick. My small 24 ft. chute opened up quickly and I came down without any problem, except with my winter equipment increasing my weight I hit pretty hard in the trees and fell right on through down to the ground. Luckily the Alaskan Highway was a few miles away and I hiked over to it and started back to the field. After an hour or so from the time I hit the silk, some of the base personnel came rumbling down the stone and dirt highway and picked me up.

In the three years of operation of flying aircraft to Alaska, over 20 pilots were killed and many were forced down due to weather or mechanical difficulties, and I believe that only five never made it back. One pilot took about six weeks to walk out but he made it."

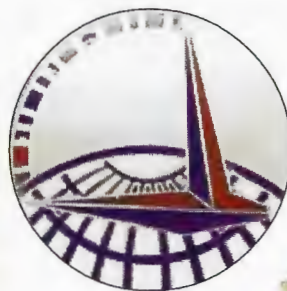


*Russian pilots waiting at Ladd Field, Fairbanks, Alaska to take charge of the P-63 aircraft to fly on to Russia.*





*"War Planes to Alaska" is a large black and white 256 page book. It has incredible stories by both Russian and American pilots blying Lend Lease aircraft from Montana to Russia. It has contributions in their own words from over 100 ATC pilots of the 7th Ferrying Group and Russian pilots. The book is filled with hundreds of photos taken by pilots and others. There are maps of their routes following the Alaskan Highway when possible. The prtogram was a life line to Russia that helped win WW II. Lt. Ben L. Brown was a contributor of information for the book.*

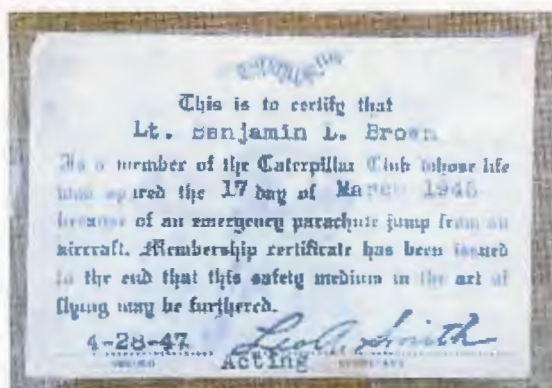


*Air Transport  
Command emblem*



*ATC emblem of the  
7th Ferrying Group*

*Lt. Ben L. Brown is now a member of the  
Caterpillar Club as of 3-17-45*



The ATC was a mammoth undertaking in training of both pilots and crews. The women pilots were called "WASP" - Women Airforce Service Pilots. There were a total of 1100 WASP into training service. The WASP were not recognized until 1992 when they received the Congressional Gold Medal. Ben was part of the 7th Ferrying Alaskan Division of the ATC. The men and women were students wanting to serve their country, crop dusters, instructors, former airline and combat pilots. They had a lot of experience and the know-how in flying the unusual in all types of weather and tough situations. They were called class 5P pilots.

The ATC was the largest airline system in the world. They not only ferried aircraft from plants to bases, they delivered parts, medical evacuees, VIPs, supplies, and military personnel. After the war, ATC pilots flew airplanes by the hundreds to their graveyards. It made you sick to see them lined up in rows ready to be scrapped, never to be flown again. Scrap yards were located in Kingman, Arizona; Walnut Ridge, Arkansas; and Muskogee, \_\_\_\_.

The ATC ferried	30,000	aircraft in	1942
	72,000		1943
	108,000		1944
	<u>57,000</u>		1945
	287,000	TOTAL	

The ATC personnel numbered 210,000 in 1945, 150,000 of them stationed overseas. In the final month of wartime operations, July 1945, ATC carried 275,000 passengers and 100,000 tons of mail and cargo with 96.7% overseas.

Air Corps Ferrying Command on May 29, 1942 redesignated as ATC in July 1, 1942.

The Alaska Wing (redesignated Alaskan Division in Oct. 1944) was originally established in Oct. 1942 as the 7th ATC group and controlled the Alaska-Siberia route to transport lend-lease aircraft to Ladd Field in Alaska.

This was the end of an era, one that will never exist again. We who lived and participated in those years never knew how wonderful it was until we got home and found out as time went by that now again we wished we could make just one more trip north. No other generation will ever experience a situation exactly like ours. It was great while it lasted.

Ben said what a great chapter in his life, loving what he liked to do, not knowing what type of aircraft he would fly next and to where. It was one great time and fantastic in so many respects, and it will never happen again. What a precious legacy to have. After his discharge from the Air Force he got a job flying for American Airlines.

Another interesting story Ben told me one day while visiting at our home, while flying for American Airlines. He also supplied me with a photo of him in his American Airlines uniform.

Back in the late '40s or early '50s Ben flew co-pilot in a DC-6 with Captain Leland Andrews, called Andy.

