

## News and Views

### From the Editorial Hangar

First, a word of thanks to Richard Harris for producing *FlightLine* No. 25-09; your “regular” editor being on back-to-back sojourns to the country’s eastern regions. The second of those, to Columbus, Ohio, for the annual reunion of his Vietnam War squadron, allowed a side excursion over to Dayton and the Air Force Museum (the official title just seems ungainly to me.) It had been a couple of years since my last visit but aside from some minor shuffling of positions and the addition of new non-aircraft exhibits, including one honoring the WWII WASPs, not much had changed. Either the newly restored Fieseler Fi-156 Storch was not yet on display, or I blew past it without noticing.

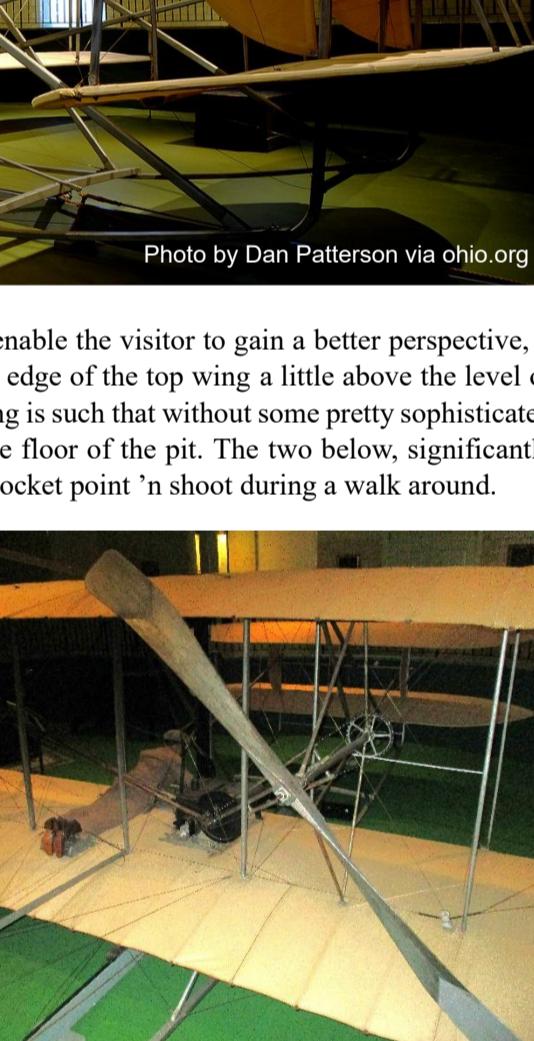
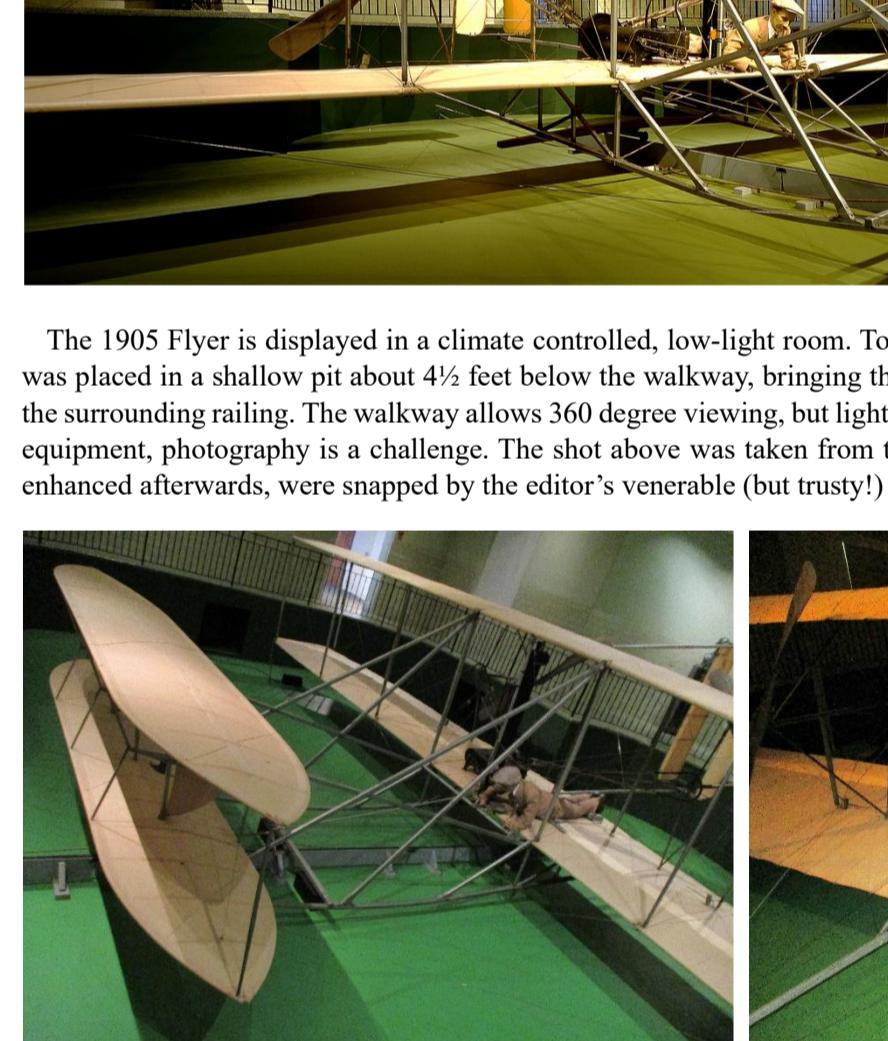
