

Monthly Publication from the Zephyrhills Historical Association

Volume 14 – Number 12

December 2012

The next Zephyrhills Historical Association meeting will be held on Thursday, January 3rd at the Zephyrhills Depot Museum, 39110 South Avenue. The business meeting is scheduled for 6 p.m. and the program is at 7 p.m. Refreshments will be served.

Speakers



Our speaker for the January meeting will be Gregg Hilferding, Vice President of Marketing at ClassB.com and a graduate of Zephyrhills High School. His family has brought this company from working out of a small storefront in an office complex, providing service mostly for local schools and organizations, to a booming internet company. This is a true success story for Zephyrhills, and Gregg will share with us what the journey was like. He is also very active in The Boys Scouts of America, and if

time permits he may talk about this as well. It promises to be an informative and lively presentation. Come join us. Remember, please, that we are meeting on **Thursday** this month, instead of our customary Tuesday, on account of January 1st being a federal holiday.



From the Desk of the Editor

I've once again included a membership form on page 8 of this month's newsletter for those of you who would like to make use of it, but if you are simply renewing your membership or advertising, and nothing has changed, you can simply send a check. The form is not necessary. If you are making additional contributions you can simply note it in the memo portion of the check. We've reached the end of the calendar year, so membership and advertizing fees are now due. We're glad to have you!

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Please consider contributing old photos for the website.

My email address is on the opening page

ZHA Mission Statement

The mission of the Zephyrhills Historical Association is to research, gather, and share local historical information with all generations, through our literature, programs, and scholarships, and to volunteer assistance to the Zephyrhills Depot Museum and WWII Barracks Museum.

Tree Decoration

Members of the Zephyrhills Historical Association decorated the Missouri tree at the 28th Annual Christmas Tree Lighting Celebration held at Florida Hospital Zephyrhills on Sunday, December 2, 2012. The Missouri tree was chosen in honor of our association President, Cris White and his wife, Jo, who is our Treasurer. They are originally from Missouri and furnished several postcards to hang as ornaments depicting the State. We even got to see Santa Claus arrive on a 1927 American LaFrance fire truck driven by Dale Barnett of Zephyrhills Fire Rescue.



Pictured, from left to right:
 Cris & Jo White, Betty O'Dell, Ken Cummings, Margie Partain, Val Hiatt,
 Clereen Brunty, Patty Thompson, Rex Hiatt

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Christmas Celebration

The Zephyrhills Historical Association enjoyed a bountiful Christmas Dinner at Wedgewood Manor Community Clubhouse on Monday, December 3rd. After dinner the members viewed a few old slides of the Depot being separated in 2 parts and moved from the original grounds by the railroad tracks to the current grounds on South Avenue. Many have never seen these pictures and now understand why the cost was so much to move a building approximately 200 feet. Also the group sang the Twelve Days of Christmas with flash cards and everyone enjoyed the fellowship.



Pictured, from left to right:
 Patty Thompson, Bob & Penny Porter, Bill Kustes, Val & Rex Hiatt,
 Mary Helen Clague, Clereen Brunty, Gail Geiger, Margie Partain,
 Elaine Benjamin, Jo & Cris White, Ken Cummings, Betty O'Dell

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Zephyrhills Army Airfield in World War II

By Nick Linville, Professional Historian &
 Son of Terry & Joy Linville of Zephyrhills
 March 10, 2011

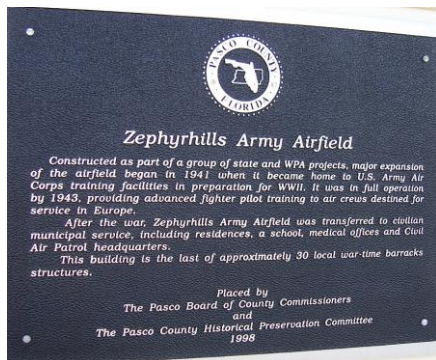
Zephyrhills Army Airfield was developed during World War II as an advanced training base for pilots who served in the Army Air Force. The hundreds of airmen who came to train at the airfield left their mark on Zephyrhills as they did in the skies over Europe.

Senator Claude Pepper of Florida, at the time a close ally of Franklin Roosevelt, successfully argued for Federal support for airports in central Florida as America drew closer to entering World War II. In June of 1941, the Army was considering 26 airport sites in Florida for expansion or development. Zephyrhills was one of them.

The Army conducted surveys around the city and decided on the east side of town which was mostly undeveloped land and some small farms. Several months after the Army examined Zephyrhills, the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. The United States went to war.

By September of 1942, the Army had received \$500,000 to develop the airfield at Zephyrhills. Three runways were built and also numerous support buildings. To ensure that the airfield was well-drained, a large ditch—known today as the Zephyrhills Ditch—was dug around the southeastern side of the airport. This ditch is still visible along Alston Avenue.

When the airfield was constructed, Zephyrhills had about 800 residents. Nearly that number of airmen came to train during the war years. The airfield was an asset to the Army Air





Force and also the city which benefited from the dollars that the men spent in town at establishments such as Neukom’s Drug Store. Also, locals found jobs at the base. Some were involved in planting grass while others assisted in building a range for testing aircraft guns.

The Tenth Fighter Squadron arrived at the airfield on January 4, 1943 and would spend a year and three weeks in the City of Pure Water. As the Tenth began training at the airfield, the once-quiet skies around the city and the surrounding countryside were filled with the roaring sounds of some of the most well-known World

War II fighter aircraft—P-51 Mustangs and P-40 Warhawks.

