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DELAWARE AVIATION MUSEUM FOUNDATION

'Panchito' is a rare B-25 Mitchell bomber, the kind of aircraft that daring U.S. aviators flew in the long-distance Doolittle Raid on Tokyo in World War II.

World War II's iconic B-25 bomber to buzz Culpeper

CAF Capital Wing's Warbird Showcase will return this spring

BY CLINT SCHEMMER

CULPEPER STAR-EXPONENT

This spring, one of World War II's most iconic aircraft will take to the skies over Culpeper, and beyond.

One of the few surviving North American B-25 "Mitchell" bombers, made famous when

used in U.S. aviators' daring Doolittle Raid on Tokyo, will visit Culpeper Regional Airport on Saturday, April 10.

The twin-tail, twin-engine bomber will also participate in an Independence Day flyover of Culpeper with vintage aircraft preserved by the Commemorative Air Force's Capital Wing, which is based at the regional airport.

The B-25, named "Panchito," will make flights around

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Warbirds

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Culpeper on April 10 and take up paying passengers for what one aviation enthusiast promises is “an awesome experience.”

The bomber will join the Capital Wing for its 2021 Warbird Showcase Tour of the mid-Atlantic region, the all-volunteer Capital Wing announced Wednesday. The tour will offer flight adventures in four different World War II aircraft to participants, starting at just \$99.

“Having this combination of warbirds available to the public at one time is quite unique,” said Kevin Peacock, spokesman for the Delaware Aviation Museum Foundation, which preserves and flies “Panchito.”

The Warbird Showcase Tour has already scheduled events in Culpeper, Warren-



JOHN LACKEY/FLYBYPHOTOGRAPHY

“Doris Mae,” a General Motors TBM Avenger, is flown by the Commemorative Air Force’s Capital Wing, based at Culpeper Regional Aircraft.

ton, Richmond and Fredericksburg, plus Hagerstown, Md., and Georgetown, Del. Other mid-Atlantic locations will be added later. The tour’s first stop is Culpeper Regional Airport on April 10.

One package that’s new this year offers a “two for one” special. People buy a ride in the wing’s TBM Avenger, the same kind of bomber that Navy pilot George H.W. Bush—later the nation’s 41st president—flew off an aircraft carrier in the South Pacific during WWII,

and also get a free ride in its two-seater Stinson L-5 spotter aircraft. The giant, folding-wing Avenger was the war’s largest and heaviest single-engine bomber.

Also new this year will be a full “Torpedo Mission” flight in the TBM Avenger, named “Doris Mae,” that includes an extensive pre-flight briefing by the torpedo bomber’s pilot, the Capital Wing said.

Also appearing in 2021 will be the Stinson Sentinel “Gayle Ann,” considered to be the first Forward Air Controller airplane, and the open-cockpit Boeing PT-17 Stearman biplane, which was the primary trainer for all of the war’s Army Air Force and Navy pilots.

The Capital Wing is bringing “Panchito” to Culpeper in partnership with the Delaware Aviation Museum Foundation. Both groups are nonprofit 501(c)(3) organizations, so ticket purchases

may be tax-deductible.

On its flights in the Culpeper area, “Panchito” will have no set flight path, Peacock said.

“Often, we will ask our passengers if they live close by,” he said. “If they do and if possible, we will fly over their home, at a safe altitude.”

“Panchito” has visited Culpeper annually for each of the past 10 years, Peacock told the Star-Exponent.

“A long time ago, the FAA determined it was in the public’s best interest to create a way for people to experience what it was like for the men and women who flew warplanes in combat, so they understand what the history, sights, sounds and even smells were like,” he said.

Globally, only about 20 B-25s are left that fly on a regular basis, he said. About 30 bombers remain that are still flyable.

The B-25 is the only air-

craft in the U.S. military inventory to be named after a person, Gen. Billy Mitchell, a strong-willed Army aviation advocate who became known as “the father of the U.S. Air Force.”

The original “Panchito,” which was part of the Army Air Force’s 396th Bomb Squadron, 41st Bomb Group, flew bombing missions against Japan in 1945.

The original aircraft was featured in the movies “30 Seconds over Tokyo” and “Catch-22,” the 1970 movie adapted from Joseph Heller’s satirical novel of the same name.

Seats sell out quickly, so advance ticketing is encouraged. Any unsold advance tickets will be available for sale the day of the Warbird Showcase.

All showcase events will observe federal, state and local COVID-19 pandemic guidelines.

People who reserve via the Delaware website book a date, time and seat selection.

The B-25 flights last 30 minutes from the time the bomber moves from its parking place to when it returns.

“Culpeper is an easy airport to fly in and out,” Peacock said. “That means the aircraft spends very little time on the ground and passengers receive more time in the air.”

“Panchito” holds six passenger; all seats are the same price, \$450.

“The proceeds help maintain the aircraft so the public has the rare opportunity to experience flight in a WWII bomber and get some sense of what it was like for those young men in WWII,” Peacock said.

The same can be said of the Capital Wing’s vintage aircraft, too.

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