

The Lighter~Than~Air Society Newsletter

Issue # 3 July 2009

LTAS Program of "THIS MAN'S NAVY" featured Goodyear Blimps in Tribute to Wallace Beery

By Ron Syroid

The Society held a free movie that featured blimps in war for the public, and it attracted more than just members on a Saturday afternoon in April.

Everyone enjoyed the MGM film "This Man's Navy," as a 60th anniversary memorial to the star of the show, Wallace Beery. The veteran actor died on April 15, 1949. He portrayed the chief pilot of a Navy blimp in World War II. Directed by William A. Wellman, the 1945 movie featured Wallace Beery and James Gleason "As a Two-Fisted Task Force of Red, White and Blue Dynamite" along with a cast of brother Noah Beery, Sr., Tom Drake and Selena Royale. "Old Gas Bag" Ned Trumpet (Wallace Beery) earned his nickname from endless and unbelievable war stories. He even brags about his imaginary wife and son. Tales of the son's talents compete



with his bickering pal Jimmy Shannon (James Gleason), who

doesn't believe him. Ned befriends Jess Weaver (Tom Drake), a handicapped, fatherless boy on crutches because of a horse riding accident, and his mother Maude (Selena Royle), and creates a surrogate family. Ned provides for a surgical operation, Jess improves, joins the blimp crew, and sinks a Japanese submarine. Skeptical Jimmy is convinced. Ned proudly marries Maude.

"Wild Bill" Wellman, an Ace pilot of World War I who directed "Wings" (1927), the first Oscar winner for Best Movie, provides excellent battle scenes of blimps in action. Shots of the Navy blimp were made at Moffett Field in Sunnyvale, Calif., near San Francisco.

Good comedy bits add humor, especially a final scene in India when Ned is reunited with a friendly old elephant. Wellman learned that Beery worked in the circus at age 16 as an assistant elephant trainer and added the scene.

Beery visited Akron in February 1945 for a special premiere of This Man's Navy, which showcased blimps made in Akron. Reportedly 6,000 people turned out for a look at Beery and the film at the

old Loew's theater, now the nonprofit Akron Civic in downtown, according to critic Rich Heldenfels in an Akron Beacon Journal story on April 22 about the free show.

Goodyear gave the actor a plaque for his contribution to the lighter-than-air industry with his starring role in the movie. Beery then presented a plaque to Hugh Allen, a public relations man for Goodyear, for serving as a technical adviser on the film.

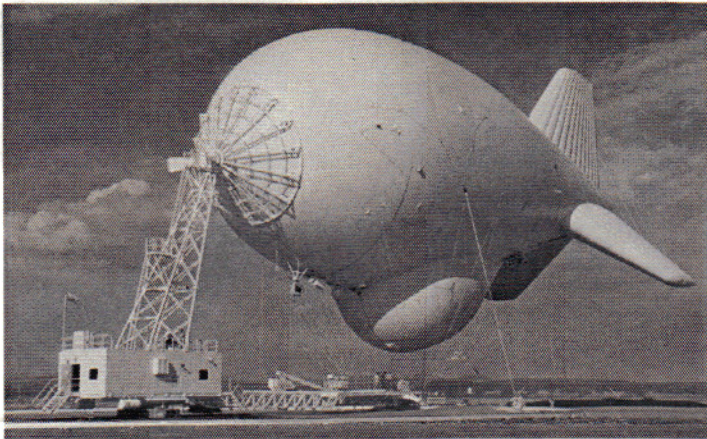
"Crowds thronged the entrance of the Mayflower hotel and of the theater for an hour before the 8:30 p.m. reserved seat show," the Beacon Journal reported at the time. "Others waited in line despite a cold wind from 10 p.m. to be admitted to the midnight premiere for war workers."

Gravel voiced Beery was a burly performer famed for such films as Min and Bill (the first of several collaborations with Marie Dressler) and The Champ. He told the Beacon Journal the premiere was his second visit to Akron, following a stop many years earlier when he was an elephant trainer

with the Sells-Forepaugh circus.

Popcorn, soda and juices were provided, courtesy of the LTAS, at the main branch of the Akron-Summit County Library.

*****SAVE THE DATE*****
October 3, 2009



The annual meeting of The Lighter-Than-Air Society will be held on the evening of Saturday, October 3, 2009, at the Martin University Center on The University of Akron campus. We are delighted to inform you that the program will feature a presentation by Brian Steinkern, of Lockheed Martin, on developments at Lockheed regarding aerostats that support the U.S. Army efforts in Afghanistan and Iraq. Please plan on attending the meeting and learning more about this exciting project. Detailed information about the meeting and dinner will be distributed in early September.

