



## Pilots Hope Students See Opportunity

By: *Jim Gransbery, Billings Gazette (reprinted with permission)*

Navy lieutenants Sarah Rhoads and Sara Stires kept their aircraft communications equipment on intercom-only earlier this year.

Like a couple of young girls on a field trip, Diamond and Goalie (their flight names) got a bit giddy flying over Yellowstone National Park on their way to Billings for the Laurel Aviation and Technology Week. They did not want anyone hearing how excited they were.

On May 9 and 10, the two officers were at Billings Logan Airport to “expose 2,000 students to the opportunities available to them,” said Rhoads. “To show what two gals from Montana achieved by setting their minds to it, that we are from the same roots they are from.”

Rhoads and Stires fly and fight with the U.S. Navy’s most sophisticated jet fighter/attacker aircraft, the F/A-18F Super Hornet. The \$57 million machine has 11 weapons stations on it.

“It is laser-sighted with our eyeballs,” Rhoads said in response to a question about lining up a target. For bombing runs, Stires consults the information from an infrared targeting pod attached to the left side of the fuselage.

Rhoads is a pilot; Stires, the weapons systems officer. Both age 30, Rhoads graduated from Butte High School, while Stires graduated from Billings Senior. The Navy lieutenants are equivalent to captains in the Marine Corps.

The only two aviators from Montana in their squadron stationed in Lemoore, Calif., they were determined “to figure out a way to get to Billings for this trip,” said Stires. “I remember Yellowstone Art museum and it made a difference in our lives.”

Both have seen wartime missions. Stires received the Distinguished Flying Cross for action in Afghanistan.

Both started by attending the U.S. Naval Academy at Annapolis, Md. Stires was carrying on a family tradition as her father was a naval aviator.

Rhoads recalls how huge an aircraft carrier looks from the ground, but, “holy smokes, it is much smaller from above.”

Landing a jet on a flight deck of a carrier has been compared to landing on a postage stamp floating in the ocean.



DAVID GRUBBS/Gazette Staff

*Navy pilots, Lt. Sara Stires, left, and Lt. Sarah Rhoads flew their F/A-18F Super Hornet from California to Billings in time for Laurel Aviation Days. Stires grew up in Billings and Rhoads in Butte.*

“You really have to trust the person in front,” Stiles said, recalling her first carrier landing with her squadron’s executive officer at the controls. “It is intimidating to think a 65,000-pound airplane can do that. It was intense.”

During the opening phases of Operation Iraqi Freedom, Rhoads flew off the USS Nimitz for eight months. Stires was aboard the USS Roosevelt immediately after 9/11. The ship was at sea for 158 days without a port of call.

The ship finally pulled into Bahrain in the Persian Gulf.

“It was great to check into a nice hotel and get a 20-minute shower,” Stires said.

Stires is married to a naval aviator.

“We are never put in under the same command,” she said. In the first 2 ½ years of marriage they spent only 10 months together.

Rhoads has another two years in her eight-year commitment. She does not know if she will stay in the Navy or leave.

*continued, page 3*

# Administrator's Column

**Condolences:** It is with extreme sadness that I offer heartfelt sympathy to Dwight and Debbie Holman and the entire Hall and Holman families on their tragic loss. Dwight and Debbie's daughter, Sara, age 21, died in an automobile accident on August 31st in Tennessee. Sara, formerly of Great Falls, was in the fashion and design industry working in Franklin, Tenn. It was told that Sara's spirit and approach to life is well summed up by Dr. Seuss: "Be who you are, say what you feel. Those who mind don't matter, those who matter don't mind."

**Ag aviation billboard:** If you are traveling on Interstate 15 heading south out of Great Falls be sure to check out the "Ag Aviation" billboard. It will catch your eye. The billboard features a beautiful, colorful landscape and spray plane. The billboard is sponsored by the Aerial Applicators of Montana (AMAA) organization and is a "floating" billboard. It will be moved around the state's roadways, being placed in high-traffic areas. What a great, creative idea for promoting aerial application and aviation in the state. Thanks AMAA!