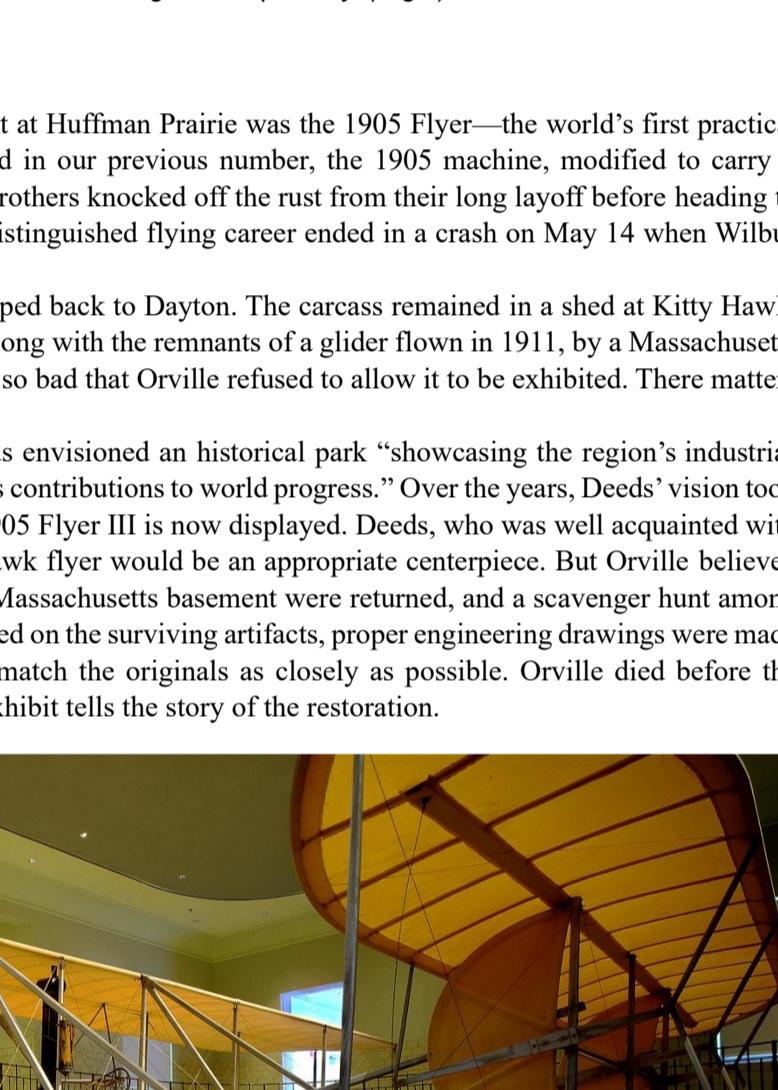
But the bubble-top P-47D in the WWII gallery was definitely missing. Our AAHS colleague Adam Estes advises that it was traded to the “American Heritage Museum in Hudson, Massachusetts (the museum was established by the Collings Foundation) in exchange for a Stearman PT-17 that was flown by Tuskegee Airmen for flight training at Moton Field, Alabama.” The P-47 will be restored to airworthy condition. (Click [here](#) for that story.) For the moment the PT-17 is stored in the museum’s restoration hangar. Related to other restoration/preservation projects, inquiry regarding the eventual display location of the B-17D “The Swoose” met with “we don’t know yet.” An upgraded restaurant is also rumored to be in the works—a welcomed improvement if it happens.

