



Two views of the 1945 P-51D Mustang. Pilot - James Read

Today, the centerpiece of his collection is a 1945 P-51D Mustang fighter. It was one of the planes that helped turn the tide in World War II.

Read has lovingly restored the plane, which was declared surplus in 1958. Of 15,000 Mustangs built, only about 150 survive today, and of those, only a few are still in flying condition.

There are more than half a dozen other planes, along with military vehicles, aircraft engines and hundreds of other military and aviation-related items, models and uniforms at the museum.

Read's wife, Cathy, who is one of a half a dozen pilots (all of them volunteers) for the museum, said she was as surprised as James when people began showing up to see the planes.

She is the only female pilot for the museum (other pilots are Kris Kortokrax, Dave Thompson and Dale Snodgrass) and received her pilot's license in 1996. In 2001, she received her commercial license and frequently flies the T-34 Mentor and the T-28 Trojan.

"What I enjoy most about flying these planes is getting out and when I take my helmet off, little girls see that a woman is flying one of these planes," she said. "It opens their eyes."



Cathy Read and her husband, Jim, inside one of the display rooms at the Indiana Aviation Museum in Valparaiso. The Reads founded the museum in 2000. (Photo by Rick A. Richards)

While the museum is open to the public on week-ends six months of the year to the public, the biggest joy for Read is showing off his collection to the many school groups that visit.

"We've had schools, Cub Scouts and Boys & Girls Clubs out here," said Read. "We've also had a lot of people involved in aviation stop by, a lot of them World War II vets." One visitor, said Read, was Charles Albury, the co-pilot of Bockscar, the B-29 bomber that dropped the atom bomb on Nagasaki.

Visitors to the museum are given an introduction through a 10-minute video, said Cathy. After that, visitors receive information on each of the planes in the collection and learn a bit about the basics of aviation and flight.

"It doesn't matter the age," said Read, "we've had groups out here from first graders up through 12th graders."

And, he said, it's a hands on museum. Visitors get a chance to get up close to the planes, touch them, and in some instances, sit in them.

Off They Go! Continued on Page 4



The centerpiece of the Indiana Aviation Museum is a World War II P-51 Mustang. (See above.) (Photo by Rick A. Richards)