



Montgomery Flight – 1904



Moffett Field – 1933



China Clipper – 1936



Hiller XH-44 – 1944



Northern Wings

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The Aero Club of Northern California

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Sean D. Tucker in the air

Aero Club to present Crystal Eagle to air show legend Sean D. Tucker

With more than 20,000 hours flight time in his pilot's logbook, much of that flying maneuvers no others can duplicate, and air show performances for 60 million fans, Sean D. Tucker can be considered an aviation legend.

In fact, the Smithsonian Air and Space Museum made it official three years ago, naming Tucker one of 25 "Living Legends of Flight."

Later this month, Tucker will join another list of aviation's best when he receives the 2006 Crystal Eagle Award, given annually by the Aero Club of Northern California to honor those whose achievements are among the highest in aviation.

The award will be presented during the Aero Club's annual Crystal Eagle Dinner at 6:30 p.m. Saturday, October 28, at the Hiller Aviation Museum in San Carlos.

The Crystal Eagle Award was first presented by the Aero Club in 1983 to legendary aviator Gen. Jimmy Doolittle. Past recipients include Gen. Chuck Yeager, Stanley Hiller Jr., Jim Nissen, Burt Rutan, George Cooper, Jeana Yeager, Frank Christensen, James S. Ricklefs, Darryl Greenamyer, Robert "Hoot" Gibson, Paul Poberezny, Wayne Handley,



-- Team Oracle photos

Sean D. Tucker will be the 2006 Crystal Eagle honoree.

Hangar One wins reprieve from Navy

Bowing to intense pressure from the community and elected officials, the U.S. Navy is re-evaluating its plan to tear down Moffett Field's historic Hangar One.

Instead of demolishing the huge dirigible hangar because of toxic contamination leaching from the metal skin into the groundwater, the Navy re-studied the comparative costs

of destruction versus restoration of the building.

A new recommendation has not yet been made, nor have officials said when one will be issued.

The reprieve came after a year-long effort by the Save Hangar One Committee, hundreds of Mountain View and Sunnyvale residents and a

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Crystal Eagle Dinner

Date: Saturday, Oct. 28, 2006

Reception: 6:30 p.m.

Dinner: 7:30 p.m.

Location: Hiller Aviation Museum, 601 Skyway Road at San Carlos Airport.

Cost: \$60 for Aero Club members, \$75 for non-members, including museum admission.

Reservations: (408) 646-7139

History corner

Robert Fowler – first aviator to fly from west to east

When newspaper magnate William Randolph Hearst in 1911 offered a \$50,000 prize to the first person to fly coast to coast in 30 days, aviation pioneer Robert G. Fowler of San Jose leaped at the chance.

Fowler, born in Gilroy in 1884, was an automobile race driver. In 1910, he took three hours of flight instruction from Orville Wright and graduated as a pilot. Responding to Hearst's challenge, in 1911-1912 he became the first person to fly across the country from west to east. He flew a Wright Model B biplane with the four-cylinder engine driving twin propellers with chains.

Fowler and Calbraith Perry Rodgers were competing for the \$50,000 prize offered by Hearst.

Fowler flew to near Jacksonville, Fla. in 112 days, following railroad tracks and stopping each night. He was in the air for 49 of those, surviving many crashes and 65 forced landings. The other days were spent on the ground to repair his plane or because of bad weather.

Rodgers flew from Brooklyn to Pasadena in 84 days. Neither got the prize, although Rodgers went into the record book for the first transcontinental flight. But Fowler was the first to fly west to east.

Fowler also was the first to fly coast to coast non-stop -- 40 miles from the Pacific to the Atlantic over the Panama Canal in April 1913.

He had been hired by Sunset magazine in Menlo Park to photograph the Panama Canal. Sunset at the time was owned by Southern Pacific Railroad, which viewed the canal as serious competition to transcontinental train service and wanted to show its vulnerability to air attack. So Fowler shipped his Fowler-Gage airplane to Panama, loaded it up with a photographer and flew from ocean to ocean to take pictures of the canal under construction.

When the photos were published in Sunset magazine, Fowler and several others were arrested for treason because the pictures showed military installations. The charges were eventually dropped.

