

# PIREPS

A monthly newsletter for Nebraska pilots and aviation enthusiasts



'Encourage and Facilitate the Development and Use of Aviation in Nebraska'

## PIREPS

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## Aviation Symposium & Maintenance Seminar Huge Success

Over 130 people signed up for the Aviation Symposium while 150+ mechanics attended the Seminar. This was the premier event for anyone interested in aviation in Nebraska, or for that matter, any other state. There were outstanding speakers throughout the four days who held their audiences captivated with tales of historical events and real world excitement.



*Hall of Fame Recipients, L to R: William, Reuben & Charles Taylor II; Don Brown, Lynn Elizabeth, Nels Christian, Hal Confer, Forrest Dean, Paul Adams & Charles Lane.*

Awards were presented on January 23rd, inducting five individuals into the Nebraska Aviation Hall of Fame. The only individual personally accepting his nomination was Harold E. Confer, fourth from the right; the remainder of the nominations were accepted by family or friends of the individual. Full writeups are included later in this issue.

The Maintenance Seminar presented technical and regulatory training sessions for aviation maintenance personnel from Nebraska and surrounding states. After dinner activities Friday were started with presentation of the following awards: AMT Company Awards, Good Friend of FAA Award, Aviation Maintenance Technician of the Year, District and Regional Award, and the Charles E. Taylor "Master Mechanic" Awards recognizing 50 + years of being actively engaged in aviation maintenance.

The evening included the introduction and recognition of Mr. Charles E. Taylor's two grandsons and two great grandsons. They were presented a copy of the proclamation signed by Nebraska Governor Mike Johanns designating May 24, 2003 (Mr. Taylor's birthday), as Nebraska Aviation Maintenance Technicians Day in honor of Mr. Taylor. Activities were concluded with a program by Mr. Howard Dufour who wrote the book, Charles E. Taylor: The Wright Brothers Mechanician.



## Harold E. Confer

Harold E. Confer was born in 1924 in Culbertson, Nebraska. After graduating from Culbertson High School in 1942, he attended Colorado A & M College for one year. In October 1943, he entered active military service where he earned his pilot wings and commission as second lieutenant.

Confer received training in the B-29 and was transferred to Kadena Army Air Base, Okinawa, where he flew B-29's. During the Korean War, he completed 26 combat missions with a total of 263 hours. He returned to March Air Force Base, where he was officer in charge of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Bombardment Wing Standardization Board.

In 1954, Confer was transferred to Headquarters Strategic Air Command, Offutt Air Force Base and served in the Requirements



*Confer and B-58 Hustler*

Division of the Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations. In 1960, Confer was the second pilot in the Strategic Air Command to become operationally certified in the B-58. In the same year he led his crew in the SAC bombing competition where they won the best scores in radar bombing and high altitude navigation. In

1961 Confer flew the B-58 to three new world speed records, including a new record over the 100 kilometer course of 1284 mph. In recognition of this achievement, they were awarded the prestigious Thompson Trophy, the first time in the 33 year history of the trophy that it was won by a bomber crew.

In 1965, Confer was assigned to the SR-71 program as Deputy Director of Evaluation and Testing for the 4200 Strategic Reconnaissance Wing. In 1966, he became Commander of the 1<sup>st</sup> Strategic Reconnaissance Squadron. He later became Deputy Commander for Operations. Confer was certified crew qualified in the SR-71, a remarkable achievement considering there were fewer than 200 pilots certified during the 25 years the SR-71 was in operational service. Confer is the only native Nebraskan to fly the SR-71.

In 1972, Confer was promoted to Brigadier General and assumed duties as Commander of the 45<sup>th</sup> Air Division, SAC, with headquarters at Pease Air Force Base, New Hampshire. He was responsible for the successful accomplishment of the operational mission of five SAC wings, of which two were equipped with FB-111 aircraft. In 1973, Brigadier General Confer was assigned as Deputy Director for Strategic Forces in the Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Research and Development in Washington DC. His last duty was Deputy Chief of Staff for Logistics, Randolph Air Force Base, Texas. Confer retired April 1, 1978.