**Allegiant Air Service:** Allegiant Air, a low-cost airline based in Las Vegas and focused on linking travelers in small cities to world-class leisure destinations such as Las Vegas and Orlando recently announced service to Phoenix-Mesa from 13 markets already served by the carrier. Beginning in October Missoula and Billings will offer service to Williams Gateway Airport in Mesa, Ariz. The airport currently services more than 2,000 passengers annually on Allegiant Air to Reno and Laughlin, Nev. The Williams Gateway Airport serves as a reliever to Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport. The self-proclaimed "Official Airline for Sunshine" will base 130-seat, MD-80 series jet aircraft at Williams Gateway Airport. Allegiant Air operates a low-cost, high-efficiency, all-jet passenger airline offering air travel both on a stand-alone basis and bundled with hotel rooms, rental cars and other travel related services. All Allegiant Air flights are non-stop.

**Search continues for Steven Fossett:** The first first person to fly a plane around the world without refueling; the first person to fly around the world in a balloon; and possibly the record-holder for the highest-altitude glider flight, is missing in Nevada. He departed Barron Hilton's Flying M Ranch airstrip in western Nevada on Sept. 3 in a Citabria Super Decathlon. No flight plan was filed. The Civil Air Patrol is combing the high desert region, focusing on 600 square miles looking for Fossett with helicopter and aircraft assistance from Naval Air Station, the Nevada Air National Guard and the Nevada and California Highway Patrols.

**New Delta CEO:** Richard Anderson is the new CEO at Delta, replacing retiring Delta head Gerald Grinstein. Anderson in on the Delta board of directors and is the former chief executive of Northwest Airlines, is an attorney and held executive positions with Continental Airlines. Anderson took over on Sept. 1. Will this refuel the discussions of a Northwest/Delta merger?

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# Calendar

**September 14-15** – 2007 Leadership Conference on Aviation and Space Education at the Marriott Crystall Gateway in Arlington, Va. Visit [www.lcase.infor](http://www.lcase.infor) for more details. Sponsored by the National Coalition for Aviation Education.

**September 15** – Dillon Aviation Days. For further information, phone Dennis or Jean Devivo at (406) 683-5242.

**October 3** – Air Search & Rescue Meeting for District 11 (Gallatin, Meagher and Park Counties). Gallatin Airport, old FSS terminal building, downstairs meeting room. 7 – 9 p.m. All pilots interested in helping with air search and rescue in District 11 are invited to attend this meeting. For further information, phone Linda Marshall at (406) 539-5909.

**October 3-5** – NWAAAE Annual Conference. Grouse Mountain Lodge, Whitefish. For further information, visit <http://nwaaae.org/nwaaeannual.html>.

**October 21** – Rocky Mountain College Aviation Program Open House for prospective students and parents. 8:45 a.m. to noon. Call (406) 657-1060 to make reservations.

**January 18-20, 2008** – Winter Survival Clinic, Helena. For further information, contact Jeanne MacPherson at (406) 444-2506 or email [jemacpherson@mt.gov](mailto:jemacpherson@mt.gov).

**January 26, 2008** – Rocky Mountain College Aviation Program Open House for prospective students and parents. 8:45 a.m. to noon. Call (406) 657-1060 to make reservations.

**February 1-2, 2008** – Flight Instructor Refresher Clinic, Helena. For further information, contact Jeanne MacPherson at (406) 444-2506, email [jemacpherson@mt.gov](mailto:jemacpherson@mt.gov).

**February 28 – March 1, 2008** – Montana Aviation Conference, Heritage Inn Great Falls. For further information, phone (406) 444-2506.

**March 15, 2008** – Rocky Mountain College Aviation Program Open House for prospective students and parents. 8:45 a.m. to noon. Call (406) 657-1060 to make reservations.

## Pilots Hope Students See Opportunity, continued...

Stires has gone past her six-year commitment and has been accepted to dental school and will remain in the service. As for the situation of women fighter pilots, Stires said, “We are one of the guys. They don’t treat us any different. We are held at the same ideals and standards.”