In the early 1950s, a plaque honoring Fowler was put up in the San Jose airport terminal, and later moved to the new terminal in 1965. But it has mysteriously disappeared.

The early aviator died in his San Jose home in 1966 at age 81.

Former Aero Club Treasurer John C. Pfahnl dies at age 83

Former Aero Club Treasurer John C. Pfahnl, a World War II Navy combat pilot and longtime San Jose certified public accountant, died June 18 at age 83.



John Pfahnl

Pfahnl was a member of the Aero Club board for 16 years, and served as treasurer for the last 13 years. He resigned last spring because of ill health.

His aviation history goes back to 1942 when he enlisted in the Navy. He received his Navy wings in 1943, and was assigned to fly TBM Avenger torpedo bombers from the aircraft carrier USS Bismarck Sea in the Pacific. He participated in the invasions of the Philippines and Iwo Jima.

On the night of Feb. 23, 1945, as the carrier cruised the waters off Iwo Jima, two Japanese kamikaze aircraft slammed into the ship, sinking it. Pfahnl was rescued by a Navy

destroyer and was transferred to a troop transport off the beach at Iwo. From the ship, he witnessed the Marines raising the United States flag on the island's highest point, Mount Suribachi.

He was next assigned to fly F6F Hellcat fighter planes for the invasion of Japan, but the war ended.

After his discharge from the active Navy, Pfahnl obtained his certified public accountant credential at Golden Gate University in San Francisco and joined a national accounting firm. In 1964, he started his own accounting business in San Jose.

Pfahnl resumed flying in general aviation aircraft. He became a partner in a Beechcraft Bonanza A-36, which carried him on many long-range flights across the United States and to Alaska and Mexico, and across the Atlantic to Europe.

He is survived by his wife of 58 years, Betty. They had four sons, ten grandchildren and three great-grandchildren.

Aero Club of Northern California 2006-2007 Board of Directors

Rick Wilson – president
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Eric Peterson – treasurer
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Moffett's historic Hangar One wins reprieve from Navy

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strongly worded letter from Rep. Anna Eshoo and signed by the entire Bay Area congressional delegation that said demolition would be "a travesty." Hangar One supporters want it preserved, possibly for use as a West Coast air and space museum.

Last May, the Navy said demolition would cost about \$12 million, while restoration and cleanup would cost twice as much.

But that didn't square with a 2003 study commissioned by NASA that put the cost of demolition at \$30 million. The NASA consultants said it would cost \$2.6 million more to destroy the 1933-vintage hangar than to save it. The Navy has not disclosed the latest estimated costs for restoration and demolition.

Hangar One was built to house the USS Macon, a 785-foot-long dirigible that was lost in a storm off Big Sur in 1935.

Aero Club members tour Wings of History



-- Northern Wings photos



Aero Club members toured the Wings of History air museum adjacent to South County Airport in San Martin this summer. The museum contains more than two dozen antique aircraft and countless other aviation artifacts. Above, Aero Club President Rick Willson inspects vintage biplane. At left, Willson talks with Museum Director John McMain.

Crystal Eagle recipients:

- 1983 – James “Jimmy” Doolittle
- 1984 – Charles E. “Chuck” Yeager
- 1985 – Stanley Hiller Jr.
- 1986 – William “Bill” Lear
- 1987 – James M. “Jim” Nissen
- 1988 – Anthony W. “Tony” LeVier
- 1989 – Elbert “Burt” L. Rutan
- 1990 – George S. Cooper
- 1991 – Allen E. Paulson
- 1992 – Jeana Yeager
- 1993 – Robert T. Jones
- 1994 – Frank L. Christensen
- 1995 – James S. Ricklefs
- 1996 – Darryl G. Greenamyre
- 1997 – Robert L. “Hoot” Gibson
- 1998 – Donald D. Engen
- 1999 – Paul H. Poberezny
- 2000 – Wayne Handley
- 2001 – Igor I. Sikorsky
- 2002 – A. Scott Crossfield
- 2003 – Clay Lacy
- 2004 – Elgen Long
- 2005 – Eileen Collins

Air show pilot Sean D. Tucker to receive 2006 Crystal Eagle award

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A. Scott Crossfield, Clay Lacy, Elgen Long and Eileen Collins.