His military decorations and awards include the Legion of Merit,

Distinguished Flying Cross, Air Medal with two oak leaf clusters, Air Force Commendation Medal, Presidential Unit Citation with



*Larry Becherer Presenting Hall of Fame Award to Hal Confer*

three oak leaf clusters, Air Force Outstanding Unit Award Ribbon with oak leaf cluster and the Republic of Korea Presidential Unit Citation Ribbon.

Currently Hal, as everyone calls General Confer, lives in San Antonio Texas.

## Captain Alfonza W. Davis

Alfonza W. Davis was born in Omaha, Nebraska on September 23, 1919. He was an outstanding scholar at Omaha Technical High School, graduating as Valedictorian. He earned the first annual scholarship awarded by Alpha Eta chapter of the Kappa Alpha Psi fraternity and studied at Creighton and Omaha Universities. Davis joined the Army in 1941, reporting for duty in a cavalry unit at Fort Riley, Kansas. In 1942, he was assigned to the Air Corps as an

aviation cadet at Tuskegee Army Airfield, Alabama. The airfield was established to train the first black military aviators. As a squadron flight leader, Davis graduated at the top of his flight class and became Omaha's first black military aviator to earn an officer commission and pilot wings.



*Alfonza W. Davis*

Davis received his first overseas assignment with the 302<sup>nd</sup> Fighter Squadron in Italy. Later he was attached to Group Headquarters of the 332<sup>nd</sup> Fighter Group as the Assistant Group Operations Officer. The 332<sup>nd</sup> was an all black unit known as the Red Tails because of their distinctive aircraft paint scheme.



They operated with the 15th Air Force protecting Allied long range bombers over Europe and the Mediterranean Theater of Operations. The 332<sup>nd</sup> established the incredible and unprecedented record of flying all of its bomber escort missions from June 1944 until April 1945, without the loss of a single bomber to enemy aircraft.

In 1944, Captain Davis was reassigned as Squadron Commander of the 99<sup>th</sup> Pursuit Squadron. Flying P-51 Mustangs, his squadron escorted large bomber groups based in Italy. During one mission, his fighter group destroyed 83 German aircraft. On October 29,



*Paul Adams and Charles Lane accepting Alfonza W. Davis Award*

1944, while on a special high altitude reconnaissance mission to Munich, Germany, his fighter crashed near the Gulf of Trieste in northern Italy. One year later, the war department declared Captain Alfonza W. Davis killed in action.

Military citations awarded to Davis include the Purple Heart, the Distinguished Flying Cross and the Distinguished Unit Citation. He also received credit for one aerial victory in the Mediterranean Theater of Operations.

In May 1988, the Davis Chapter of the Tuskegee Airmen in Omaha was founded, honoring Captain Davis. The chapter conducts historical research and documentation of the achievements of Tuskegee Airman who served their country.

## Reuben L. Wagner

Reuben L. Wagner was born in Fairbury, Nebraska on July 7, 1897. He attended the University of Nebraska before enlisting in the aviation section of the US Army signal corps in 1917. He received his flight training at Ellington Field, Texas and was commissioned as a 2<sup>nd</sup> lieutenant, reserve military aviator.

In April 1923, Wagner was hired as a pilot for the US Post Office Air Mail Service. He started on the New York-Cleveland route but was transferred to Omaha-Chicago and Omaha-Cheyenne circuit. During this time he was an air mail service "night-flying" test pilot, which led to the development of lighting systems for municipal and military airports. On July 1927, the post office awarded the Chicago-San Francisco contract to Boeing Air transport which later

became United Airlines and Wagner was hired as a pilot. On July 10, 1928 Wagner flew the first airmail to Lincoln, NE, landing at Page Field.

