

SCHAF Press Release - October 21, 2011



Ramping up for the 70th anniversary of Columbia Army Air Base's opening, **Springdale Mayor Pat Smith** (left), **Cayce Mayor Elise Partin**, and **Chapin Mayor Stan Shealy** get acquainted with the region's largest artifact remaining from that WWII era of B-25 dominance here in the midlands. Citizens from communities all three mayors represent were involved in the bomber training center. The rare B-25C, under the stewardship of the South Carolina Historic Aviation Foundation, is hangared at the historic Curtiss-Wright Hangar, Hamilton Owens Airport.

Columbia Army Air Base reunion set:

Military and civilian personnel sought for 70th anniversary observance and day of remembrance December 3, 2011

Khaki sleeves, along with civilian white, gray, and plaid sleeves, were rolled up during WWII for work toward the common goal of freedom, and at Columbia Army Air Base that meant getting aviation training crews combat ready.

"As we pause December 3 to remember all those who endeavored for freedom, shoulder to shoulder, we want to pay special tribute to those among us who worked or served at CAAB. We want to bring them together again, 70 years later. Those who served but are no longer with us we hope will be represented by their family members," said Cantzon Foster, President of South Carolina Historic Aviation Foundation (SCHAF).

By early 1942 civilians from communities throughout the midlands had dropped what they were doing and signed on for jobs in the laundry and parachute rooms, in the mechanics bay and the post office, the local bank and the welding shop.

The base became the employer of hundreds of residents of Springdale, Cayce, West Columbia, Swansea, Columbia and Lexington. Now SCHAF is searching for those civilian patriots, along with any military who served on CAAB.

The air base that emerged on what, only a year earlier, had been family farmland became the Allies' largest B-25 training center. CAAB helped put Columbia, South Carolina, on aviation charts throughout the world. As the rallying site for a highly-secret mission that became known as the Doolittle Raid, Columbia took its place in the annals of history because CAAB was here.

"It's been 70 years since the B-25 center opened," Foster said. "We now want to honor our fellow citizens who were part of CAAB's success. We hope they will come and reunite on this day of remembrance."

As part of the day's observances, an informal reunion will be held between noon and 1 p.m., Saturday, Dec. 3 at the South Carolina Aeronautics Commission hangar, adjacent to Columbia Metropolitan Airport, where CAAB was situated. According to SCHAF vice president for education Ron Shelton, the reunion will be the heart of the event.

"To give context to this reunion, there will be displays of WWII artifacts and vehicles, and demonstrations of WWII model airplanes. At 1 p.m. there will be a short patriotic program during which homage will be paid to all those who served at CAAB. More than 200 airmen perished in training accidents; we want to honor their memories as well," Shelton said.

CAAB personnel and/or their families who pre-register will have special nametags created, indicating their role in the fight for freedom. More details about the 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. event can be found at www.schistoricaviation.org, or by calling 803 731-3254.