“Our missions are the same,” Rhoads said, “Either you can do your job or you can’t. If you do it, you get the respect.”

Rhoads noted the modesty of her weapons officer by bringing up Stires’ Distinguished Flying Cross. “She won’t mention it,” Rhoads said.

Pressed for a story, Stires said she was part of a two-plane section flying in the northern portion of the country when they discovered a convoy. After it was determined to be the enemy headed for Kabul, Stires and her pilot were able to “bottleneck” the convoy and were then assisted by other planes to stop it.

Stires and her pilot received one of the Navy’s higher awards for valor in aerial combat.

She kept a diary of five months at sea and in the air. Returning to it brings “vivid memories flooding back to missions and people I served with.”

Rhoads emphasized that their service is by choice and that “we are willing to make the sacrifice if it helps ensure others have the quality of life we’ve enjoyed.”

“I’ve had an awesome childhood here in Montana,” she said.

“Absolutely,” said Stires.

# Adventure to Airventure

By: Mark Evanoff, Montana Pilot

The alarm clock went off but I had been awake for hours. Sleep was out of the question. All that was necessary now was for the sun to rise.

Today, after weeks of preparation, I was to realize my life long dream of flying back to Oshkosh, Wis. in my own plane, in order to attend the world's greatest airshow, Airventure.

After several online weather briefings, innumerable restroom stops, and a last minute check of my 5 sectionals, I lifted off in my 1963 Cessna 182 from Ferndale's (Bigfork) dew covered grass strip. I had calculated the total flight time to be 10.5 hours with a few fuel stops along the way. The 1,300 mile flight would take me across four states and include dodging TFR's, MOA's, and TRSA's. With my trusty yoke mounted Garmin GPS, I headed east at 9,500' for what was to be the first day of my week long adventure.

The landscape between Montana and Oshkosh would vary considerably, as the lush mountains of western Montana gave way to the rolling prairies to the east. High winds would dog me all the way to my first fuel stop at Dickinson, N.D. where the wind was 18 knots gusting to 24 knots, fortunately right down the runway! The FBO had online weather that showed more hospitable conditions further along my course. Eventually the emerald green of Minnesota, with its large farms dotted with water towers and grain silos, came into view and I landed at Alexandria (AXN).

After a long day of cross country flying, the sun was getting low, and I was ready to reward myself with a big steak dinner and perhaps a comfortable bed. Unfortunately, a local water festival meant that all the nearby motel rooms were already full with bass fishermen and their boats. So I found the airport courtesy truck, an old beater with a camper shell, and after a delicious dinner at a nearby restaurant, elected to throw my sleeping bag in the back. Sleeping between bent aircraft parts and old tow bars was not a very dignified way to end my day but the prospect of pitching my four season backpacking tent at 10 p.m. with erratic lawn sprinklers threatening only made the bug free camper shell "motel" more attractive. My only concern was someone driving off with it in the a.m.!

Arriving at Oshkosh is indeed crowded but methodical. The VFR approach starts at Ripon, Wis. and follows railroad tracks until you're given a runway assignment. FAA controllers in temporary facilities on the ground, identify your aircraft without N numbers so I had to be keen to listen for the "white Cessna with blue stripe" instructions.

The sheer volume of arriving aircraft means that radio traffic is kept to a minimum by having planes acknowledge instructions by wagging their wings, all the while maintaining 1800 msl and 90 knots. I evidently showed real enthusiasm when cleared for runway 29 as the tower controller said "great job."

Airventure runs a tight ship, all coordinated by volunteers. I must've been "handled" by at least 15 orange-vested guides as I snaked my way back to vintage aircraft camping. Hot showers nearby, porta potties aplenty and the company of 10,000 other planes meant that I would have a wonderful stay. One of my neighbors had already set up a tarp- enclosed tiki bar with hanging lights and a gas powered blender which dispensed endless margaritas. They were delicious!