Preserving a Piece of Airship History



By Wayne Buchanan

For many LTA enthusiasts, the appreciation of current advances in the field is accompanied by a desire to see the devices and technology of past eras preserved for future generations. While a great many of such items are lost to decay or simply discarded when past their useful life, it is always a pleasure to see a "cast off" that is preserved because of the foresight to appreciate its historic value. One such item in the collection of the LTAS is a post WWII era Magirus Ladder which is currently in the process of being refurbished so that it might continue to educate for generations to come.

This ladder was manufactured by the Magirus Feuerwehrwerke (Magirus Fire De-

partment Works) of Ulm, Germany; a company which has been making fire fighting equipment since 1864. If you are familiar with photos of the construction of The Akron and Macon in the Goodyear-Zeppelin Airdock, you may have seen the older wooden versions of this ladder being used to access the furthest reaches of those behemoths. Unfortunately, those wooden versions were all dismantled after their usage due to safety concerns. The version currently being restored has a manufacture date of 1954 and was used at Goodyear's Wingfoot Lake Hangar in Sufield Township during a period when they were turning out ZP4K's for the US Navy as well as for maintenance on their own fleet of advertising blimps. Like its wooden predecessor, this steel and aluminum extension ladder can reach approximately 80 feet when fully extended by its hand cranked gear and pulley system. The base of the ladder which houses the gear system is rendered mobile by use of four solid rubber tires, allowing it to be wheeled to whichever section of the blimp required attention.

Destined for the scrap yard, this ladder won a much deserved reprieve when LTAS Board member Joan Reisig in-

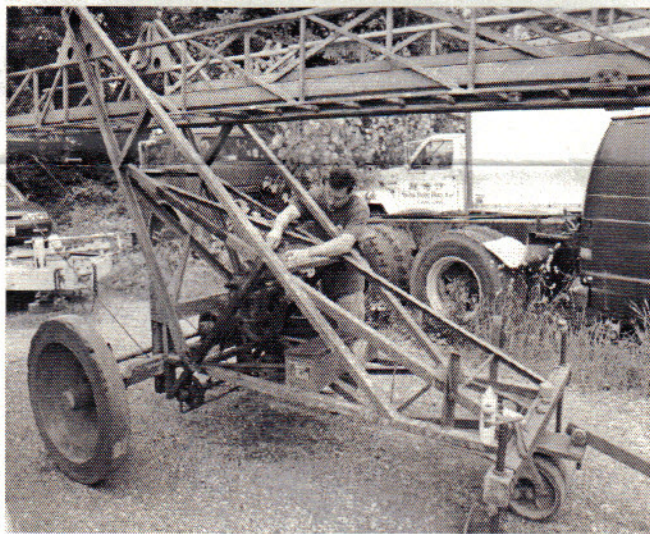
formed Norm Walsh (now deceased), owner of N.E. Walsh Construction Co. of it's historical importance. Mr. Walsh



decided to forego the scrap value and generously donated the ladder to the LTAS. The ladder was first stored at Joan's daughters' farm and then at an indoor location at a Goodyear Tire & Rubber facility. The ladder was recently transported by Lou Hinkle of Lou's Automotive & Dump Truck Service of Akron to a location where there is ample room for the task at hand. After restoration, it will then be moved to the Lock 3 facility in Downtown Akron where there will be the opportunity to display it to the public on special occasions and allow them to get a close-up view of a piece of the rich Airship heritage that Akron is so proud of.

The restoration underway is by no means a complete over-

haul of the piece. Fifty-five years of use, storage and Ohio weather have taken their toll on the paint in many areas and once that protective cover is lost, the bane of steel quickly begins to cast its rusty hue over once bright red components. The first step was to mask off the still very legible stenciling of the Magirus name and the 1954 designation. Since power washing was the best way to remove the peeling paint, grease grime and rust, these original markings had to be



protected from any harm. Even though an original patina is often desirable when it comes to relics of the past, the fact that oxidation was beginning a destructive process made it necessary to stop it in its tracks. When there is more than one of an item you have the option of leaving that item in original condition

because of the ability to view an example in better shape. When an item may be a one of a kind, measures must be taken to keep it from coming to an irrevocable end and denying our descendents the opportunity to see these items firsthand. After removing the surface debris, any loose paint that remains is sanded off and then the exposed rust can be removed via sanding also. Once an acceptable surface is achieved it is prepped, primed and painted with a rust inhibiting paint. Afterwards, the gears and pulleys must be re-lubricated so that the raising/lowering and inclination actions work smoothly. This ladder is still in great working condition and is really quite a sight to behold when its reach is presented. Work is still progressing but it is hoped that by the next newsletter we can announce that this stabilization process has been completed and another piece of LTA history can be studied and enjoyed by all.

The L-T-A Society Directors

David Osterland (Chairman), David Wertz (Vice-Chairman), Sandy Bee Lynn (Secretary), Alvaro Bellon (Treasurer), James Boyazis, Eric Brothers, P. Rendall Brown, Wayne Buchanan, John S. Cunningham, David Gowans, Robert Handelman, John Miller, Steven Paschen, Joan Reisig, Tom Riley, Benjamin Schlater, Brian Steinkerchner, Ron Syroid, Timothy Toppen. Honorary members Howard Flood, Loren Seely, Charles Huettner and James Shock.