"He was an oldtimer and ready to retire. Andy knew many famous people. On a flight from Los Angeles to Mexico City we had to stop in Monterey, California because of engine problems. Just before we landed John Wayne came up to the cockpit, a friend of Andy, and wanted to know what was going on. My impression of him was that he was loud, profane and big in all directions. He had an ego a mile long but you could chat with him okay. When Andy introduced him to me he said, "Hi Ya Kid." I wasn't any small boy at the time as you can see in the photo. We laid over in Monterey two days. In a restaurant with his friends one night he came over and said "Hi Ya Kid" again.

American Airlines set up six berths in the rear of the DC-6 just for movie "stars." People in the entertainment world were always traveling around the country. There were always "stars" on the high class flights from Los Angeles to Chicago to New York and back.

Some "stars" were a real pain on board and had to be kicked off. The more famous the person, the worst they were it seemed. The major airlines arranged schedules to fit the "stars." We were always briefed as to who was coming aboard and to handle them with "kid gloves" and smile.

One time Frank Sinatra, Judy Garland, and her husband were on board riding with the common people. Frank was very thin and had poor complexion and was going bald. He also was not very nice to people. In my commercial flying days I saw many great people, some not so good, and many were nice, kind and talkative, like Bob Mitchum, Red Skelton, Jack Benny and many others.

During that time period the author's uncle Kenny was a bellhop at the Westward Ho Hotel in Phoenix, Arizona. Many "stars" came and went there, some were jerks and many were good people, Kenny said. Gene Autry stayed there a lot, and he was okay but drank a lot. Kenny even modeled western wear clothing for him. Kenny later moved to Las Vegas as a bellhop and



*Pilot, Ben L. Brown of American Airlines back in the late '40s or early '50s.*



became good friends with Wayne Newton. I hope I didn't veer off the main article too far with Kenny's story."

Here are some later in life pictures of Lt. Ben Brown.



*This photo is of Captain DeWayne Evans and Ben Brown standing beside the Leica Jetstream which Ben was getting training as second in command. Ben has his Royal Air Force jacket on. Ben flew with DeWayne as second in command on many flights for a corporation for about three years.*