The days were filled with seminars, exhibits, the EAA museum of flight, the seaplane base, and of course the daily airshow. There was an overwhelming air of kinship and brotherhood at the event with most people smiling in affirmation of having a good time. They say that nothing remains "lost" for long at Airventure as misplaced items always end up at the lost-n-found.

Having your own plane on the grounds meant that you could retreat for a frequent nap in the shade of your wing. One afternoon, a gentleman ambled by and inquired about the oversized nose gear and main tires on my plane. I explained that I was from Montana and that "back there" we have occasion to fly into back country grass strips. I, as a low time pilot having amassed 150 hours total flying time, seized the opportunity to confidently expound on the benefits of my plane's configuration for mountain flying. The man listened patiently and seemed genuinely interested in what I had to say, which gave me license to talk even more. It was only after I was through that this patient soul introduced himself. "My name is Mike Ferguson." Needless to say, after sharing his background with me, 27-years with Montana Aeronautics in particular, I figured out why his name sounded so familiar. He has a rich and lengthy history of supporting Montana aviation and having started the Montana Aviation Conference that I so enjoy. He was very gracious and humble!



*Camping at Oshkosh*

*continued page 5*

# Adventure to Airventure, continued



*Cubcrafters' "Carbon Cub"*

A few lessons learned: **Bring a friend** to share fuel expense; **Bring food!** There are many food concessions on site but variety is limited, with bratwurst being the staple. A small cooler full of cold cuts, cheese, fruit, nuts, etc. would've come in handy. I contemplated eating my freeze dried survival rations on several occasions; **Bring a large tent!** There is ample room adjacent to one's plane for pitching a full size tent. My backpacking tent made dressing in the morning rather awkward; **Plan your fuel stops** using the web site [www.100ll.com](http://www.100ll.com) or a similar site that identifies the cheapest fuel along your route. Fuel prices ranged from \$3.89 in Minnesota, to \$4.69 at Oshkosh from the truck with the two pretty girls!; **Be flexible.** Give yourself time on either end for weather delays.

This trip to Airventure in Oshkosh was one of the more gratifying things I've done in my life. I recommend to all aviation enthusiasts to try to make the pilgrimage at least once and if you own your own plane, fly back. You won't regret it!

After six days, several thunderstorms, and way too many bratwursts it was time to head home. On-field weather briefers gave a reasonably good picture of my route home but warned of low ceilings west of Oshkosh and thunderstorms later in the day in eastern Montana.

Indeed, within a half-hour of my departure I found myself descending uncomfortably low to stay out of the clouds and, after pressing the "nearest" function on my GPS, elected to land at Wisconsin Springs! An hour later the ATIS for Minneapolis was reporting clearing skies and I was back on my way for a reasonably smooth return leg. The edge of a menacing looking thunderstorm north of Great Falls rinsed the bugs off the windshield and yielded to very smoky skies. After one last diversion around the Ahorn fire TFR near Schafer Meadows, the beautiful Flathead Valley came into view with the orange setting sun reflecting off Flathead Lake. I was home!

## Silver State Employees Honored



*Silver State Helicopter employees Mike Wallace and Matt Call were recognized for their efforts and support to the MDT air search and rescue program last month. Mike and Matt assisted and were successful in locating the missing aircraft in the last three extended searches. The most recent resulted in locating survivors - a great success story. Pictured (l-r) are Ron Williams, regional manager of the Western US; Mike Wallace, certified flight instructor; Debbie Alke, MDT, Aeronautics Division; and Steve Balint, vice president of Training in the Western US.*



*Richard Krott, general manager, Montana (r) presents Matt Call, certified flight instructor with his award for outstanding service in air search and rescue.*

# Montana Fire Season Continues

## Fly safe – Be aware

*Submitted by: John Townsley, Airspace Coordination Unit,*

Montana is experiencing a long and active fire season. Since June, numerous wildfires burned nearly 700,000 acres and destroyed 35 structures. High fire danger is expected to persist into September.

