



FLIGHT-WATCH



VOLUME 185

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OCTOBER, 2007

II.

GENESIS OF THE SCRIPT

AIR SHOW PILOT

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN THE BATTLE OF MIDWAY, ROME, GEORGIA - - 2007

I.

WHY REENACT THE BATTLE OF MIDWAY?

Following the 2006 Air Show in Rome, Georgia, Gene Schayer told me that the theme for the 2007 Air Show would be to honor Naval Aviation. That decision had been made since Admiral John Towers, a pioneer and champion of aviation in the U.S. Navy, was born in Rome, Georgia. Honoring Naval Aviation at the 2007 Air Show seemed like a natural way to honor the memory of Admiral Towers. When Gene told me of his plans, I told him that we should reenact the Battle of Midway – the most decisive naval engagement between the American and Japanese navies during WWII. I knew that reenacting the Battle of Midway would be no small feat. We needed a host of Japanese fighters and bombers, a number of U.S. Navy carrier aircraft, a Navy patrol plane and a North American B-25 Mitchell bomber. It occurred to me that writing a script for the Battle of Midway would be a way to tell a story with dramatic content, display exciting flight sequences to the crowd, and also educate the air show audience.

While flying the Kate at the Columbus Air Show in March of 2007, I saw Gene and his wife Frances at the air show dinner. He asked me how I was coming along with writing the script for the Battle of Midway. After I saw Gene at the Columbus air show, one day when I had some extra time, I began sketching out the script. In my mind, the Battle of Midway would not be an isolated incident. Rather, this decisive battle of the Great Pacific War would be placed in a proper perspective. That meant that we had to have the Japanese surprise attack on Pearl Harbor, followed by the Doolittle Raid on Tokyo which set the stage for the decisive battle at a small island in the Pacific called Midway. Having written my book and screenplay *Preemptive Strike*, I had more than a passing knowledge of the facts and circumstances leading up to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. One of my good friends, Chuck Wheeler, served aboard the aircraft carrier *Enterprise* during the Battle of Midway. The history leading up to the battle and the events during the battle did not present a challenge. My concern was having an aerial performance that moved constantly just like a good motion picture, without a lot of dead air time. However, at the same time, I had to have adequate separation for the aircraft to ensure the aerial choreography could be safely executed.

It may sound like a simple task to have thirteen or fourteen airplanes flying within four miles of an airport making diving passes on the airport for simulated bombing runs and strafing attacks and approaching the airport at speeds substantially in excess of 200 miles an hour at altitudes of 100 feet and then pulling up away from the airport after those passes are complete only to have dogfights thereafter between Japanese and American airplanes, but I can assure you that this is not a simple process.

The first thing that occurred to me was to have four holding areas where we could shuttle the airplanes in and out fairly quickly. I decided to have the Japanese aircraft hold to the west, the B-25 hold to the north, the American fighter planes and bomber planes hold to the east, and the PBV hold to the south. Since we would have both American fighters and bombers holding to the east, I would hold the American bombers at 1,000 feet above ground level and the American fighters at 1,500 feet above ground level. The holding patterns for the B-25 to the north and the PBV Catalina to the south would be easy, since they would be flying solo. The Japanese aircraft could simply hold in trail to the west. It seemed to me that having holding patterns four nautical miles from the center of the airport would be adequate to separate the four holding areas of aircraft but also allow the aircraft to be brought in very quickly by the air boss when needed.



Beginning with the premise that we would have four holding areas, the first task was to bring the Japanese aircraft in for a surprise attack on Pearl Harbor. The second thought was to have the crowd hear the speech given by President Roosevelt on December 8, 1941, the “date that will live in infamy” speech. That would set up America’s desire to avenge Pearl Harbor in the form of the Doolittle Tokyo Raid. That meant that the second flight sequence would consist of the B-25 Mitchell Bomber coming in from the north and over flying the runway while explosives occurred. In order to keep the tempo of the performance moving, I had two passes by the Japanese aircraft during the Pearl Harbor attack and two passes by the B-25 during the Tokyo Raid. Because the B-25 would only do two passes, there was not a great deal of time for the Japanese aircraft to depart the airport after the Pearl Harbor attack, rejoin and set up for the attack on Midway Island.