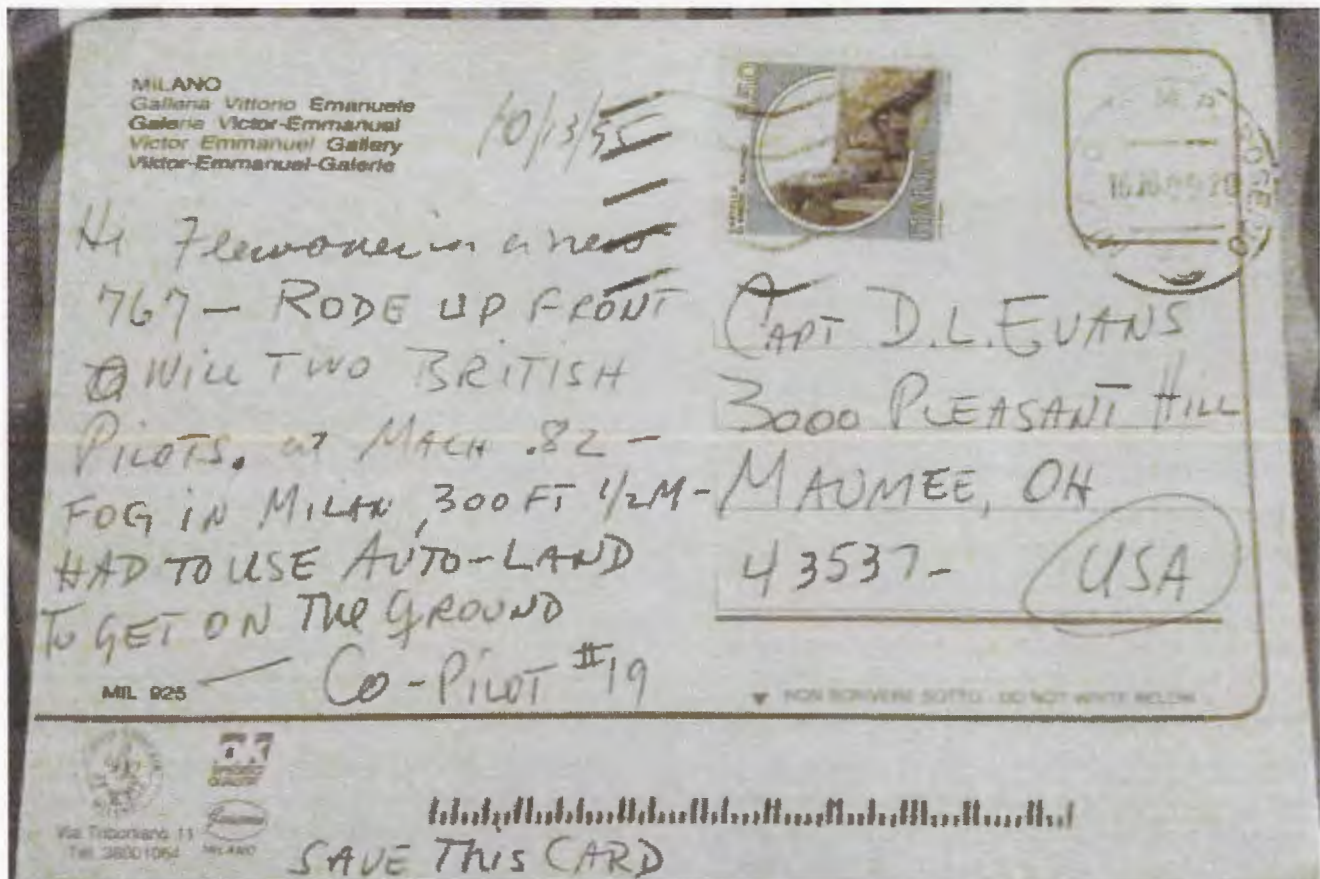


*Photo of General Yeager and his good friend Lt. Ben Brown at the 50th anniversary of World War II Indianapolis International Airport photo by Captain D Evans with his Leica jet.*



"As I was taxiing to park beside the B-17 my first officer Ben Brown said that looks like General Yeager over there. I said let's go talk to him and when we got about fifty feet away General Yeager said, "hey Benny!"

Charles "Chuck" Yeager, born February 13, 1923, is a former United States Air Force General officer and record setting test pilot in 1947. He became the first pilot confirmed to have exceeded the speed of sound in level flight in the Bell X-1. Chuck was in the middle of it from 1947-1954 and loving every minute of it. We became the test pilots of choice among engineers."



This photo is a copy of a post card sent to Capt. Evans from Ben Brown. He had flown to Milan, Italy in a recent Boeing 767 which had just come onto the market.

OBITUARY  
APRIL 26, 1923 - DECEMBER 20, 2002

"Mr. Brown, a Monclova Township resident, spent most of his life flying, first in the military, then with American Airlines in the 1950s, and finally, recreationally until just seven months before he died, said daughter Connie Brown of Marion, Ohio. "The man could stumble over his own feet, but in the air he was as graceful as a bird," Ms. Brown said. He never had an accident flying, she said.

Mr. Brown learned to fly as a teenager at Toledo's Metcalf Field in 1939. After graduating from Rossford High School, Mr. Brown attended the University of Wichita before entering the U.S. Army Air Corps in 1942. While in the military, he attended the British Royal Air Force Academy in Dallas, Texas, making him eligible to wear the wings of the RAF and the U.S. Air Force.

Mr. Brown's flying took him on numerous adventures. During World War II, he piloted planes to Alaska that went on to be used by the Russians. He once delivered an experimental P-63 King Cobra fighter plane to Wright Field in Dayton in 1945 where he met Orville Wright. "For a small-town kid from Rossford, this was big-time. And seeing Russians, foreigners, that was a big deal," she said. Mr. Brown was one of the few American pilots permitted to fly into the Soviet Union after World War II to give training assistance to the pilots who were learning to use American equipment.

When Mr. Brown would return to the Toledo area as a young aviator to visit his parents, he would give them a special greeting so they knew he was home. "He would buzz his parents' house. They would know he was back. I think when he left town he did the same thing going out," Ms. Brown said.

Later in life, Mr. Brown admitted he had done some kinds of stunt flying in his younger years. He said he rented a plane and flew under the Anthony Wayne Bridge and other downtown spans.

Ms. Brown remembered her father's stories about chasing cattle herds from planes. "He probably did some silly goofy stuff that a lot of guys did," she said.

After his career with American Airlines, Mr. Brown worked for Strong Electric as a purchasing manager until he retired in 1983, Ms. Brown said. Much of his retirement time was spent with airplanes. He bought his first craft when he was 71. He often rented planes to fly to visit Ms. Brown in Marion. "He was sort of the home delivery service from mother to daughter and back," she said.

Mr. Brown was also a past member of the Monclova Township zoning commission."

- Excerpt from **The Blade**, December 23, 2002  
Lt. Ben L. Brown, 1923-2002

"Dear L. B. Miller (Louie)      1996

I thought you may like to have a small part from the old Corsair you helped bring to Napoleon High School.

The school scrapped the plane while I was a senior in 1952. I was told they could not sell it as a complete plane because of the war at the time.