In 1934, Wagner was assigned to United Airlines Central Division, Air Passenger Service as a Senior pilot. Two years later, he was upgraded to Chief pilot. In 1937, he was promoted to Superintendent of Flying, Pacific Division and was in charge of training DC-3 pilots. During World War II, the US Air Transport Command contracted with United to supply pilots for the Pacific Theater of Operations. Early in the war, Wagner flight tested B-24s at Consolidated Aircraft's San Diego plant. In September 1942, he flew the first air transport command/United flight from San Diego to Australia in a C-87, a converted B-24.

In 1947, Wagner qualified the first United Airlines DC-6 for the newly established Mainland-Honolulu route. For the next ten years, Wagner continued to fly passenger service for United in the DC-6, the Boeing Stratocruiser and the DC-7.

August 1, 1957 Wagner retired from United as the company's senior Captain with over 31,000 hours of flight time. He was presented with the President's Award, United's highest honor. Company President W. A. Patterson described Reuben Wagner as "the outstanding technician-scientist-professional man flying today". Wagner's last flight for United was from Honolulu to San Francisco on a DC-7 christened the "Captain Reuben L. Wagner."



*Don Brown Accepting Reuben Wagner Award*

Don Brown accepted the award on behalf of Reuben L. Wagner, deceased.

## Forrest Silas Petersen

Forrest Silas Petersen was born in Holdrege, Nebraska, on May 16, 1922. He grew up in Gibbon and attended the University of Nebraska at Lincoln for two years prior to entering the US Naval Academy in 1941.

During World War II, Petersen was aboard the USS Caperton



and saw action during operations in the Mariana and Western Caroline Islands, Leyte Gulf, Okinawa and Japan. In 1947, Petersen was designated a naval aviator. Petersen received a Bachelor of Science in Aeronautical Engineering from the Naval Postgraduate School and a Master of Science from Princeton. He flew in several fighter squadrons prior to commanding Fighter Squadron 154. He commanded USS Bexar and was Executive Officer and Commanding Officer of the USS Enterprise.



*Petersen and X-15*

In 1958, Petersen was ordered to Flight Research Center, NASA, Edwards Air Force Base and participated in test flights of the X-15. He was the Navy's only X-15 pilot. For this service he received the NASA Distinguished Service Medal, The Distinguished Flying Cross, the National Society of Aerospace Professional's Montgomery Award, and was joint recipient of the Collier Trophy.

Petersen was appointed to the rank of Vice Admiral in May 1976. He served as the Assistant to the Director of

Naval Program Planning, Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, the Assistant Director for Strategic and Support Systems Test and Evaluation, Office of the Director for Defense Research and Engineering, the Vice Chief of Naval Material and Deputy Chief of Naval Operations (Air Warfare). In October of 1976, he assumed command of the Naval Air Systems Command.



*Larry Becherer, Nels Christian, Lynn Elizabeth, and Forrest Dean*

Petersen also earned the Legion of Merit with bronze star, the Bronze Star Medal, the Navy Commendation Medal with Combat "V", the American Defense Service Medal, Asiatic Pacific Campaign Medal with four stars, American Campaign Medal, World War II Victory Medal, China Service Medal, National Defense Service Medal with Bronze Star, Korean Service Medal, United Nations Service Medal, Vietnam Service Medal with silver and bronze stars

and the Philippine Liberation Ribbon. He also received the Vietnam Campaign Medal with device and the Gallantry Cross from the Republic of Vietnam.

Vice Admiral Petersen and his wife Jean had four children, Lynn Elizabeth, Nels Christian, Forrest Dean and Preston Carter. Petersen passed away on December 8, 1990 and was buried in Arlington National Cemetery. Accepting the award from Larry Becherer are three of Petersen's children, Nels Christian, Lynn Elizabeth, and Forrest Dean.