Tucker, who lives in Monterey County, began his air show career in the mid-1970s after learning to fly aerobatics from Amelia Reid at Reid-Hillview Airport in San Jose.

Interestingly enough, he took the aerobatic training from Reid because he still had a fear of flying after earning his private pilot's license in 1969.

Since then, he has flown more than 700 performances at more than 300 air shows. More than half of his air show maneuvers are original and have never been duplicated by another pilot.

Tucker was the 1988 U.S. National Advanced Aerobatic Champion. In

1992, he was awarded air show flying's top awards -- the Art Scholl Memorial Showmanship Award and the Bill Barber Award.

The Aero Club also will present National Aeronautic Association Certificate awards to air museum founder Ronald Reuther, warbird restorer Art Teeters and agricultural aircraft manufacturer John Weatherly for their life-long contributions to the advancement of flight.

Advance reservations are necessary because seating is limited and the dinner is expected to be sold out. Tickets, including museum admission, are \$60 each for Aero Club members and \$75 for non-members. For additional information, contact the Aero Club at (408) 646-7139.

Board member profile

James Ricklefs – from helicopter entrepreneur to antiques

When James S. “Rick” Ricklefs graduated from Stanford University in 1937, he went to work for an investment firm, but soon decided that was not his career path.

After all, Ricklefs had taken flight instruction and soloed a Kinner Fleet at the then-Stanford Airport four years before. The aviation bug had already bitten him.

So began a long and diverse aviation career that saw him create the largest helicopter business in the world, develop new cold weather flying techniques and restore three antique airplanes that were judged Grand Champions at the annual Watsonville Fly-In and Air Show.

Ricklefs, now 92 and retired in San Carlos, is still involved in aviation. He was the 1995 winner of the Aero Club’s Crystal Eagle Award and is currently on the club’s board of directors.

After leaving the San Francisco investment firm, Ricklefs earned an aeronautical engineering degree from West Coast University. He worked as a stress analyst for Northrop Aircraft and was chief engineer for the West Coast University and Aero Industries Technical Institute in Glendale.

In 1944, he became vice president of Landraf Helicopter Co. in Los Angeles and soloed the firm’s Model H-2 helicopter at Vultee Field in Downey. From then to retirement, his career was mainly in helicopters.

Ricklefs formed Rick Helicopters, a commercial helicopter charter operation, in 1948 with two Bell 47B copters. Five years later, it was the largest in the world with 35 helicopters.

He also owned Rick Helicopter Maintenance Co. in San Francisco and Los Angeles and Alaska Helicopters Inc. in Anchorage.

He and his company pioneered cold weather work on the North Slope

of Alaska, establishing new flying and maintenance techniques that permitted year-round operations.

In retirement, Ricklefs focused on restoring and flying antique airplanes and helicopters.

He was a three-time Grand Champion winner at Watsonville, taking the top honors with a replica World War I Spad VII fighter and a couple of Fairchilds.

Over the years, Ricklefs also has owned and restored a World War I Sopwith Pup, several early Sikhorsky helicopters, two Hiller Rotorcycles and an experimental Hiller Ram Jet helicopter.

Corporate pilot Sandra J. Clifford named to Aero Club Board

Sandra J. Clifford, a corporate turbine-rated pilot and alumni representative to the San Jose State University Aviation Department, has been elected to the Aero Club of Northern California Board of

Directors. Clifford is a 1995 aviation graduate of San Jose State University. She is co-president of the Bay Area Chapter of Women in Aviation and safety chair for the Santa Clara Valley Ninety Nines.

Aileen Nissen, widow of Crystal Eagle honoree James Nissen, dies

Aileen Nissen, widow of 1987 Crystal Eagle honoree James M. Nissen, died Aug. 14 in Walnut Creek. She was 89.

Her husband, who died in 1994, built San Jose Airport from a dirt landing strip to a modern jet airfield from 1945 to 1975.

The Aero Club of Northern California

**2500 Cunningham Avenue
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(408) 929-1060**

Chartered in 1981 as a chapter of the National Aeronautic Association



-- To keep the public informed of the importance of aviation and space flight to the nation’s economic progress, its security, and to international understanding.
-- To support a vigorous aviation and space education program for students at all levels of learning.
-- To recognize and honor those who make outstanding contributions to the advancement of aviation and space flight.