Zephyrhills was one of many training fields in Florida that made up the Army Air Forces School of Applied Tactics. Headquartered at Orlando Army Air Base, the school was formed early in the war to provide advanced training for the thousands of pilots who fought in the war. Their teachers were veterans fresh from the air battles of the ongoing war. Both in the air and on the ground, the school prepared pilots for combat operations. They participated in a variety of exercises that would prove crucial overseas--bomber interception, bomber escort, strafing, skip bombing, and gunnery missions. At times, the training went on daily and nightly.

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Lt. Col. George E. Kiser, an Ace airman who received acclaim for his achievements in the Pacific Theater, was Commanding Officer at Zephyrhills. The airfield was yet to be completed when the Tenth arrived and there were few amenities. Though the city was known for its water, the pipes at the airfield had problems and the men were forced to drink soda until the situation was fixed.

Bud Fortier, a veteran who was stationed for training at Zephyrhills in 1943, remembered the airfield as about twenty tarpaper shacks and some dirt roads. By the end of that summer, however, a measure of relief from the combat-like conditions was reached when the officers of the Tenth completed a Club building where weekly dances and picnics were held.

The Tenth Squadron took over the city swimming pool in August of 1943 for training purposes. Also, the squadron had its own weekly column in the local newspaper. Their official insignia featured a character called Gus the Good Gremlin.

In November of 1943, the Tenth’s operations were significantly increased and both day and night training took place. On January 29, 1944, after a year and three weeks in Zephyrhills, the Tenth Squadron returned to Orlando Air Base.

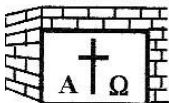
In August of 1944, the 372nd Army Air Force Base Unit, consisting of 12 enlisted men and one officer, arrived to maintain the airfield on a standby basis. Twenty-five civilian employees were assigned to operate firefighting equipment and engineering works. Now, the only planes that visited were Army inspectors from MacDill Army Airfield in Tampa who tossed around the idea of reactivating the airfield.

What was supposed to be a rather uneventful mission at Zephyrhills turned into quite an ordeal for the men of the 372nd. On October 19, 1944, the so-called “Cuba-Florida” hurricane tore across central Florida. Warned about the storm from the weather stations at the Lakeland Army Airfield, the men at Zephyrhills huddled into the stoutest structure at the base—the Field Dispensary building—and rode out the storm. The Category 3 hurricane blew down telephone and power lines and knocked another building off its foundation, but none of the men were injured.

Ten days later, the 372nd was ordered to MacDill. According to their unit history from 1944, the men “were reluctant to leave Zephyrhills as close friends had been made with the townspeople.” Despite the warm relationship that had developed during the war, the military would soon cease operations at the airfield.

The massive training of airmen was no longer necessary when the war ended in 1945. The military declared the airfield at Zephyrhills, and hundreds of other airfields, surplus. In the late 1940s, the government officially transferred the airfield to the city. The roar of P-51 Mustangs and P-40 Warhawks are rarely heard over the skies of the city today but the World War II Barracks Museum, housed in one of the original structures from the old airfield, keeps the history of the era alive.



<p>CornerStone  Baptist Church 7th Street & 8th Avenue Come be our special guest Coffee & Donuts 10:30***** Worship 11:00 A.M. and 6:00 P.M. Dr. Neal Resue—Pastor * NealDoe1956@verizon.net</p>	<p>In Memory of Ryals Furniture Exchange And Great Parents Powell & Maude Ryals From son James God Bless America</p>
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Zephyrhills Museum of Military History

The information below is provided by the World War II Barracks and Zephyrhills Museum of Military History brochure. The museum is located at 39444 South Avenue, Zephyrhills and is open on Saturdays 10:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.



In the early 1940s, hundreds of Army fighter pilots came to Zephyrhills to hone their skills at the newly built Zephyrhills Army Airfield before going to war.

After World War II, the airport was donated to the city. The barracks where the pilots lived have all been demolished with this infirmary building being the only survivor. From 1997 to 2001, state and city

grants allowed for restoration and preservation of this building. The museum holds treasured memories of the World War II veterans who lived and trained in Zephyrhills, such as the 10th Fighter Squadron and the self-dubbed P-Shooters. This museum shares their experiences with you.

The World War II Barracks Museum staff continues to add to their collections. Please call (813) 780-0067 if you have a vintage historical item that relates to World War II that you wish to donate to the museum.

Collections include the following items:

- Flight gear, including leather flying helmet, flight jacket, and oxygen mask
- Various unit insignias and military rank badges
- A pictorial history of the 10th Fighter Squadron spanning their training in 1943 in Zephyrhills, their combat tour in Europe and their return to the United States in late 1945
- Examples of the types of ammunition used by the U.S. forces at that time
- A collection of decorations earned by Major Peacock, a B-17 Pilot with some 30 combat missions to his credit
- Vintage airspeed computer dating back to 1943
- Original publications from the WWII period
- A 48-star flag
- Ammunition boxes
- Jerry cans (used to haul gasoline)
- A remnant of a parachute from D-Day
- Examples of the ration coupons used by civilians to get items such as tires, gasoline and fresh meat
- Examples of military recruiting papers
- Reconstructed C-47 Aircraft



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