#### Honoring Dayton’s Most Famous Citizens

As the home of the Wright Brothers, Dayton boasts several related historical sites. The Dayton [“Aviation Trail”](#) lists 17 individual sites in the area that have some connection to aviation, although some, such as the Waco Museum, are a ways down the pike from Dayton. One that is just a few miles northeast of the AF Museum is the Huffman Prairie Flying Field. *FlightLine* No. 25-07 (20 July 2025) covered in considerable detail the Wright brothers’ aircraft that came after the pioneering 1903 Flyer and the two years spent developing and test flying the new machines from Torrence Huffman’s cow pasture.

Administered by the National Park Service, the field is part of the sprawling Wright-Patterson AFB complex, so getting there involves taking back roads to avoid the base proper. The one-time prairie land appears to be mowed periodically, otherwise the landscape today is probably not dramatically changed from the way it looked to the Wrights in 1904-05.

Aside from replicas of the hanger/workshop and a catapult tower and launching track, there are only the open fields and a few explanatory plaques. The site is obviously little visited, and had run down noticeably since my previous visit in 2023, presumably due to NPS funding cuts. Nonetheless, to envision the making of so much aviation history while standing on the very ground where it all took place is worth the few extra miles and minutes it takes to make a visit.



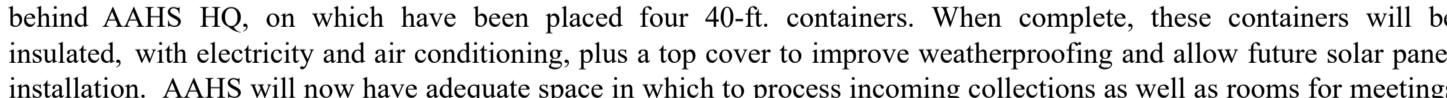
(Above and left) The replica hangar, which is open at both ends, as it was in 2023. Inside are a few tools and other items, with accompanying graphics. Nesting birds threaten to turn it into a guano depository. (Right) The launch rail in 2025. The site appears to be virtually untouched now.

#### The 1905 Wright Flyer

No doubt the most notable aircraft to ever take flight at Huffman Prairie was the 1905 Flyer—the world’s first practical airplane, as it is often correctly dubbed. As recounted in our previous number, the 1905 machine, modified to carry a passenger, served as a refresher trainer as the Wright brothers knocked off the rust from their long layoff before heading to France (Wilbur) and Ft. Myer (Orville) in 1908. It’s distinguished flying career ended in a crash on May 14 when Wilbur “pulled the wrong lever.”

The engine and various other components were shipped back to Dayton. The carcass remained in a shed at Kitty Hawk. With Orville’s permission, the pieces were salvaged, along with the remnants of a glider flown in 1911, by a Massachusetts museum. The cobbled-up restoration that resulted was so bad that Orville refused to allow it to be exhibited. There matters stood for 30-odd years.

Around 1940, Dayton industrialist Edward A. Deeds envisioned an historical park “showcasing the region’s industrial innovations, transportation achievements, and Dayton’s contributions to world progress.” Over the years, Deeds’ vision took shape as today’s Carillon Historical Park, where the 1905 Flyer III is now displayed. Deeds, who was well acquainted with Orville Wright, thought a replica of the 1903 Kitty Hawk flyer would be an appropriate centerpiece. But Orville believed the 1905 machine might be restored. The parts in the Massachusetts basement were returned, and a scavenger hunt among Kitty Hawk residents yielded other bits and pieces. Based on the surviving artifacts, proper engineering drawings were made and with Orville’s input missing parts fabricated to match the originals as closely as possible. Orville died before the work was finished, but [The First Pilot’s Last Project](#) exhibit tells the story of the restoration.