Because the American fighter planes at Midway did not enjoy a great deal of success in stopping the Japanese bombers and fighters that attacked Midway Island, I thought the way to demonstrate this to the audience was to have the Japanese aircraft come in from the north and the American aircraft taking off to the north. The Japanese aircraft would race by the American airplanes as they sought to intercept the Japanese aircraft. That is precisely what we did. The Japanese aircraft set up for a three mile final on Runway 19 heading south just as the American aircraft were taking off from Runway 01 heading north. To ensure separation, the Japanese aircraft would take the east side of the runway while the American aircraft would take the west side of the runway.

During the show, if the aircraft were not protected from a collision hazard by taking opposite sides of the runway, then the Japanese aircraft flew high in the event of a near mid-air and the American aircraft flew low because the American aircraft were just taking off. After the attack on Midway Island, the Japanese aircraft would turn to the east allow the American aircraft to get on their tails and then make a pass during Runway 01 flying north with the American aircraft in hot pursuit. Of course, the Japanese aircraft would be trailing smoke during this low pass down Runway 01.



After the Battle of Midway dogfight, the American fighters would turn east while the Japanese fighters turned west. The American fighters would hold to the east while the Japanese fighters headed south to intercept and shoot down the American TBM Avenger torpedo bombers. As the Avengers turned from south to north for an extended final down Runway 01, Zero No. 1 would slide in behind Avenger No. 1 and Zero No. 2 would fly behind Avenger No. 2. The aircraft would then fly in trail for their low pass down Runway 01. After the Avenger shoot down, the Avengers would turn right and hold to the east while the Zeros would turn left and hold the west where the Nakajima “Kate” would be holding.

After the Avenger shoot down, with the Avengers holding to the east and the Zeros holding to the west, the Dauntless dive bomber would climb high above the airport for the climax of the show when three Japanese aircraft carriers were severely damaged in rapid succession by U.S. Navy dive bombers. Because we only had one SBD-5 Dauntless dive bomber, an AD-1 Skyraider would have to augment the dive bomber force even though the Skyraider did not enter service during WWII. My expectation was that the bomb explosions during this dive bombing attack would be the largest explosions during the air show.



After the American dive bombers essentially destroyed three of the Japanese carriers, then the Japanese would take revenge by attacking the American aircraft carrier *Yorktown*, and the Japanese aircraft would, again, come in from the west, make wide descending turns down Runway 01, bomb the *Yorktown*, climb up to the east, and once again be intercepted by American fighter planes. Following the interception, the Japanese aircraft would again make low passes down Runway 01 with the American aircraft in trail.



In writing the script it occurred to me that I had to set up the attack of the American dive bombers by the tragic loss of Torpedo Squadron 8. VT-8 was an American torpedo squadron based on the *Enterprise*. All of the men and aircraft of that squadron were lost in the attack on the Japanese fleet except for one man, Henson George Gay. Gay was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for his heroic actions during the Battle of Midway. While the loss of this torpedo squadron seemed to serve no purpose at the time, it did have a very dramatic effect. The Japanese fighter planes were so busy shooting down the American torpedo planes that the American Dauntless dive bombers flying at high altitude were able to approach the target without being intercepted by the Japanese fighter planes. After I had written, edited and rewritten my works I emailed my Battle of Midway script to Gene Schayer as well as George Cline, our air boss and Hugh Oldham, our air show announcer. Everyone recognized the script for what it was, a complex but exciting aerial choreography.

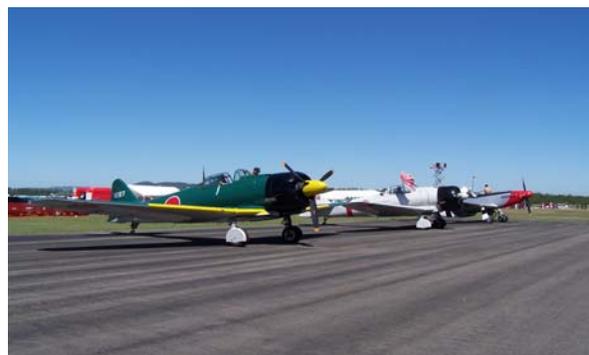
III.

