

The Confederate Air Force ensures that
old times there are not forgotten.

WORLD WAR II IN THREE HOURS

*Reenacting a scene
from the attack on Pearl
Harbor, a CAF B-17
attempts to land with
only one wheel down.*

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Way down South in the land of cotton, a most unusual band of characters is keeping the heritage of airpower alive, refighting the great air battles of World War II. For them, World War II lasts just a little over three hours.

Each year, more than a million people come to airfields across the US to catch a glimpse of living history. The men and women who put on these airshows are the heart and soul of the world's largest private air force—the Confederate Air Force.

The CAF began in 1957 when five Army Air Forces veterans started tinkering around with a P-51 Mustang. Piloting the vintage Mustang stirred their passion for the high-performance propeller fighters of World War II and drove them to acquire more airplanes. Soon the south Texas “cow-pasture” days of the CAF were in full bloom.

Early airshows featured aerobatics, dogfights, and races between a P-51, an F8F Bearcat, a Corsair, and a P-38. At today's airshows, au-

diences watch a flying museum of approximately 132 warplanes do “battle” in the skies.

Before the audiences' eyes, Spitfires take on Me-109s and a He-111 as the Battle of Britain is refought. Moments later, a flight of CAF AT-6s painted to look like Japanese Zeros swoops over the airfield, setting off a series of explosions. The scream of diving planes sounds from above, a battle-damaged B-17 Flying Fortress attempts a landing with only one wheel down—it's De-

*CAF Col. Carter
McGregor, B-29 veteran,
flew on the first and last
B-29 missions of WW II.
Many CAF officers are
combat veterans.*



ember 7, 1941, all over again, and Pearl Harbor is under attack.

But don't be misled. The CAF is about more than just airshows. For the men and women who are veterans of or who lost loved ones in the monumental struggle against the Axis powers, it's about preserving American airpower history of the time period from 1939 to 1945.

"The CAF's stock-in-trade is nostalgia, patriotism, and living American history that you can see, hear, touch, feel, and smell," says CAF

CAF airplanes painted to look like Japanese Zeros fly in close formation during an airshow performance. Each year, more than 1,000,000 people watch CAF airshows and exhibits.



The B-29A Superfortress Fifi is the pride of the CAF fleet. Restoration of Fifi took more than three years.



Executive Director Mack Sterling.

The CAF also strives to offer jet-age generations a look back at the critical role of aviation in World War II. And, too, with an international membership approaching 7,000, the CAF is about a lot of hard work mixed in with the satisfaction of preserving the aircraft and collecting the memorabilia of World War II.

The work is not without its rewards. As one CAF member put it: "To see a man walk up to one of our aircraft—see his lip quiver, and a

tear come to his eye—that is all the payment we need for the labor of love that we do."

The pride of the CAF fleet is *Fifi*, the world's only remaining flyable B-29A Superfortress. *Fifi*'s internal systems were restored to operational condition by a CAF maintenance team in 1971, after the aircraft had sat for seventeen years in the arid climate of the Mojave Desert at China Lake, Calif. They flew the B-29 to their headquarters at Rebel Field in Harlingen, Tex. Res-

toration of *Fifi* took more than three years.

The appearance of *Fifi* at airshows is a reminder that, nearly forty years ago, another B-29, the *Enola Gay*, dropped history's first atomic bomb on Hiroshima—an event that helped convince the Japanese to surrender, preventing an estimated one million Allied casualties that might otherwise have been incurred if the invasion of mainland Japan had been necessary.

The CAF fleet of bombers also

B-24 at sunset. The beauty of Ghost Squadron airplanes is a tribute to the preservation work of the CAF.

A B-17 on static display during a CAF airshow stirs emotions while attracting admirers from earlier and later generations.



includes the B-17, B-24, and B-25, among other aircraft. In fact, with its extraordinary collection of flyable World War II bombers and fighters, the CAF is much sought after by Hollywood filmmakers in search of authenticity. CAF airplanes have filled the frames of such box-office attractions as *Tora! Tora! Tora!*, *Patton*, *Final Countdown*, *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, and *The Right Stuff*.

From offices at Rebel Field, the CAF coordinates participation in

approximately 100 airshows each year. The priceless collection of planes belonging to the CAF make up the "Ghost Squadron," which has been participating in airshows since 1963. The world-famous World War II Airpower Demonstration, in which CAF airplanes reenact the great air battles of the Second World War, is held in Harlingen each October. The program includes reenactments commemorating Wake Island, Midway, the bombing of Tokyo, D-Day, and V-J

Day. Many of the crews who fly in the airshow are combat veterans from the battles they help to recreate.

Next year, the Confederate Air Force will be at "AFA's Gathering of Eagles—1986" in Las Vegas, Nev., from April 27 to May 1. This event will mark the fortieth anniversary of AFA as well as of such USAF major commands as the Strategic Air Command, the Tactical Air Command, and the Aerospace Defense Command. ■



From front to back: a CAF Me-109, Mustang, and Spitfire in flight. Airplanes from both Allied and Axis powers make up the CAF's priceless collection of warplanes.

CAF Executive Director Mack Sterling. In twenty-eight years, the CAF has established a reputation for professionalism and dedication to preserving history.

