



# ***NEWS RELEASE***

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## **“LOST SQUADRON” STORY TO BE TOLD AT THE MUSEUM OF AVIATION ON MAY 19**

Two men who spent a decade of their lives to recover a World War II fighter plane buried 265 feet under the Greenland icecap will tell their amazing story at the Museum of Aviation on Thursday evening, May 19. Pat Epps, a 2011 inductee into the Georgia Aviation Hall of Fame, and his partner Richard Taylor were co-founders of the Greenland Expedition Society that braved sub-zero temperatures from 1981 to 1992 to retrieve a P-38F aircraft that was eventually restored and flown again in 2002.



*Pat Epps, left, and Richard Taylor by Glacier Girl in 2002*

The public is invited to the presentation sponsored by the Museum of Aviation Foundation, the Warner Robins Patriot and Chapter 296 of the Air Force Association, a social hour at 6:00 pm and presentation at 7:00 pm in the Century of Flight Hangar. Artifacts from the Expedition will be on display including an actual part of the P-38 tail. The cost is \$20 a person for those who register by May 13 and \$25 after that date or at the door. Reservations can be made on the Museum gift shop web page (<http://moagiftshop.com/thelostsquadronstory.aspx>) or by calling the Museum at (478) 923-6600.

***The Lost Squadron***

The recovered P-38, renamed “Glacier Girl,” was part of an ill-fated flight of 2 B-17s and 6 P-38s that was forced to land on the ice in eastern Greenland after fighting a storm and running low on fuel. The flight on July 15, 1942 was part of Operation Bolero, a massive buildup and movement of Allied aircraft from the United States into the European Theatre. The eight aircraft had flown the day before from Goose Bay, Labrador, Canada to Sondre Strom on the Western coast of Greenland and were headed over ice-capped mountains and the Denmark Strait for Reykjavik, Iceland and eventually on to Scotland.

Ninety minutes from Iceland at twelve thousand feet, clouds began to form and the temperature dropped to minus ten degrees Fahrenheit. Trying various routes and altitudes and battling a snow storm the flight decided to return to Sondre Strom. Unfortunately their gas tanks ran low and they were forced to land miles from nowhere on the frozen tundra of Greenland.

The first P-38 landed with its gear down and flipped over. The remaining aircraft landed gear up and all skidded safely to a stop. Miraculously all crew members including the pilot in the first P-38 to land were uninjured. They endured three days on the ice before a ski and dogsled team reached them. After an exhausting 17-mile hike back to the coastline they were picked up by a Coast Guard cutter and returned to their base.

The abandoned aircraft were left to the elements and no one saw them for almost 40 years. Covered by years of snow and ice, they would drift more than a mile from where they landed.

### *The Recovery of Glacier Girl*

Epps and Taylor began their adventure with an exploratory flight to the ice cap in 1981 only to discover the airplanes were no where to be found. On another trip a few months later they met dangerously unpredictable weather which covered their equipment with snow and ice and forced them to quit. Several attempts were tried over the next eight years before an expanded 1989 expedition team finally drilled a core down 250 feet and pulled up the metal of an aircraft wing.

The story of the actual recovery is one of human endurance, determination and ingenuity. Using a device called a “Super Gopher” which pumped hot water through copper tubing, the Expedition successfully melted a hole down to reach what turned out to be one of the B-17s – crushed beyond repair by the ice and not worth recovering. Undaunted, the team continued to search and finally found a P-38 miraculously still intact. After tunneling down and carving out a cave around it, the aircraft was disassembled and brought up in pieces. The final fuselage section weighing 7,000 pounds was hoisted to the surface on July 31, 1992.

The pieces were taken to a hangar in Middlesboro Tennessee where it took another ten years to reassemble and rebuild the plane to its original condition. It made its first flight on October 26, 2002 and is now one of only a few remaining flyable P-38s in the world.

### *The “Forked Tail Devil”*

One of the most advanced and versatile combat planes of World War II Lockheed’s P-38 lightning was the fastest, most heavily armed fighter in the skies.