ACQUIRING THE RESOURCES TO FILM THE BATTLE OF MIDWAY IN HIGH DEFINITION

When I flew the Kate to Neighbor Day at the Peachtree Dekalb Airport in June, one of my good friends, Bill Bell mentioned that he knew someone in television in Atlanta. That person, in turn, worked with a gentleman named Jack English. Jack English had worked as the managing producer of *First Flight*, a TV series that appeared on A&E that was hosted by Neil Armstrong. I called Jack on a Sunday afternoon, and he was receptive to my ideas about filming air shows. We met early on a Wednesday morning when he took me for a tour of our local public broadcasting station in Atlanta. Broadcast Solutions, Inc. Jack explained, was a private company that did a great deal of work for Georgia Public Broadcasting. Jack proceeded to get on the telephone with a pilot who flew a helicopter with a gyro-stabilized high definition camera. The next thing I knew, Jack was making plans to have the helicopter and camera equipment in Rome, Georgia to film the Battle of Midway. Jack's efforts were in conjunction with one of his projects, a film on the *First Hundred Years of Flight in Georgia*. Jack would get footage from the air show for his project, and my production company, Flying Tigers, LLC, would also get access to and use of the film by virtue of having written the Battle of Midway script and arranging to get Broadcast Solutions on the Rome Airport for the filming.



Not only was I collaborating with Jack English, but Gene Norman had become a good friend of mine. Gene Norman is very accomplished videographer and film editor who loves old airplanes. On several occasions, I took Gene Norman flying with me. He went with me on the back of the Kate to the Columbus Air Show in March of 2007, and he developed a beautiful two minute video tape complete with stunning photography and exciting music. In time, Gene Norman struck a deal with Gene Schayer to film the air show in Rome, and I drew up a contract that would allow Transportation Expo, Broadcast Solutions, Inc. and Flying Tigers, LLC to exploit the film taken at the Rome Air Show. It was also decided that we would have all of the pilots and performers at the show sign releases permitting the commercial exploitation of their images in film or movie developed by Transportation Expo, Broadcast Solutions, Inc. and/or Flying Tigers, LLC.



IV. THE BEST LAID PLANS GO ASTRAY

One of the problems with being an air show pilot is you have to have a real job to support your passion. My real job is that of a lawyer. I had a client in economic distress and was trying to save the company a couple days before the air show was scheduled to begin. On Thursday morning, September 13, 2007, Keith Wood (who was going to fly the Dauntless) gave me a call on my cell phone and suggested that we depart that afternoon so that we could beat the influence of Tropical Storm Umberto. I packed my flight gear and overnight bag planning to meet Keith late in the afternoon on the 13th and was on conference calls much of the day trying to save a company in economic distress. Waiting by the telephone for an important phone call, I saw the storm clouds moving in. Then the rain began, and I did not believe there was any way we could make it to Rome, Georgia on the 13th of September. Because I wanted to get an early start the next morning, and the airport where the Japanese bomber is based is an hour drive away, I drove across town to get a hotel room close to the airport so I could leave early shortly after sunrise. I met Keith and the other pilots at the Dixie Wing early in the morning of September 14. The weather was low overcast conditions with intermittent rain. We spent the entire day, from 8:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. trying to get out of Falcon Field Airport to Rome, Georgia with no success. During that day we moved airplanes around, put canopy covers on, moved airplanes in and out of hangars, and endured a substantial level of frustration. We vowed to meet at the airport the very next morning and get an early launch in hopes of making the briefing which we thought was at 10:00 a.m. on Saturday, September 15, 2007.

Initially, Saturday morning dawned clear, but in a short period of time, low clouds had developed, and it was not technically legal for us to depart the Falcon Field Airport with a ceiling of 600 feet overcast and four miles visibility. We constantly kept checking the weather updates and calling Flight Service, but it was not until 10:20 a.m. that we were able to depart. John Currenti led the flight in Jim Buckley's SNJ-5 Texan while Keith Wood flew the SBD-5 Dauntless, and I flew in the Kate. Jim Buckley was also flying in our vicinity in the P-51D Mustang, and Pop Wilson was flying in our vicinity in the newly-restored LT-6 Texan. I flew off John's right wing until we approached the Rome Airport when Keith moved over from John's left wing to John's right wing, as we set up for echelon right formation as we over flew the airport. After flying over the runway, we made snappy left turns in sequence and landed about 3,000 or 4,000 feet apart. Taxiing in, we were assigned our tie down spots and left our aircraft in hopes of getting a briefing for the air show.

We could find none of the other pilots who would be flying the Battle of Midway sequence, so we had them summoned over the public address system. Their position was since we had not attended the briefing we could not fly. They were backed up by the FAA operations inspector. It was ironic that the man who wrote the script could not fly in the air show because he missed the briefing, but that was a decree I had to accept. To say I was unhappy would be an understatement.