I did get a lot of parts from the plane. The hydraulic cylinders that folded the wings were used on a feed mixer truck that Dad and I used for many years to feed cattle. Four cylinders that closed the wheel wells were used on a four row carrot harvester.

I guess we were into recycling down on the farm before it ever had a name.

Many times I wished I would have done something to have kept that plane intact for the people of Henry County.

I remember the evening you came out to our place and we went down to the old Toledo Airport to see the Corsair that just arrived.

I can remember another time we drove down to your Dad's hardware store, and can't for the life of me remember the town.

I was very lucky to have the opportunity to ride along on these trips. It's hard to believe all of this happened around fifty years ago. Like the old saying goes, "time flies when you're having fun."

Would love to set and talk to you again. Wish you all the best.

Sincerely,  
Jay Huddle"



*Have you ever wondered what a fuel pump would look like for a Corsair 2200 hp. engine? Probably not, but here is a picture of the one removed from the Napoleon Corsair and preserved 71 years later. The data tag on the pump motor says 1/8 hp. with a 1 inch fuel line.*

*Also this is a wheel strut removed from the Corsair by Jay Huddle in 1952 when it was scrapped.*



4-22-96

Dear Jay:

Thank you for sending the piece from the Corsair plane. Rex Walker delivered it.

I will never forget getting that plane for N. H. S. It became simpler and I was lucky enough to get it. Pete Reichert, the jeweler paid the \$150.00 to have it flown from Patuxent River Maryland Marine Base to Toledo, airport

We filled one tank with fuel which I think cost \$9.00. I guess I paid it and got Lt. Brown (who was a ferry pilot & flew all kinds of planes) to fly it to Napoleon.

I was amazed the school junked it. After I left it had very few hours on it. (I received the planes log) It was used by Colonels, Majors & other officers to acquaint with that plane.

It could have been worth real money.



Don't know your address, so will send it back with the letter

2

All you mention in your letter I remember very well. Your brother Herb, Floyd Keller, Leuben Johnson, Bruce Honeck & others had a lot of experiences with it. (not flying) but taking care of it.

We first parked it on Webster St., built steps up to the cockpit and thousands of people got to see it inside and out.

Thank you again Jay, for the part & remembering me. My Dad's Hardware you refer to was in Harrod, Ohio. Eleven miles east of Lima.

I have often wondered what happened to the Link Trainer I got for the school.

Hope everything is fine with you and yours. Tell Herb, Dwight and Marilyn, I said "Hello".

Sincerely, Ken Wilson

After a thorough research of the school board's minutes during that time frame of March, April and May of 1952, no mention of scrapping the Corsair was found. I think they decided off the record to have Hogrefe Salvage Yard cut it up for scrap. The Corsair was actually purchased by Mr. Pete Reichert, the local jeweler, for \$150.00 but under the school board's control from the government.

As F4U Corsair pilots across the country found out about Napoleon's Corsair, they want to know where it is or what happened to it. We received one call as far away as California. They all say what a shame when I tell them what happened to it. One fellow wanted to know if he could dig it up after I told him where it was buried.

Some of you probably remember the TV series *Baa Baa Black Sheep* from 1976-1978. The show featured the four month period that a squadron of United States Marine Corp. Corsair F4U pilots were in the South Pacific. It was based on the experiences of their colorful leader, Major Craig (Pappy) Boyington. They were an attack squadron #214 who carried out bombing raids, surveillance and escorted bombers to their bombing targets and back, flying F4U Corsairs. Robert Conrad portrayed the leading role as Pappy Boyington. I enjoyed watching the show because it was both entertaining and interesting because of the connection to the Napoleon Corsair experience.

God gives each individual incalculable talents and Mr. Miller was able to expand on his students' talents. Each student was given the opportunity to train and improve. I'm thankful that I had Mr. Miller as my mentor in my early teenage years.

Look closely at my 1946 restored Willys Jeep and you can see two chrome security hooks on the drawbar. They came off of the Corsair fuselage as tie-down anchors.

Today the Corsair would be worth over a million dollars if it would have been put in storage somewhere like in a farm barn.



Hindsight is always better than foresight it seems. What a sad ending for those of us who had a part of it in our lives.





*Left to right, Marilyn (Huddle) Leaders; C.D. Brillhart, deceased; Ruben Johnson, deceased; Herb Huddle; and Bruce Honeck, sitting on the wheel.*



*Herb Huddle*



*Bruce Honeck*

After 72 years Bruce and I remember the Corsair story very well because it was a part of our young lives in 1946.

