

SCHAF Press Release - January 31, 2011

National Boy Scout week and Feb. 5 event

Former Explorer kicks off National Boy Scout Week by revisiting historic plane he worked on in '80s



The historic B-25C bomber was in rough condition when Explorer Post 15 scouts rolled up their sleeves to work on it more than two decades ago.

Robert Smith was an Explorer Scout and Airport High School student when he first laid eyes on the fragmented B-25 that went down in history on D-Day, then quickly sank to the bottom of Lake Greenwood.

“Our Post 15 was chosen to work on the recovered plane to begin the cleaning and corrosion-removal processes,” recalled Smith, then post president. “The aircraft’s wings were off, it had no landing gear and no propellers. We felt we were stepping back in time to a part of the state’s history we teenagers were unaware of.”

Smith will be reunited with the iconic Mitchell bomber Saturday, Feb. 5, during a member orientation at Hamilton-Owens Airport hosted by the South Carolina Historic Aviation Foundation. “I hope some others who were in the post will turn out as well,” said Smith, now employed by the South Carolina Department of Corrections. “What a great way this will be to kick off National Boy Scout Week!” (Note: Scout Sunday begins the week, Feb. 6-12.)

One of Smith’s lead advisors during the period his Explorer post assisted with the plane’s early restoration efforts was Larry Yon, then director of maintenance at the in-town airport, now a SCHAF founding board member. “We’ve kept in touch over the years – both advisors and scouts – and when I ran into Larry last week, he told me about SCHAF’s event to commemorate the date Lt. Col. Jimmy Doolittle came to town to begin recruiting for his secret mission.” (Note: B-25s were flown in the Tokyo Raid.)

A highlight of Saturday’s re-introduction of the plane will be walk-around tours, at 11 a.m., noon, and 1 p.m., led by the student pilot crewing on the plane when it ditched. “In addition to Lt. Col. Dan Rossman, whose hand I’ll enjoy shaking, I hope to talk with Frank Shumpert, one of the lead Midlands Aviation mechanics instrumental in the restoration project.”

Smith, who grew up near Columbia Metropolitan Airport where Columbia Army Air Base was located during WWII, has sustained his interest in aviation – after his Explorer Scout days – by attending military air shows. He now serves in the South Carolina National Guard as staff sergeant.

As post president, Smith came up with the idea for the Explorers to wear flight suits as their uniforms; a special patch differentiated scouts from active pilots. “I still have the patches and, for this event, will transfer them to a current flight suit which I will wear.”

Smith challenged members of former Post 15, later named Explorer Post 214 after the Baa Baa Black Sheep Squadron, to come out Saturday to see the plane SCHAF is gearing up to restore for 21st century South Carolinians.

Former Explorer Post 15 president Robert Smith is looking for others who worked on the B-25 with him: David McCall, Lance Franklin, Jim Rowe, Danny Stanton, Donald Kelly, John Patton III, Bonnie and Michael Gower, Lisa Hulon, Duke Baz, and Brenda Stroud.