Being on the ground during the Battle of Midway reenactment on Saturday gave me a chance to see the flight from the ground and hear the music and determine that my vision had come to be a reality. It was a very moving experience as I was acknowledged by the air show announcer as the person who wrote the script. I stood on the stage of the VIP platform and took my bow and enjoyed the moment.



V.

FLYING FORMATION WITH A HELICOPTER

After the air show was concluded, Keith and I briefed with a helicopter pilot named Paul who had been brought to the airport by Jack English. It was determined that Keith (again, flying the Dauntless) and I would take off in formation and Paul would catch up with us during our take off in the helicopter. After a briefing, Keith and I taxied out to Runway 01 with me in the No. 1 position and Keith in No. 2. I nodded my head, and our aircraft accelerated down the runway. The next thing I knew a helicopter was off our left wing filming our take off. We climbed out to the northwest and eventually turned west with the helicopter off our left side. We were given instructions by Paul in the helicopter as we flew along in formation. When Paul wanted me on Keith's right wing, I would cross under from his left wing to his right wing, and we did a series of turns while Paul captured this on the camera in the helicopter. In time Paul had Keith and I going to an in trail formation with turns to simulate a dog fight. Then, Paul had us lower our landing gear and flaps and reduce our airspeed as we flew along at 80-90 knots with the helicopter off to one side. In time, Paul photographed the aircraft individually and then we returned to the airport for landing. One unusual thing I recall during the formation flight with the helicopter was a lady with an oriental accent talking over the Rome intercom frequency about airplanes flying over Rome in formation. I could not tell whether she was a pilot or merely someone with access to a hand held radio.

Returning to the airport, we landed, fueled and secured the aircraft. I then met my wife Marlene so that we could prepare for the dinner that will be held at the Forum in Rome. Swinging by the hotel, I got cleaned up and changed clothes, and we enjoyed dinner with the other air show performers and volunteers, and Gene Schayer introduced my friend, Chuck Wheeler, who served on the *Enterprise*. Chuck told us about the Battle of Midway and other stories, and he received a standing ovation.

VI. FINALLY - - THE BIG DAY ARRIVES

Keith and I resolved that we would be early for the 9:00 a.m. briefing for the Battle of Midway flight. We arrived in the briefing room where an award was given to George Cline, the air boss by Jim Terry, the pilot of the B-25, since George had forgotten to issue landing instructions to the B-25. The result of that had been that after the aircraft had landed and taxied down the taxi way and stopped in front of the crowd to gun their engines and blow smoke, George then called on the B-25, and a final bomb explosion was activated to announce the end of the show. That had not been the plan. The plan had been for the B-25 to land with the other aircraft. George confessed his mistake during the Battle of Midway briefing at 9:00 a.m. However, George decided that it looked great to have the B-25 flying overhead as the final explosion took place, and the script was amended accordingly.

Before the Battle of Midway briefing began, George and I talked about the flight sequence schedule which is a companion to the script. While the script describes the action that is going to take place and the narration of the air show announcer, the minute by minute activities of the airplanes and their flight paths was the subject of a flight sequence schedule I had written to compliment the script. George mentioned that the action in the flying went a little faster than had been envisioned in the flight sequence schedule. As I told George, when I wrote the flight sequence schedule, I was flying the routine in my head, and I decided to be more conservative with time by getting extra time for actions as opposed to compressing time and rushing the pilots during their performances. As it turned out, the pilots were able to react to the instructions more quickly than I had anticipated and the show was about 30 minutes long as opposed to 40 minutes.

After the Battle of Midway briefing at 9:00 a.m., we had the standard pilot's briefing at 10:00 a.m., and we were concluded by about 10:30 a.m. This gave us time to walk about the airport and view the aircraft before our engines started at 3:00 p.m.



VII.

THE FINAL PRE-FLIGHT BRIEFING

Since we anticipated we would start engines at 3:00 p.m., the pilots involved in the Battle of Midway reenactment had a final briefing out on the flight line at 2:00 p.m. This last minute discussion confirmed that all passes down the runway would be to the west side of the runway except for the low pass by the Japanese aircraft flying in a head-on pass towards the American aircraft when the Japanese aircraft would keep to the east side of the runway. We also confirmed that during the Avenger shoot down by the Japanese Zeros, the Kate would simply orbit to the west, since only two Zeros were needed. Dan Reedy, pilot of one of the three Zeros that had flown in the Saturday show had to go home for a family emergency which still left us with three Japanese airplanes, two Zero fighters and the Kate bomber.