 Photo by Dan Patterson via ohio.org

The 1905 Flyer is displayed in a climate controlled, low-light room. To enable the visitor to gain a better perspective, it was placed in a shallow pit about 4½ feet below the walkway, bringing the edge of the top wing a little above the level of the surrounding railing. The walkway allows 360 degree viewing, but lighting is such that without some pretty sophisticated equipment, photography is a challenge. The shot above was taken from the floor of the pit. The two below, significantly enhanced afterwards, were snapped by the editor’s venerable (but trusty!) pocket point ‘n shoot during a walk around.



For most out-of-town aviation enthusiasts, the Air Force Museum will take top priority in a visit to Dayton. But if you have a little extra time, side trips to the various locations within the [Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park](#) will be of interest. The 1905 Flyer is far from the only attraction in the Carillon Historical Park. For the mechanically minded, there are all sorts of gadgets, from dozens of National Cash Register models to antique autos to a pair of 210-ton Corliss Steam engines. There are various cultural and historical buildings and exhibits throughout the park. Some hoofing will be required, but it’s a pleasant way to spend a few leisure hours.

#### We get letters . . .

Not nearly as often as we’d like, but once in a while one pops up. Our recent History’s Most Influential Aircraft series and Richard Harris’s even more recent contribution listing the 20th Century’s Most Important Aircraft prompted this response from Chris Hansen: “Come on guys. History’s most important aircraft is the C-130.” Chris didn’t add anything to that one-liner, but the long-serving Hercules is without doubt one of history’s most important aircraft. Whether it would be *the* most important is of course a matter of debate.

Which is kinda the purpose of this whole exercise—not to proclaim any one aircraft as the most important, influential, or whatever, but to spark some conversation on the subject. We’ve chosen the term *influential* for our listing. Nobody will argue that the C-130, the Spitfire, the P-51, the Boeing 707, and a dozens of other aircraft were or are *important*. But how much did they influence the development of aviation? To use a sports analogy, a most valuable player award should be exactly that—the player most valuable to his/her team, which does not necessarily equate to the best or most popular player, although that distinction is frequently lost in voting, which is why the Wright Flyer is often cited as the most important aircraft.

To continue with a couple of examples mentioned above, the Spitfire and P-51 unquestionably rank among the most important military aircraft of all time. But we’d argue that despite their outstanding service in WWII neither the Spit nor the Mustang were great influencers of aircraft development. They were design refinements, not breakthrough innovations. The prototypes of both those legendary types, along with the Me-109\*, the Zero, the P-38, P-39, P-40, and P-47 all flew before Pearl Harbor. The later models of the P-51 may well represent the pinnacle of the piston engine fighter aircraft, but it was the end of the line—not much more could be wrung out of that technology. Jets had already flown, and by war’s end the Me-262 actually entered combat, although too late to make much of an impact. But the path forward was clear.

If you have comments or thoughts on this or any other subject related to aviation history, do share with your fellow enthusiasts. At some point, we intend to roll out a proper online blog that will allow real-time reader response. Meanwhile, shoot us an email.

\*Mark Postlethwaite makes a convincing case that Willy himself called the Me-109, not the “correct” Bf-109. But we’ll save that one for another time.



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 (Left) The newly poured slab.

 (Top R) Placing containers.

 (Bottom R) Container entrances, looking northeast.

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Flabob Airport’s ongoing construction project has moved ahead with the pouring of a 35 x 48 ft. concrete slab behind AAHS HQ, on which have been placed four 40-ft. containers. When complete, these containers will be insulated, with electricity and air conditioning, plus a top cover to improve weather protection and allow future solar panel installation. AAHS volunteers are planning the transfer of our book/magazine collection into this new area.

We continue to painstakingly review the materials of the Frank Strnad estate (we’ve now processed about 12 of the 90 boxes) and continue to find historic gems, such as Alexander de Seversky’s pilot’s license! AAHS is also gearing up for another book sale, this time at nearby Cable Airport’s (CCB) 80th Anniversary celebration on Saturday, September 13th. We’ll introduce our brand new AAHS trade show canopy there. Look to our social media clips, and our Facebook page for updates!

By Jerri Bergen

 (Left) The newly poured slab.

 (Top R) Placing containers.

 (Bottom R) Container entrances, looking northeast.

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