## VI. NAPOLEON EARLIER YEARS

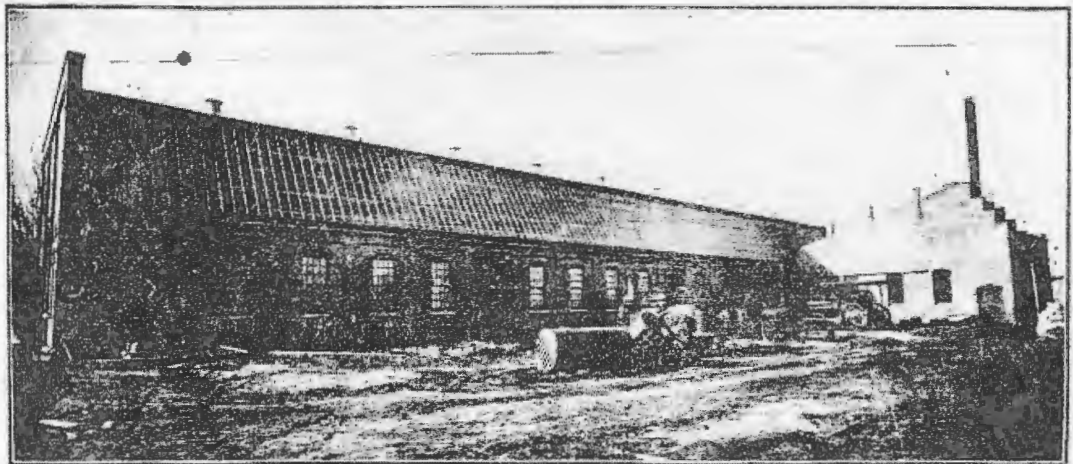
Here are little known facts of the history about Napoleon. The picture below depicts an airplane made in Napoleon in the 1920s. The manufacturing facility was located on the south end of the river bridge on the west side of South Perry Street. There was a grocery store, a building where the airplane was made. Men in the picture are unknown.



*Airplane made in Napoleon on south side on Perry Street just south of River Bridge.*

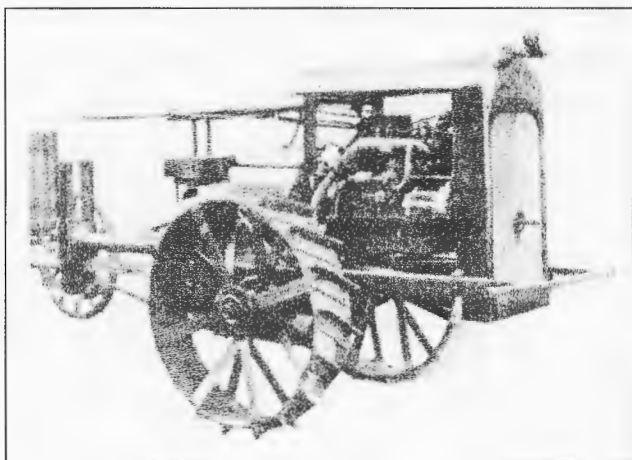
Napoleon had an airport runway east of town on State Route 110, now the property of Campbell Soup Company. There was a gas station and later Bob Hinkle's radio shop, a Meadowgold milk warehouse, and a beer joint called Little Brookland. Across the street was a diner restaurant at the northeast end of the river bridge, and a City Service

*Morningstar  
Manufacturing  
Company's Plant  
on Filmore Street  
that is still there  
today.*

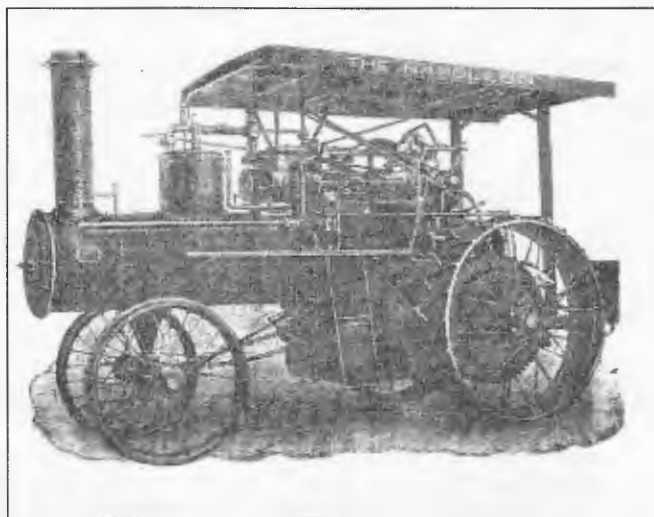




gas station, and later Sunoco gas station and Firestone store, and a car wash, then the present Shell Party Mart. There was also a Shell station where the Subway restaurant is now, and a Clover Farm grocery store where the Henry County Bank is today.