The LTA Society, 526 S. Main St. Ste 406,
Akron, OH 44311 Office and Workshop: 330-535-5827



Mike Nerandzic

A caricature by Tom Riley

He's a "one-of-a-kind" for sure. 23 years back he connected with airships (in that "land-down-under) via Alan Bond's entry into that field. In the photo above he's the good lookin' lad on the right. A bear of a guy who splays unparalleled leadership and garners a fierce loyalty from all of his crews everywhere in the world he's commanded airship programs.

We met him for an assignment just outside Paris (Paris Air show Ops), City of Meaux, near Euro Disney. At the time he was commanding two programs; one for Goodyear and another mixed ads in and around Paris. There was a mix of Brit, Aussie, European and American crew among the two operations. He introduced

himself; gave Mrs. "R" an info. sheet with his cell numbers and approx. times we'd be spending at the airport each operating day. They were long days for sure - from early AM to sunset (when the airport ceased ops for the day). The guys in the tower requested a fly-by not unlike Tom Cruise's "Maverick" "buzz" of the NAS tower in the movie Top Gun. They loved it! I swear I could see ripples in their coffee cups as we brushed the structure.

On the last day of Meaux operations a salesman (truck tire) showed up at the airport with a couple dozen major customers who were promised a ride. It was less than an hour before sunset (with the airport preparing to shut down) when the passenger groups were divided up into groups of three and launched into 10 minute flights around the countryside. Naz launched that ship like a rocket, skyward with 30 degrees nose up, quick level off to enjoy the view, then rolled over steaming toward earth for recovery and launch of yet another. We loaded the passengers in and out of our Land Rover with the most expediency possible and this escort service included VIP pet-sitting whilst

their owner enjoyed the flight. The salesman was so delighted with the effort he passed a magnum of fine champagne into each of our vehicles as we headed toward the hotel to pass the drink around just as the shrimp were coming off the "barbie". We of course had our back-up-rotating crew preparing the feast under the direction of Mrs. "R".

That wasn't our first meeting though - he commanded the Goodyear blimp in Sydney during the '96 Olympic Games. He and his second in command, Michael Dawson, flew in fierce winds and unstable conditions during many of the venues in and around the Australian capital. To add to the challenge they worked from a marshy area to be close to downtown. They managed to capture a front page in USA TODAY, color shot of the airship over the event.

Myth, mirth or recorded history? Once, whilst flying the airship across miles and miles of Australian outback; practically deserted highways; hours and hours of grinding away to get from one locale to another it's told he crept up, from behind, as the ground support vehicles plodded along, whereupon he did a practice landing (touch

and go) on the trailer unit much to the surprise of that vehicles drivers.

He's known as "Naz" among his loyal supporters and crews. It seems they'd sign up for an operation under the most extreme conditions with "Naz" in command. During one of his many European operations the home office required the airship's return to the UK in an impossible time-frame from hundreds of miles away, somewhere in the middle of Europe. With a planned fuel stop, probably on the French coast, he rolled off the runway fat with fuel and a videographer aboard, flew a record 24 hours (single pilot) to make the deadline in the UK.

Take a minute to click his resume which I didn't enumerate here. Also take a minute to drop him a note on how much you enjoyed meeting him through the LTAS Newsletter. His website is www.nerandzic.com.

Are your dues up to date?

Check your mailing address on this newsletter to see when your current dues expire.

We save the Society money by not mailing reminders.



THE LIGHTER-THAN-AIR SOCIETY
526 SOUTH MAIN ST STE 406
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PURPOSE: *To further knowledge pertaining to the history, science and techniques of buoyant flight; to encourage the use of lighter-than-air transportation; and to establish and maintain a library and museum on lighter than air.*

Everyone is welcome to join

The LTA Society Membership Application

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____

Email address _____

Types of membership available:

- ☐ Active Membership, U.S. & Canada: \$25 per year
- ☐ Active Membership, all other countries: \$35 per year
- ☐ Benefactor Membership: \$100 per year

☐ Life Active Membership:
(NEW! Senior rates!)

- ☐ \$425 - Up to Age 55
- ☐ \$325 - Age 55 to 70
- ☐ \$225 - Age 70+

- ☐ New Membership Please mark your envelope ATTN NEW MEMBERSHIP or
- ☐ Renewal ATTN RENEWAL to speed processing.
- ☐ Please note: My address has changed to the one written above

Make checks or money-orders in U.S. funds payable to **The Lighter-Than-Air Society** and mail to:
THE LIGHTER-THAN-AIR SOCIETY, 526 S. MAIN ST., STE. 406, AKRON, OH 44311 U.S.A.

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