## Charles E. Taylor

Charles Edward Taylor was born in Illinois on May 24, 1868. In



*Charles E. Taylor*

1878, he moved with his family to Lincoln, Nebraska where he attended the Lincoln Public Schools. At the age of twelve, Taylor quit school and became an errand boy for the Nebraska State Journal and eventually worked in the bindery department. His association with the Journal allowed him to be around and learn to use various hand tools and machinery. Taylor did general repair work, painted signs, cut stencils, made rubber stamps and was appointed State Weigher of Grain in

Omaha for a short time. He opened and operated a machine shop for approximately a year and a half before lack of business forced closure. In 1890, Taylor moved to Kearney where he engaged in making metal house numbers. This is where he met his future wife, Henrietta.

In 1896, Taylor and family moved to Dayton, Ohio, where he worked for a local machinery manufacturer. In 1898, Taylor opened a machine shop and manufactured parts for the Wright Cycle Company owned by Orville and Wilbur Wright. In 1901, he went to work for the Wright Cycle Company, repairing bicycles, which allowed the brothers to concentrate on their aeronautical work. It was during this time that the Wrights flew their gliders and developed information for powered flight.

In late 1902, the Wright Brothers were looking for an engine to install on their glider but were unable to find one suited to their requirements. They decided to build their own engine. Together with Taylor, they designed the engine. Taylor built the engine while the Wrights built the airframe. No formal drawings were developed. The equipment used to build the engine consisted of a drill press, metal cutting lathe and various hand tools. The cast aluminum crankcase was produced by a local company but Taylor machined it as needed. He built all the other components from raw iron and steel stock. The engine was built in six weeks and when completed weighed 170 pounds and produced 12 horsepower at 1025 rpm.

On December 17, 1903 the first sustained powered flight was

Continued on page 5



accomplished. The engine powering the Wright flyer was built by Charlie Taylor, who's youth in Nebraska gave him the life skills and experiences to accomplish this task.

On January 30, 1956, Charles E. Taylor passed away. He was interred in the Portal of Folded Wings, Valhalla Aviation Memorial in Burbank, California.

In December of 1965, Taylor was inducted into the National Aviation Hall of Fame in Dayton, Ohio by the US Air Force as the world's First Airplane Mechanic. In 1993, the Charles E. Taylor "Master Mechanic" Award program was introduced by the Federal Aviation Administration. The award is presented to recognize the "unsung heroes of aviation" who have at least fifty years in the aviation maintenance arena, maintaining the US civilian and military aviation fleets.

Taylor was the last of the three giants of aviation. Their visions and contributions to the aviation world are unparalleled and are the foundation for the leadership position that the United States aviation industry holds in the world today.

May 24, 2003 (the 135<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his birth) will be declared as "Aviation Maintenance Technicians Day" by a proclamation signed by the Governor of the State of Nebraska.



Larry Becherer, Grandsons Reuben & Laurent Taylor; Great Grandsons Charles II & William Taylor

## Airport of the Year Award

The winner of the 2002 Airport of the Year Award was Valentine's Miller Field. There were several outstanding nominations, and it was a tough decision for our judges. The winner was chosen by a 5 member committee, representing: EAA, FBO/Air Charter Service, Nebraska Flying Farmers and Ranchers, Nebraska Aeronautics Commission, and the Nebraska Department of Aeronautics. The six nominations (in alphabetical order) were: Columbus, Fairbury, Grant, Omaha, Tekamah, and Valentine.

This year's winner was nominated by an airport user (David Higgins) and his efforts speak highly of his regard for the airport. The city council has worked to develop a plan that will allow for a substantial construction project in the next year.



Kent Penney, Mr. & Mrs. Bob Kilmer, & David Higgins

The airport has a full service FBO, 100LL and Jet A available 24 hours a day through a credit card system; Meteorogix Aviation Sentry computerized weather and flight planning service, which also allows access to DUATS, and two courtesy cars on the field.

Recent capital improvements include: a remodeled terminal building, funded through local donations of about \$75,000. The terminal building was also upgraded to meet handicap standards and completely refurbished. New T-hangar and taxiways - \$225,000; runway, taxiway and apron rebuild in 2000 - over \$800,000. Planned improvements: 2003 - rebuild the crosswind runway, including an extension and widening. While unable to attend the Symposium, Norma Jean New (Valentine City Manager) was instrumental in the airports development.

