

# The Lufkin Daily News

## WWII pilot dedicates replica of Navy plane at airport

AMANDA CASANOVA

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Uncle Sam, pointing and with narrowed eyes, wanted Joe Denman to join the Army. But Denman, standing outside the enlistment offices, saw a poster of a young Navy pilot in his crisp white uniform and opted to enlist in the U.S. Navy.

"I decided the girls would like that more," he said.

Eighteen months later, Denman earned his wings and fell in love - with his plane.

"My first love affair was the Corsair," Denman said.

On Saturday, some 65 years later, the retired lieutenant rekindled that affair at a dedication ceremony during the 53rd consecutive Fajita Fly-In at the Angelina County Airport. Denman dedicated a replica of his WWII plane to members of the 153rd Bomber-Fighter Air Group of the Navy.

"As you get older, you think a lot about your life," he said. "I needed to do this to remember my buddies, because there's not many of us left."

Denman's search for a replica of his plane started slowly because of the plane's rarity, but he eventually found one that, after a coat of navy blue paint, was a match. The small-scale version of the Corsair flanks the entrance to Angelina County Airport.

A fence guards the plane, which is suspended in a dive and boasts yellow-tipped propellers, a Navy star emblazoned on the left wing and the numbers "153BF6" printed on the side. At the plane's feet a memorial reads: "In honor of my WWII buddies."

"Your buddies look after you, and you look after them," Denman said.

Before enlisting, Denman was a student at Texas A&M University, set to graduate in 1946. However, enlisting postponed receiving his degree until 1950. Denman said he has no regrets about grounding the idea of college to be in the Navy, even though he never saw any action.

In 1945 Air Group VBF-153 was training in Ocean, Va., and parts of the East Coast for an invasion of Japan. The air group was scheduled to depart from the West Coast and head across the Atlantic, but on Aug. 6, American B-29 bomber Enola Gay dropped an atomic bomb that exploded over Hiroshima, ending WWII.

"We would have been right in the middle of the invasion," Denman said. "At the age of 21 and having been training for over two years, I felt disappointed that I did not get a chance to use my skills that I had trained for as a Navy aviator."

While Denman is no longer manning a 2,450-horsepower fighter plane, he maintains ties to the air through his involvement in the Experimental Aircraft Association. According to its Web site, EAA is "dedicated to providing aviation access to all who wish to participate."

An outreach of that mission statement is the Young Eagles. The program welcomes 8- to 17-year-olds and has flown more than 1,000 kids in the East Texas area.

"Pilots are very unselfish people," Denman said. "Well, we feel sorry for the ground-bound people," joked pilot Steve Reeves, treasurer of EAA, chapter 1219.

With tinted pilot glasses sitting on his nose and a Navy cap perched on his head, Denman said his love for being a pilot is based on "good looks." "When you go down to Lake Sam Rayburn, you see part of the lake," he said, "but a pilot gets to see all of it."

## **Chaos: Storm wreaks havoc on East Texas**

**AMANDA CASANOVA**  
**The Lufkin Daily News**  
Sunday, August 3, 2008

Firefighters from several local departments responded Sunday afternoon to a report of an oil well explosion in the Moffett community.

A Hazmat team had also been dispatched to the scene. Firefighters said they think the fire started when lightning struck the wells, sparking what Steve Lumbley, Moffett fire chief, called a "very dangerous situation."

The two roughly 5,000-gallon tanks boasted towering flames that sent a dark smoke cloud drifting high over the area.

"If one of these wells splits a seam, we'll have burning oil cover the area like a volcano," Lumbley said.

Area firefighters battled the fire well into Sunday night, calling in more manpower and more foam to help contain the blaze. Law enforcement, firefighters, paramedics and other responding agencies were stretched thin starting around 4 p.m. Sunday, as scanner traffic reported numerous structure fires, car accidents, downed trees and power lines, grass fires and small forest fires.

Several incidents occurred almost simultaneously in Huntington, including a tree blocking the roadway on Highway 69, downed power lines on Main Street and a car accident in which a woman was said to be trapped in the vehicle.

At one point, an officer reported on the scanner that Main Street had been temporarily shut down.

"I was down in Burke when the storm started rolling in, and it was bad," said Clint Jones of Lufkin. "Trees were like flopping around and big limbs were breaking out. I saw a transformer explode. But nothing like tornadoes or anything. Just downed power lines and stuff like that."

## **Football faithful start lining up at 8 a.m. Sunday for chance to buy Lufkin Panther season tickets that go on sale today**

**AMANDA CASANOVA**

Sunday, August 10, 2008

Ellen Elliott leans forward in her maroon chair outside of the Lufkin ISD Transportation building on Sunday afternoon, flipping a page in her book. She is first in line for Lufkin Panther season football tickets, one of roughly 30 people camping out for ticket sales beginning today.

She and her husband, Terry Elliott, have been staked out in front of the doors since 8 a.m. Sunday. But she came prepared.

"I have bug spray," she said, laughing and pointing to a blue bag behind her, "and I have lots of company."

Snaking around the glass building, men and women formed a line that stretched along the sidewalk. Some hid under umbrellas, trying to stay cool, while others slouched in their chairs for a nap or talked to neighboring people.

"We might be crazy," said Juan Guerrero, who had arranged for his meals to be brought to him, "Or we're just diehard Lufkin Panther fans."

To give fans and parents an increased chance at buying season tickets, 1,100 general admission seats on the home side of Abe Martin Stadium were converted to reserved seating.

However, even with the additional seating, fans like Guerrero said it was still necessary to camp out.

"I mean, if you want the good seats," he said, drawing nods of agreement from those around him.

While Abe Martin's capacity is close to 10,000, acquiring season tickets is known as a community challenge, with fans relying on word-of-mouth to earn a seat at Abe Martin.

Donovan Rudd, whose children attend Hudson schools, arrived at 9 a.m. Sunday, making him third in line. He also came prepared for a night outside, bringing a cot, plenty of fluids and a deck of cards to pass the time.

"I'm here until I get tickets," he said.

Guerrero said he anticipates a solid season from the highly-ranked team, despite the fact that the Panthers have not seen a deep playoff run since 2005.

"I expect what I always expect," he said, "and that is to go all the way." "We're spoiled to them winning," Rudd added.

With a bid for a state championship always looming, Panther fans are gearing up for the season that starts Aug. 29 at Tyler Lee.

However, Elliott said she looks forward to simply seeing her daughter, sophomore junior varsity cheerleader Susan Elliott, down on the field.

And while her daughter says rotating shifts and camping out for tickets is "hilarious," Elliot can only respond with a shrug.

"It's Lufkin Panther football," she said, smiling.