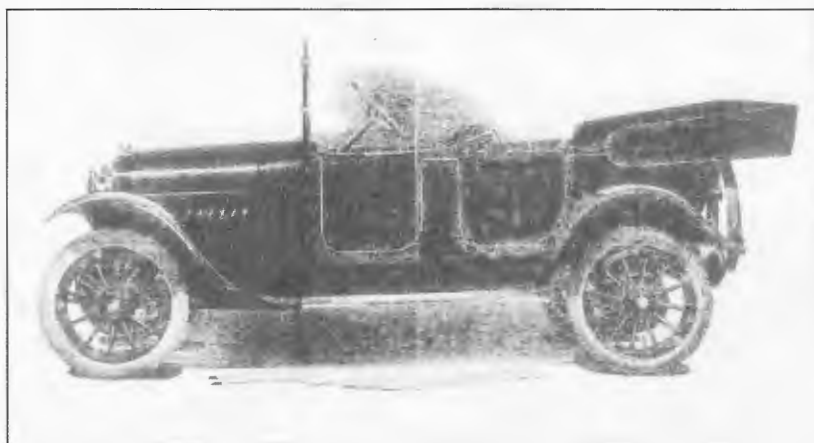
*Royal Motors Co., Napoleon, Ohio, 1917  
This 1950 model was equipped with a Briggs & Stratton model N 4 cylinder engine with a 2" bore and 4" stroke. It had electric lights and starter. Rated at 35 hp on the belt. This tractor was built on the south side of the Maumee River bridge in a shop where the gazebo is now located. This unique farm tractor steered with leather strap reins similar to driving a team of horses. My father told me about it one time.*



*Napoleon Morningstar Steam Traction Engine  
built at the early Products Co. on Filmore St.*

*The following farm equipment and tractor dealerships have been discontinued in Napoleon: International Harvester (Farmall tractors), Allis Chalmers, Ford, Oliver, Gamble store (Graham Paige), Co-op, Case, New Idea and Fordson.*

*The following gas stations have closed since the 1940s in Napoleon:  
Sohio, Texaco, Gulf, Sunoco, City Service, Sinclair, Marathon and Pure Oil.*



*The Napoleon Touring Car was made at the Products Co.  
on Filmore St.*

*The following automobile dealerships have been discontinued in Napoleon since the 1940s and beyond: Ford, Dodge, Chrysler, Kaiser-Frazer, Jeep, Hudson, Studabaker, Mercury, Packard, Edsel, Henry J, Oldsmobile, Plymouth, DeSoto, Comet and Falcon.*

The mushroom factory was the only business north of Lagrange Street on State Route 108 besides the DT&I roundhouse, and it became Foster Canning Company. The mushroom factory was later converted into the Metropole night club which is now George's Furniture building. Other businesses closed were Tietgen Brewery, Maher Ice, Vocke's Mill, Farmers Elevator, Bauman Stockyard, Foster Canning Co., Lippenkot Tomato Factory, Loudon, Standard Brands (bought out by Campbell Soup), Heller-Aller Co., Yarnell Coal and Straw Co., Napoleon Products Co., Napoleon Creamery, Egg Auction, several lumber companies, Genuit-Mieneke Tile Mill, alfalfa mill, two fertilizer companies, Neuhauser Hatchery, Elite Plating and Parcher Fabrication Co., the Wellington Hotel, two hardware stores, a plastics factory, monument company, chemical company, Fruth's Freezer Locker, ice cream and slaughter plant. The Napoleon Bonaparte night club was located behind the Taco Bell restaurant area. There was also a metal stamping factory there called Winter Enterprises that made value rocker arms for International Harvester gas engines, and The Heller-Aller windmill factory at the corner of North Perry and Oakwood streets. There were others too numerous to mention.

The Vockes Mill in Napoleon was located at the north end of the Maumee River Bridge on South Perry Street. It was water powered from the Erie Canal in its early days. That changed when they purchased a Fairbanks Morris diesel two cylinder engine. That 125 hp engine ran the major parts of the elevator. Today that 10 ton engine is owned by Herb and Jay Huddle. The mill is no longer there and is now Snyder Chevrolet's parking lot.

You can see time marches on and the effects of big box stores like Wal-Mart, Menards, and Lowes, and consolidated automobile and farm implement companies have done to our job market. Now the economy is fast food restaurants, medical facilities, and government jobs which all have mushroomed. Small farms have turned into large farms requiring less people to operate. The internet sales have greatly contributed to the displacement of smaller businesses also. We are thankful for the large factories that have created jobs in our area like Campbell Soup and General Motors.

With the building of the Ohio Turnpike in 1955, State Route 6 traffic dried up from both the east and west that went through town. Five motels on the south side of Napoleon went out of business: Clarence Daum's Motel, Dunlop Motel, Geo. Daum's Motel, Bauman's Motel, and Dr. Park's Motel. Biddie's Motel survives yet today but the restaurant closed.