## Award of Excellence

There were several outstanding nominations for Airport of the Year, and the runner up was awarded a Certificate of Excellence. This Award goes to Omaha's Eppley airport that:

- Completed major runway upgrade a year ahead of schedule.
- Expanded and improved their air cargo facilities with just 60 days notice from the air freight company.
- Installed an Instrument Landing System (ILS), mostly with local funds.
- Cooperated with the FAA in testing a runway safety system using LED lights and microwave sensors.
- No discrepancies noted by the FAA in the last 3 annual inspections.
- World's largest aircraft, the Antonov 124 used the facility on



several occasions.

- Devised a runway incursion detection and warning system which was patented in 2002 and has been deployed by Seimens. The Certificate of Excellence was awarded to Omaha's Eppley Airfield.



*Kent Penney & Ralph Holtmann, Director, Planning and Engineering Services, Eppley Airfield*

## Project of the Year Award

Each year the Department of Aeronautics presents an award for the best airport project. For a project to qualify for the award it must be on-time, under budget, no change orders and good quality work – in other words a good smooth project.

This \$1.3 million Project of the Year got off to a great start. The sponsor selected their engineering consultant in 2000 and signed a design contract in 2001. Due to their initiative the project received a portion of their federal funds in September 2001, one fiscal year earlier than expected. The project was bid in November 2001 and the grant was signed in March 2002. Construction was divided



*Diane Hofer (NDA), Garold Ulmer, Don McElrany, Doug Abbout, Arnold Hottovy, & Anna Lannin (NDA).*

into two contracts – paving and electrical – which lowered the overall project costs. This required that two contractors work together, requiring more oversight by the consultant and resulted in cost savings. Construction was completed in December 2002 and everyone was pleased with the project and the performance of the contractors and engineers. Others involved in the project: Orville Davidson and Jack Vavra (City of York), Paulsen, Inc. of Cozad (paving), and Kayton Electric of Holdredge (lighting).

This year's Project of the Year Award was given to York Municipal Airport for construction of a parallel taxiway, paving and lighting project.

## Maintenance Seminar

Mr. Howard DuFour opened the evenings entertainment by presenting an informative and interesting monologue on Charles Taylor, the worlds first aviation engine builder and mechanic. Mr. Dufour has researched the Taylor family over a number of years and has built a replica of the Wright Flyer which presently resides in the Experimental Aircraft Association Museum at Oskosh, Wisconsin. Mr. DuFour is the Supervisor Emeritus,



*Mr. Howard DuFour*

Instrument Machine Shop, at the Wright State University, Dayton, Ohio, and has written a book concerning Charles Taylor and the Wright brothers. For more information or to acquire a copy of his book; call Mr. DuFour at 937-845-1449.



## Charles E. Taylor Master Mechanic Award



*Charles E. Taylor, II*

*Eugene Martin*

*Robert Kilmer*

*Alfred Glaser*

*Jack Jackson*

*Donald Maxfield*

In 1993, the Federal Aviation Administration established the Charles E. Taylor "Master Mechanic" Award. The award is to recognize aviation maintenance personnel (mechanic or repairman) who have been actively engaged in aviation maintenance for at least 50 years and have been certificated as a mechanic or repairman for at least 30 years. The other 20 years can consist of military aviation maintenance, aviation manufacturing and/or maintenance.

The great grandson of Charles E. Taylor was present and helped in presenting the awards to five honorees who have been in the aviation maintenance arena for over half of the time since powered flight became a reality. The five recipients of the Master Mechanic Award were: Gene Martin, owner/operator of Sioux Air, Inc.; Bob Kilmer, owner/operator of Sandhills Aero; Al Glaser, owner/operator Glaser Flying and Spraying Service; Jack Jackson, owner/operator Husker Aircraft Repair and Don Maxfield, owner/operator Li'l Red Aero, Inc.

