

WINGS



THINGS

GREAT PLAINS WING - COMMEMORATIVE AIR FORCE

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4th Quarter 2025

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Photo: Greg Jacobson



Airplanes = Maintenance

Great Plains Wing CAF 3rd Quarter Update

The third quarter started off a bit rough for the Wing. During a training flight, an oil leak was discovered on 60. It was determined that internal seals in the starter had failed, allowing engine oil to leak out. The starter was sent out for a rebuild. Around the same time, we found that the fuel selector was sticking, which required it to be removed once again for inspection and maintenance.

On the brighter side, our application for the Ride Program was accepted, and we were able to sell several rides at both Millard and Hastings. Unfortunately, the generator later failed, and despite our efforts, we were unable to find a shop to rebuild it or a suitable replacement. The decision was made to install an alternator in place of the generator under an available STC. 60 was

"Lest We Forget"

able to make another trip to Hastings and sell additional rides, but overall, we remain below the number of rides we had hoped to achieve this year.

Despite the challenges, there were several highlights this quarter. We hosted another successful Fly-In Breakfast in August. While attendance from visiting aircraft was down due to wildfire smoke and haze, the event was still a strong fundraiser for the Wing. Our summer cookouts have wrapped up for the season, all of which were very well-attended and successful. The Wing was also represented at LNK's National Aviation Day celebration, where children participated in a "passport" activity by visiting various booths, followed by an outdoor showing of Top Gun: Maverick projected on the side of a hangar.

Progress on the Ercoupe restoration has been slower than anticipated due to ongoing maintenance issues with aircraft 60, but work continues steadily on reassembly.

The museum remains a continual work in progress as we strive to update exhibits and rotate displays with items from storage to keep things fresh and engaging.

Overall, the Wing is focused on increasing our visibility in the community and participating in more local events. We have several plans in development for next year — so keep an eye on the newsletter, as we may be coming to a city near you

Picture: From the Web, via Jared Albers



Polikarpov Po-2

The Night Witches by Jared Albers

As the Nazi blitzkrieg marched East across the Soviet Union, the Soviet "Amelia Earhart," Marina Raskova, reached out to Joseph Stalin and asked to start several all-female aviation units. Stalin granted the request, the three units were the 586th fighter regiment which flew Yak-1s, the 587th Bomber regiment that flew the Pe-2 and the most famous the 588th Night bomber regiment flying the Po-2.

Upon approval, Raskova selected 400 women for each unit ranging in age from 17 to 27. The selected ladies moved to Engels where everyone was required to train in flight, navigation, ground crew and maintenance.

Their training was substantially shorter than their male counterparts, with them learning in a matter of months instead of years. Those deemed most qualified were sent to the 586th, second most to the 587th and lastly the 588th, how fate is a fickle mistress.

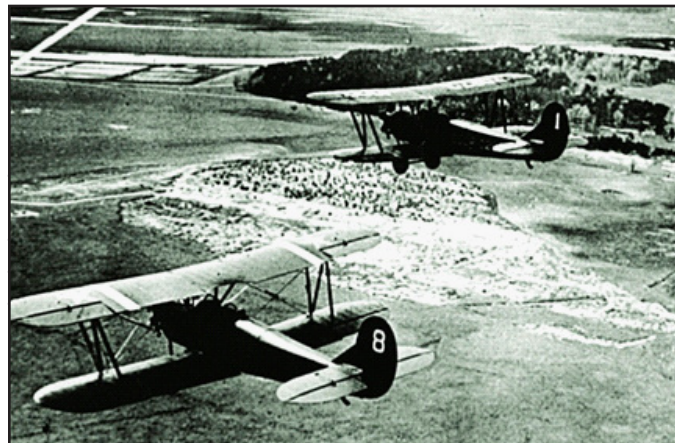
Picture: From the Web via Jared Albers



Marina Raskova

The 588th flew the Polikarpov Po-2, which was a biplane trainer plane/crop-duster. It was crewed by a pilot and a navigator/bombardier. The plane was made of wood and canvas. It offered little protection from enemy fire, especially the incendiary shells. One could turn the plane into fireball. The construction did also aid the Night Witches in that it did not show up on German radar. The Po-2's top speed of 94 mph was slower than the stall speed of the German fighters making it very hard to engage. The Po-2 was extremely maneuverable also adding to the degree of difficulty for a "modern" fighter to engage. It could only carry 770lbs of bombs. This forced the unit to fly extremely low and was the reason for their use only at night.

Photo: From the Web



"Nachthexen," the Night Witches.

Photo: From the Web



Night Witches on the flight line

The Night Witches were not just a nighttime harassment unit like the Japanese "Washing machine Charlie," though that was a side effect of their attacks. Due to the light payload of the plane, they would fly multiple sorties in one night, up to 18. They were active almost every night from the operational start of the unit to the end of the war. They flew over 23,000 sorties, 28,000 hours, with almost every member having over 800 missions by war's end and some with more than 1,000.