Designed by Clarence “Kelly” Johnson, who later designed the SR-71 “Blackbird,” it served as a medium-altitude fighter-bomber, high-altitude precision bomber, bomber escort, torpedo plane, radar-equipped night fighter and long-range observation and photo-reconnaissance plane. While the twin-engine Lightning was a powerful weapon against the Axis powers in the European and Mediterranean theaters, it was indispensable in the Pacific, where its range (extended by auxiliary fuel tanks) permitted it to fly dangerous missions over vast distances and return safely to base. It lacked the maneuverability of its premier adversaries – Germany’s Messerschmitt 109 and Japan’s Mitsubishi Zero – but the P-38 frequently triumphed because of its speed (greater than 400 miles per hour), awesome firepower (20-mm nose cannon supplemented by four .50-caliber machine guns) and rugged, heavily armored construction. The Japanese described it as “two airplanes with one pilot” and the Germans dubbed it *der gabelschwanz teufel* – The fork-tailed devil.” The two top-scoring U.S. Army Air Force aces of all time – Majors Richard Bong and Thomas McGuire – flew P-38s in the Pacific, as did Colonel Charles MacDonald, the third-highest scoring P-38 ace, who ranks fifth overall. P-38s were also involved in the mission that shot down Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto, the architect of Japan’s attack on Pearl Harbor. Sixteen P-38s made the 1,000 mile round trip from Guadalcanal to Bougainville in the Solomon Islands in a perfectly timed ambush to bring down Yamamoto’s Mitsubishi Betty Bomber and six other Japanese planes.

### *The Speakers – Epps and Taylor*

**Pat Epps**, a native of Athens, Georgia and the youngest son of Ben T. Epps, graduated from Georgia Tech in 1956 and entered the United States Air Force in 1957. As a distinguished graduate of Class 58L, he became the fifth of Ben Epps’ sons to become a military pilot. With over 10,000 flying hours as a commercial pilot with type ratings in North American B-25 Mitchell, Douglas DC-3, Learjet, and Cessna Citation, Epps continues to go "Above and Beyond." Epps has been recognized amongst the honorees of the 1998 Gatherings of Eagles, an international group setting standards and paving the way for future air and space power.

In 1999, Pat Epps received the NBAA American Spirit Award. In 2007, Epps Aviation was again recognized at the NBAA Annual Convention by receiving the John P. "Jack" Doswell Award for his lifelong dedication to general aviation and community volunteer work. Epps has also been honored by the NBAA and was inducted into the Georgia Aviation Hall of Fame in 2011.

Epps led an 11-year quest to recover the Lost Squadron. In 1992, he succeeded in retrieving a WWII Lockheed P-38 Lightning buried beneath 265 feet of the Greenland ice cap. In June 1994, Epps piloted a friend's DC-3 to France. As he flew over Normandy, veteran War World II paratroopers jumped to commemorate the 50th Anniversary of D-Day landings.

Pat and his wife Ann Epps, reside in Atlanta. Pat continues to work at the FBO. Their three children, Patrick, Marian and Elaine, all have their pilot's license and presently work in the family business.

**Richard Taylor** was born in Washington D.C. and served in the US Army Airborne for three years, including two years in Germany. After the service he received a

Bachelor of Architecture degree from Kent State University and a Master of Architecture from Georgia Institute of Technology. Subsequently, as an Associate Professor, he taught Architecture at Tech for ten years.

His company, Taylor Architecture, a highly respected design firm in Atlanta, Georgia, has received 21 design awards. For these achievements he was elevated into the College of Fellows in the American Institute of Architects.

As a real-estate developer he has developed The Stove Works and Inman Alley in Atlanta and several residential condominiums projects.

Taylor's hobbies include vintage sports car and motorcycle racing and, of course, aviation. He holds a Commercial, instrument and multi-engine rating with 3800 hours as pilot in command.