## AMT of the Year



*Rich Baeder, Robert and Shirley Elrod, Darwin Godemann*

"Pay for good training or pay for poor performance." That statement hangs on the wall in Bob Elrod's office at Duncan Aviation and sums up his philosophy of aircraft maintenance training. He was awarded the Aviation Maintenance Technician (AMT) of the Year, District and Regional Level, at Kearney during the recent Maintenance Seminar.

Bob has 47 years of maintenance experience which began with a career in the Air Force and is presently Duncan Aviation's Technical Training Coordinator. At Duncan he has established a training program addressing the technical training needs of Duncan Aviation and established a network of full time and part time technical trainers representing all of the technical areas. Additionally, he teaches many in-house training classes and has incorporated a Mentor program in all the shops.

Bob Elrod epitomizes excellence in all that he does and is justifiably the Aviation Maintenance Technician of the Year.

# PIREPS

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## Calendar of Events

**Mar 4** Pfizer-LPS Science Fair. The theme is Aviation and Aerospace; over 500 student experiments and demonstrations expected. Pershing Auditorium, 226 Centennial Mall, Lincoln. More info: Curtis Mann 402-488-4280 or [cmann@lps.org](mailto:cmann@lps.org)

**Mar 8 - Jun 1** Strategic Air and Space Museum; Lindbergh exhibit. Flying replica of Lindbergh's Ryan NYP "Spirit of St. Louis" aircraft. Over 400 pieces of Lindbergh memorabilia. Open 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily, off I-80, exit 426.

**Mar 10** EAA Chapter 80 meeting, 7 p.m. Hangar One, Millard Airport.

**Mar 12** AOPA Air Safety Meeting, 7 p.m., 6001 Dodge St., UNO Administrative Building. More info 1-800-638-3101.

**Mar 16** Homestead National Monument 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., aircraft flyovers. Blackhawk helicopter static display; visit with Tuskegee Airmen; Diane Bartels speaks about Evelyn Sharp, one of our first female airmail pilots. Free transportation for fly-ins from Beatrice airport to the Monument. Four miles from Beatrice on Hwy 4. More info: 402-223-3514 or 402-223-5349.

**FAA Aviation Safety Meetings.** Meets requirements of Wings Program. **Mar 18**, Columbus Airport, AvCraft Inc., 7 p.m.; **Mar 20**, 7 p.m., Holdredge Airport conference rm; **Mar 25**, 7 p.m., Wayne Airport, GHL Aviation Hgr; **Mar 26**, 7 p.m., O'Neil Airport, Admin Building; **Mar 27**, 7 p.m., Valentine Court House Meeting Room.

## Editor Comments

This year's Aviation Symposium and Maintenance Seminar was the Aviation Event of the year. I tried to get a "taste" of those activities into this issue of PIREPS and must apologize to anyone who was left out due to space limitations or an inadvertent omission.

Start thinking of who you would like to nominate for next year's Nebraska Aviation Hall of Fame inductee and for the Mechanics Awards. A person must be nominated in order to be considered for induction and could come from any walk of life; e.g., educators, Fixed Base Operators, civil or military pilots, designers and manufacturers, spray pilots, inspectors, mechanics, airport administrators and managers etc.

The "Hall of Fame" had a humble beginning. Rob Hurst of the Air Force Association and Ed Clark (former PIREPS editor), took it upon themselves to get the Hall started in 1991. On their own time and using their personal resources, they presented their idea to the aviation community. They were pleasantly surprised at the positive response. Since those beginnings, 56 persons have been inducted. Those selected for induction are honored with a plaque recognizing their achievements and their name and a record of their achievements are permanently filed with the Nebraska State Historical Society.

April's issue of PIREPS will be dealing with our normal run of Aviation Happenings & GA News, including local articles. Keep those flying articles coming. You will see two in April by Lincoln's Scott Stuart and Ed Bowes. Thanks for reading PIREPS!