Henry County has not grown much in the last 60 years. It remains at about 30 to 32 thousand residents.

A little more Napoleon history for posterity and future generations:

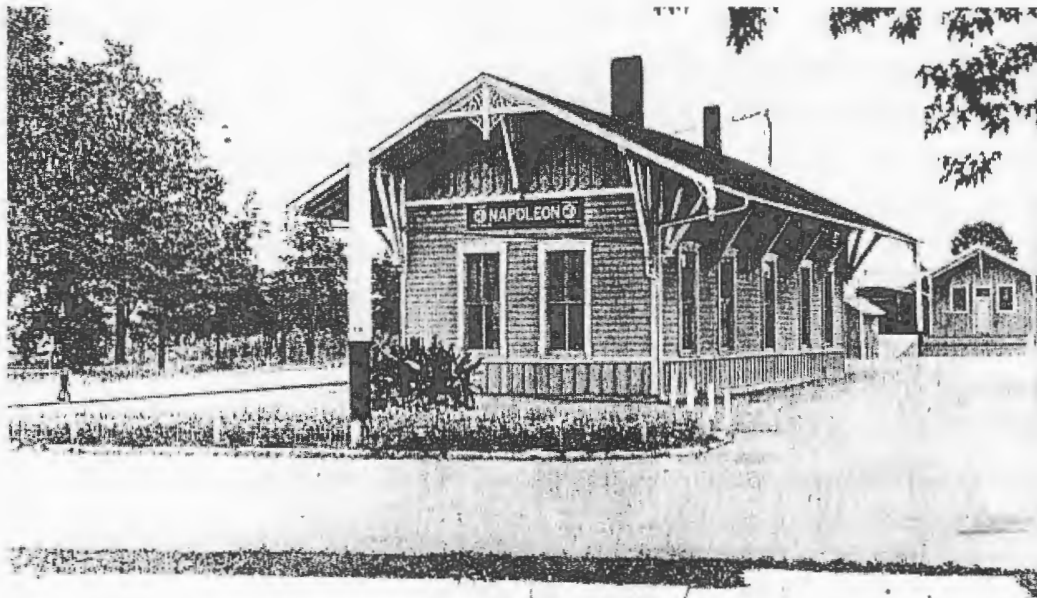
The DT&I (Detroit Toledo & Ironton) Railroad was built in 1905 called Henry Ford Railroad. The railroad was used to haul coal from Southern Ohio to his factories in Detroit at River Rouge Plant. He had a roundhouse and an engine storage facility about where Wal-Mart is today. They would park a steam engine about where McDonald's is overnight. Mike Anderson would grease and oil the engine and keep steam up for the next morning run. A friend of Mike's, Reuben Johnson, and I would go and sit in the engineer's seat and look at all the gauges and gadgets at night sometimes.

The DT&I railroad is now gone. The track ran between Flatrock, Michigan through Napoleon to Malinta, Ohio. It was bought by the Grand Trunk Western Railway in 1980. The railroad was abandoned in the late 1980s by Grand Trunk. The DT&I Railroad had previously changed over from steam engines to diesel electric. The only remaining bridges in the area are at the Maumee River and at the South Turkeyfoot Creek.

The DT&I depot in Napoleon was moved to the fairgrounds, spearheaded by Jay Huddle and moved by Jr. Harmon Moving Co. on a Sunday morning.

Once Napoleon had some notable visitors at the train depot: Mr. and Mrs. Henry Ford, Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Edison, Mr. and Mrs. Harvey Firestone, and Henry Ford's chief train engineer, Harry Cochran, from Napoleon.

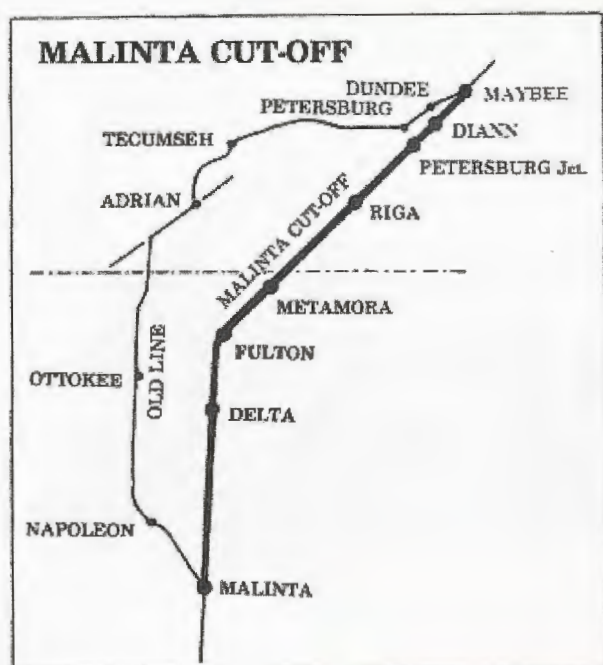
Henry had a private railroad car he called the "Fairlane." As a child I saw it on the railroad track going through our farm. The railroad track has since been abandoned and removed. He built a new straight through railroad track east of Napoleon in 1928 called the Cut Off.



