



National Warbird Operator Conference

Presented by Cannon Aviation Insurance

The Origin of NWOC

What you don't know might interest you...

For those new to the phenomenon known as the National Warbird Operator Conference, or simply NWOC, the humble beginnings of this gathering may be somewhat vague or even confusing. It's really quite simple.

In 1992, EAA Warbirds of America president Bill Harrison and Lone Star Flight Museum administrator Ralph Royce conceived the idea of a gathering of warbird organizations, flying museums, and owners while on the ramp at the National Championship Air Races at Reno. The purpose? Essentially, it was to discuss common goals and address the changing environments in which we operate warbird aircraft.

The need for the gathering became more apparent when the FAA imposed a moratorium on the importation and licensing of surplus military turbine-powered aircraft. As it turned out, other issues were also tugging on our sleeves which needed addressing. Bill Harrison spoke well when he remarked, "We don't necessarily need to come away from this meeting with all the answers, but we do need to find out what the questions are and develop a plan to answer them."

Perhaps the best-known answer to come from the initial conference was that of standardized formation flying rules. Before the FAA could impose rulemaking on the subject, then-FAA National Air show Coordinator John Thiem gave the warbird community the opportunity to establish the criteria, subject to final FAA approval. It worked. Today we have the Formation and Safety Training (FAST) program to show for that first year's effort.

That first gathering in Galveston also disproved a myth that the myriad warbird organizations, museums and individual owners could not work together for the common good. It may have taken some years for this to occur, but it succeeded and continues to do so to this day. Not wanting to be tied to any one location, the conference organizers wisely chose to seek hosts to annually host the conference. Museums and organizations generously gave of their time and staff to put together this now-yearly event. The list of hosts and cities looks like this:

1993 – Galveston, Texas (Lone Star Flight Museum)
1994 – Fort Worth, Texas (Vintage Flying Museum)
1995 – Midland, Texas (Confederate Air Force)
1996 – Nashville, Tennessee (EAA Warbird Squadron 1)
1997 – Dallas, Texas (Cavanaugh Flight Museum)
1998 – Nashville, Tennessee (EAA Warbird Squadron 1)
2000 – Las Vegas, Nevada
2001 – Washington, D.C. (Alexandria)
2003 – Mesa, Arizona
2004 – Oklahoma City, Oklahoma
2005 – Seattle, Washington
2006 – Orlando, Florida
2007 – Dayton, Ohio
2008 – Palm Springs, CA
2009 – Washington, DC (Dulles)
2010 – San Diego, CA

After fifteen NWOCs, one might get the impression that the entire range of topics for discussion has been exhausted. And yet, each year, that theory is disproved. To be sure, some topics are revisited frequently, but for good reason. Training and education sometimes require repetition in order to ensure comprehension. And each year we are presented with new information, which we share with others upon our return to home.

Utilizing the time and talents of volunteers and a number of paid staff from sponsoring organizations over the years benefited the gathering, but to bring the conference to the next level, hiring a meeting planner made sense. In 2000, Event Productions in Scottsdale, Arizona, assumed the helm in the organization and operation of the conference. With additional help from Bob Cannon at Cannon Aviation Insurance, Event Productions' proprietor Wendee DeBusk has brought an air of professional experience to the overall production.

With time have come changes in technology. In the early years, we relied solely on the verbal aspects of each presentation. We then graduated to overhead and slide projectors, followed by an occasional VCR and multiple televisions wired together. In 2003, to our delight, virtually every presentation was backed up by PowerPoint® presentations and corresponding paper handouts. Technology is a wonderful tool.

To attract more participants to the conference, organizers also debated the idea of an exhibitor's area, in which membership organizations, restorers, and other warbird-related business could advertise and "show their wares." This idea came to fruition in 2003 in Mesa, where the first "Warbird Wing" was assembled—with very positive results and feedback.

Of course we have also worked in some "play" time during these conferences, mostly with aviation museum tours. Those who've been to all, or nearly all, of the events have witnessed some of the best collections of aircraft and memorabilia this country has to offer. Lone Star Flight Museum, American Airpower Heritage Museum, Cavanaugh Flight Museum, Champlin Fighter Museum, NASM's Paul E. Garber Preservation, Restoration and Storage Facility, Vintage Flying Museum...been there, done all those.

Ultimately, it is the exchange of information that attracts most, if not all, of the participants. From medical information, to insurance concerns, to the future of the fuel

supply, to engine and airframe maintenance issues, to pilot attitude and training, to government programs, and a whole host of subjects in between, knowledge is king at NWOC.

To remind the participants of one of the purposes of the gathering, Jim Fausz made a remark at the first conference, which has been repeated numerous times to great effect. "Leave your organizational allegiances at the door and your politics on final at 500 feet." That one statement has served the NWOC well over nearly a decade of camaraderie.