VIII. IN THE AIR AT LAST

By 3:00 p.m., I was strapped in my airplane with my knee board and notes strapped to my left leg. As Zero No. 1 began to spin his finger, I turned on the fuel selector, primed the engine, engaged the master switch and activated the starter. After two blades, the magneto switch was turned on, and the engine came to life. The two Zeros and the Kate started at roughly the same time. Shortly after our aircraft came to life, I saw Zero No. 1 taxiing outbound for the runway. Zero No. 1 was a grey aircraft flown by Doug Jackson, and he was followed by Zero No. 2 (flown by Billy Parker) which was green with a grey underside. We taxied out for the active runway in trail and reached an intersection short of the threshold of Runway 01 where we did our pre-flight run ups. We were followed by Bob Ford in an AT-6 Texan who would be performing aerobatics while we orbited to the west. Bob Ford's aerobatic routine would be the last flight routine of the air show before the Battle of Midway reenactment.

As we sat on the ground after our engine run ups had been complete, the B-25 was initially slow to start. However, in time, it came to life, and we were cleared to depart from Runway 01 with a left turn to the west. As we had agreed upon, as quickly as the tail of the aircraft in front of us came up, the next pilot would take off. Because the Zeros were faster and lighter than the Kate, when they made a left turn, I had to cut them off and fly a smaller radius turn to keep up with them. We orbited at 1,500 feet about three miles to the west of the airport for a few minutes until air boss called in one minute prior to the start. We then rolled out on a heading to the east about 500 feet apart and 1,500 feet above the ground. Over flying the airport, we made descending right turns to the south paralleling the runway and then turned again to the north and flew down the runway at about 100 feet above the ground. As we did so, explosions occurred below us on the ground, and we pulled up sharply and then banked to the right followed by sharp turns back to the left to fly down the same runway in the opposite direction. Again, there were explosions below us including the fireballs of exploding gasoline. After our Pearl Harbor attack, we banked sharply to the right and climbed to the west to hold. As we held, I could see the B-25 Mitchell flying first down Runway 19 to the south followed by a course reversal and a low pass flying up Runway 01. During both low passes, there were simulated bomb explosions.



After the Tokyo Raid of the B-25 was completed, we once again rolled out on a heading to the east and made descending right turns to the south when we flew up Runway 01 on a low pass and then made right turns to the east to be intercepted by the American aircraft. During this pass I saw a plume of smoke erupt in front of the Kate and decided to fly right through it. I wish I had been wearing a helmet camera, because the scene was very striking. A Wildcat jumped in behind the Zero No. 1 flown by Doug Jackson, and a Corsair jumped in behind Zero No. 2, flown by Billy Parker, and I fell in trail behind the Corsair. As I was coming in for my pass, the air boss told me to tighten up my turn and shoot directly for the runway because the Corsair was much faster than me. The north runway was over flown first by Zero No. 1 followed by the Wildcat then by Zero No. 2 followed by the Corsair, followed by yours truly in the Kate. The Japanese aircraft broke off to the left while the Allied fighters broke off to the right. Then the air boss called in the Avengers for their low pass, and the two Zeros departed the west holding area to rendezvous with the Avengers to the south of the airport and fly up Runway 01 with Zero No. 1 behind Avenger No. 1 and Zero No. 2 behind Avenger No. 2. In just a few moments, the two Zeros were headed back to rendezvous with me, and we held while the SBD Dauntless and the AD-1 Skyraider delivered the *coup de grace* to the Japanese Imperial Navy aircraft carrier formation. This was the climax of the show.





Finally, the Japanese took revenge in the form of a retaliatory attack by fighters and bombers flown from the *Hiryu* and we once again rolled out on a heading to the east over flying the airport and making descending right turns to the south with a low pass up Runway 01 with simulated bomb explosions below us. During this run, a column of smoke appeared before me. I eased back on the stick and skimmed over the top, just like flying over a cloud. After we finished our pass up Runway 01, we pulled up abruptly and rolled to the east where once again, the Wildcat got behind Zero No. 1 and the Corsair got behind Zero No. 2 with the Kate following behind the Corsair.