*Napoleon, Ohio played an important role in the history of the DT&I. In this 1920's era photo both the passenger and freight stations are visible. It appears that Ford interchanged much traffic here with the Wabash Railway prior to the opening of the Malinta Cut-Off. – DT&I photo, E.B. Novak Collection*



*Freight Office now at the Henry County Fairgrounds, Napoleon, Ohio.*



*The map above shows the old DT&I road line and the new Malinta Cut-Off that was completed November 6, 1929.*

*At right is the Malinta DT&I history park. There is a hand car inside the depot used for track maintenance.*

The opening of the Cut-Off saw the division point and terminal roundhouse at Napoleon closed out, forcing 375 railroad employees to relocate elsewhere on the road. This fact served as a serious blow to the town since the railroad had been Napoleon's largest employer. The opening of the Cut-Off and closing at Napoleon happened right at the start of the Great Depression.

The Wabash Railroad also ran through Napoleon with a passenger and freight station. It ends in town and is now called Indiana High Line Railroad.







*This viaduct of the DT&I railroad is located on Road 10 between Roads M and N. It was part of the 5 mile purchase by Jay and Herb Huddle when Grand Trunk abandoned it. The Grand Trunk purchased the railroad from DT&I. Their engine was blue and the DT&I engines were orange with the markings removed. The viaduct has since been removed.*



*DT&I Steam Engine*



*DT&I logos*



## NAPOLEON'S FIRST FATAL PLANE ACCIDENT



Oct 21, 1948

The above is a picture of the airplane that figured in Napoleon's first crash of its kind, in which Richard Brubaker lost his life and Tom Hardy was seriously injured. The accident hap-

pened shortly after the take-off from the Napoleon air port with Bruaker at the controls. Both men are licensed pilots and have been flying for several years without previous accidents.

Photo by Kerr



## VII. CLOSING THOUGHTS

I have veered off course somewhat from the main Corsair subject. I feel that history should be preserved. If I don't do it who will. I lived through the subject matter of time. I was born in 1930 and survived through the Great Depression of the 30s which were very bad years for most people. My family moved three different times when Dad couldn't make the farm payments and the farm was resold out from under him. My family moved in with Dad's parents at one point. Our neighbor lost his 80 acre farm. Dad's sister and husband moved in with our family when the bank closed and they lost all their money in their savings account.

However, most farm families were better off than the city folks. We had our own fruit trees, vegetable gardens, milk, meat, eggs, butter, cider, vinegar and flour from wheat. Then WW II came along and things were needed for the war effort. There was rationing of gasoline, tires, sugar, then the O.P.A. (Office of Price and Administration) froze the prices of everything. People were united and defeated the Japs and Nazis.

I am so blessed by having Christian parents and being born and raised on a farm. I loved the four seasons of the year. In the spring we worked the ground, planted the garden and the crops. We went mushroom hunting and watched the flowers and crops grow. Then summer came and we went fishing and swimming in the Turkeyfoot Creek nearby. First dad farmed with horses. We shocked the wheat and harvested it with a threshing machine and ring of neighbors. We made hay with horses and put it in the barn on rope hay slings, all hard work. Then the bailers came along and we bailed the hay and straw. Tractors replaced the horses and combines replaced the threshing rings. Farming became easier but us kids still had our daily farm chores to do.

We learned to work and not complain. We watched the crops grow all summer long. When fall came we harvested the crops. Corn pickers replaced hand husking. We could now combine and shell the corn in fifteen minutes, that would have taken Dad all day to husk by hand. There was hunting of pheasants, rabbits and trapping.

Winter time followed with ice skating, snow sledding and ice hockey. We had neighbor kids at our house all the time. We had lambs, pigs, and calves to feed with a bottle. Seems like there were new experiences and adventures every day.

My father was never schooled past the eighth grade. He became a successful prominent farmer with the help of his three sons, one daughter and his wife. In 2016 he was posthumously inducted into the Henry County Agriculture Hall of Fame.

Those days are just memories and gone forever. The tractors today have GPS with auto steering. Times and things change and we move on. School days were happy days and the Corsair airplane was a big deal in our lives.

It has been an interesting project writing and reminiscing about the past. I hope my writings preserve a part of history for future generations who live in the Napoleon area.





*The F4U-1D Corsair's speed, firepower, maneuverability, and ruggedness caused many to rate it with the P-51 Mustang as one of the best fighter planes of WW II.*