Photo: From the Web



*Maintenance in the Night Witches
GPW Groundswine take note: It could be worse!*

It did come at a cost, 32 women lost their lives from combat, crashes or disease. Marina Raskova did not survive the war. She was leading two Pe-2 to an airfield outside Stalingrad when she crashed while making a forced landing. She received the first state funeral of the war. Twenty-three women were awarded the Hero of the Soviet Union, two earned Hero of the Russian Federation, and one earned Hero of Kazakhstan. The Night Witches were the most decorated unit of Soviet Air Force.

Six months after the end of the war the unit was disbanded. After all the hard work and sacrifice the women had endured during the war, they lost their final battle. The Night Witches were not allowed to fly in the Victory Day Parade in Moscow...because their planes were deemed too slow.

Photo: From the Web



Hitting the beach at Tarawa

SgtSiwash, the Combat Marine: 603 Artillery Crewman (Duck)

In 1943, while awaiting combat in New Zealand, a young Marine, PFC Verner Ericson, purchased a raffle ticket in a pub. Against the odds, he won and as a result of his good fortune, his unit, the 1st Battalion of the Tenth Marine Regiment, received its newest recruit, a duck. Widely assumed to be a male duck, Siwash likely made history as the first female to serve in a Marine combat unit. Her true gender was later revealed when she laid an egg. This only happened after she had participated in the invasions of Tarawa, Tinian and Saipan, however. Ericson bestowed the nickname 'Siwash' to the duck naming her after a buddy of his, Sgt Jack Cornelius, from Skagit County Washington.

Ownership of Siwash moved to Cpl Francis Fagan of Chicago in an unknown process, possibly involving a poker game.

On Betio, during the invasion of Tarawa, Siwash engaged a Japanese rooster in hand-to-hand (or beak-to-beak) combat, forcing the rooster to withdraw. She received a Citation from the unit, which reads,

"For courageous action and wounds received on Tarawa, in the Gilbert Islands, November 1943. With utter disregard for his own personal safety, Siwash, upon reaching the beach, without hesitation engaged the enemy in fierce combat, namely, one rooster of Japanese ancestry, and though wounded on the head by repeated pecks, he soon routed the opposition. He refused medical aid until all wounded members of his section had been care of.

Cpl Fagan reported that when shells began landing near their Pack-Howitzer unit, Siwash was the last to waddle into the foxhole and the last to leave, signaling the all-clear.

In true Marine tradition, Siwash was an avid beer-drinker. "Siwash just can't pass up a free drink" Fagan told the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette in 1944. "A long one and a short one is her limit, but she doesn't know it. She won't touch draft beer though. And it's got to be warm beer. The way it was in New Zealand."

Although at the Battle of Saipan, Siwash carried out assignments on a Destroyer, she hit the beach again in the Invasion of Tinian, going ashore with her artillery unit.

As happens with many combat veterans, Siwash had some difficulty readjusting to civilian life. Initially placed on a farm, she did not adapt well.

Sgt Fagan then brought the duck to Chicago, where she was housed at the Lincoln Park Zoo. She also helped with his duties as a Recruiter in the Korean War.

In 1954, While planning to travel to the San Diego Zoo for the Reunion of the 2nd Marine Division, Siwash passed away in Chicago from liver disease. Her Marine buddies vehemently denied that this had any connection with her love of beer.

Services for The Combat Duck were held at the Taxidermy Studio and subsequently, Siwash was donated to the Marine Corps Museum. Unfortunately, the attempt at preservation failed and Siwash's remains are no longer with us.

It would have been worth the trip to the Marine Corps Museum just to see her(Ed).

Photo: From the web



Siwash and Sgt. Fagan enjoying a beer.

2025 CALENDAR OF EVENTS

OCTOBER

11th – Wing Meeting – @ Hanger – 11:00a.m.

NOVEMBER

8th – Wing Meeting – @ Hanger – 11:00a.m.

DECEMBER

13th – Wing Meeting – @ Hanger – 11:00a.m.

13th – Christmas Potluck - @ Hanger – 12:00pm

Monthly Events

Council Bluffs Airport – Great Plains Wing
hosts a monthly cookout on the

3rd Wednesday of each month from

April to October – 5:30-7:00 pm

York, NE Airport • EAA Chapter 1055 hosts a

fly-in breakfast on the 1st Saturday

of every month - 8:00am to 10:00am

Crete, NE Airport • EAA Chapter 569 hosts a

fly-in breakfast on the 3rd Saturday

of every month - 8:00am to 10:00am

If you would like to put a event on this calendar,
please send an email with the necessary information
to Terry Helphrey at terry.helphrey@outlook.com