At this stage in the air show, something unexpected happened. Roger Crawford, our pyrotechnics expert, had radioed the air boss that he had an extra explosive charge left. The air boss called in the two TBM Avengers for low passes down Runway 19 to the south at the same time we were commencing our low pass up Runway 01 to the north. As he issued this instruction, the air boss emphatically told the Zeros, Allied fighters and Kate to maintain 1,000 above ground level during our next pass. So, as we zoomed up Runway 01 to the north, we had aircraft going in the opposite direction less than 1,000 feet below us. It was pretty exciting flying in trail of other aircraft with a significant explosion underneath and viewing the Avengers going the opposite direction just below the Kate. As I recall, we orbited to the east for one more orbit followed by a final low pass up Runway 01. Following that low pass, we were given clearance to land and we landed in sequence on Runway 01. The Kate was the last aircraft to land as the B-25 continued to orbit to the north. As we lined up on the taxi way that paralleled the active runway, the noses of our aircraft faced the crowd. On the signal of the air boss, we revved up our engines and turned on our smoke systems and the B-25 came roaring down Runway 19. As the B-25 flew overhead, the final bomb explosion was activated. That concluded our reenactment of the Battle of Midway. As we taxied in, we would wave to the crowd, only to receive waves back to us. It was clear the people in the audience really enjoyed the show.

In time, we taxied our aircraft back to the warbird ramp where we shut down our engines and fueled up for the trip home. A quick call to the FAA Flight Service Station in St. Petersburg confirmed that the weather was good and there were no matters of concern for my return flight to Falcon Field. In all the confusion of the retreating crowd, my wife had left me a voice mail on my cell phone that she was driving home, and I saw some of my buddies who are fellow pilots, and we talked about the air show performance.



IX. THE TRIP BACK HOME

The return trip to Falcon Field was a simple flight. The magical box in my aircraft which is called a global positioning system receiver gave me a precise ground track throughout the flight, a far cry from the days when I learned to fly when flight calculations were made with pencil, a plotter and a rudimentary mechanical computer which we called an E6-B.

After landing at Falcon Field and taxiing back to the hangar of the Dixie Wing of Commemorative Air force, I was met by Jack Van Ness and we hooked the Kate up to a tug and pushed it off to the side to make room for the other Dixie Wing aircraft that would be following me. In time, our other aircraft arrived at Falcon Field including the C-45, LT-6 the Dauntless and the Mustang. When all the aircraft of the Dixie Wing are placed in the hangar, it is a very crowded facility. According to my notes, I shut the engine of the Kate down at 6:03 p.m. It was nearly 7:30 p.m. by the time all the aircraft had been installed in the hangar. For nearly an hour and a half we had a rodeo of tugs and airplanes moving about the facility getting the aircraft in the hangar. I called Marlene on my cell phone and told her I would be late for dinner, and she said she had it in the oven, and it would be there when I got home.

**X.
REFLECTIONS ON THE BATTLE
OF MIDWAY REENACTMENT AT
ROME**

Looking back on the reenactment of the Battle of Midway, it was a very ambitious project. We had over one dozen aircraft flying at high speeds and low altitudes within four nautical miles of an airport with explosions and simulated anti-aircraft fire going off during the midst of this flight sequence. While the flight actions of the individual pilots were not necessarily complicated, the flight sequence schedule was just like a fine watch. It was intricate and every piece was interconnected. A mistake by one pilot could blow the whole show. The pilots who flew the show were very experienced and competent and they were also very alert. Not only were the pilots alert, but the air boss was also alert as he had given instructions to individual aircraft if he saw spacing or timing issues emerging in the flight sequence or traffic flow.



From a personal standpoint, it was a challenge to keep up with the replica Zero fighter planes which were lighter and faster than the Kate. Using geometry to cut off the Zeros in their turns during the holding patterns was the only way to keep the necessary spacing within our flight.

Once again, I had wished that I had a helmet cam aboard the aircraft. The two occasions of flying in or just above a billowing black column of smoke were visually stimulating. I wish others could have seen what I saw. It was also very striking following on the tails of the Zeros watching them fly at low altitude above the runway as the explosions went off just below them. It looked just like a real war.

I owe thanks to Gene Schayer for permitting my vision of the Battle of Midway to be brought to life at the 2007 Northwest Georgia Air and Car Show.



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