Where there is smoke, there is fire. Often there are temporary flight restrictions (TFRs). TFRs provide a safe environment for fire fighting aircraft. Several aircraft may work a single fire. Retardant tankers and helicopters with buckets drop water or fire retardant to cool the flames or to protect homes and other structures. Fire fighting aircraft operate within a wide band of altitudes. Helicopters fly as low as 150 feet when making a bucket drop and may orbit the fire incident at elevations up to 1,500 feet AGL. Retardant tankers and other fixed wing aircraft may operate over a fire at any altitude below 3,000 feet AGL. Fixed wing aircraft flying between fires or from their home base can be at 10,000 feet MSL or above. TFRs may remain for some time after the flames are knocked down because helicopters and other aircraft continue to work hot spots and fuel concentrations.

Because fires come in different sizes and shapes, so do TFRs. This summer we've had as many as 15 TFRs at one time in Montana. TFRs are established by the Federal Aviation Administration when requested by fire fighting agencies such as the Montana Department of Natural Resources & Conservation, Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, Bureau of Indian Affairs, or Park Service.

Pilots can significantly increase safety for themselves and for fire fighting aircraft with a few simple actions:

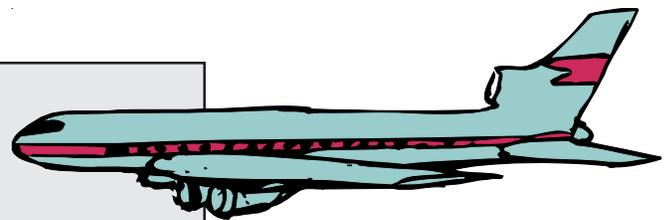
- **Fly high.** Stay above 5,000 feet AGL when you fly across country.
- **Keep your distance when you see a smoke column!** Fire fighting aircraft may be orbiting the fire six to ten miles from the smoke column.
- **The smoke column can hide danger!** Realize that even on a clear, VFR day, aircraft in or on the other side of the smoke column are invisible to you.
- **Get a Standard Briefing before you fly.** TFRs can “pop up” at any time. Why risk a violation if you fly into one?
- **Report smoke columns to Flight Service.** Don't fly to the smoke, use your charts or GPS to determine an approximate distance to an easily identifiable landmark (airport, town, etc.).
- **Use VFR Flight Following, but keep your eyes outside of the cockpit!** Remember, retardant tankers must fly between their reload base and the fire. They also fly between fires. Fire fighting aircraft may or may not be seen by ATC.

Aviation is an unforgiving activity. Keep a safe distance from fires. Stay well clear of TFRs. Help us maintain a safe environment for all aircraft – including yours!

Be aware of the fire situation. Scan news for reports of major fire activity. Talk with Flight Service Stations for current TFR information before every flight. Lightening storms may spark many small fires. Smaller fires worked by fire fighting aircraft may not have TFRs! Visit the Interagency Airspace Coordination website at [www.fs.fed.us/r6/fire/aviation/airspace/](http://www.fs.fed.us/r6/fire/aviation/airspace/) and check out the many links to online TFR and NOTAM resources.

## Pilot Shortage Delays Commercial Service

Big Sky Airlines says a lack of pilots is forcing it to delay re-introduction of scheduled service to Jackson, Tenn., until November. Big Sky President Fred deLeeuw told the Associated Press that an increase in hiring by larger carriers has left regional airlines short of pilots. Big Sky was to take over service to Jackson in May, two months after the FAA shut down RegionsAir for alleged training deficiencies. DeLeeuw said the airline hopes to begin with a partial schedule to Cincinnati in mid-November and move to a full schedule by December. The new airline will have an uphill battle to lure local travelers, however, according to local chamber of commerce president Paul Latture. “I think the service has been so bad for so long people have adapted,” Latture said. “Until we're able to provide our citizens and give a consumer a choice, a viable choice, people will go elsewhere.”



# In Memory

Former Aeronautics Board Member, Leland F. Ford, 73, of Missoula, passed away Sunday, June 17, at his home with his beloved family at his bedside. He was born Sept. 9, 1933, in San Jose, Calif., an only child of his parents, Harold E. and Myrtle Camille Ford. He had a happy childhood that included hunting trips with his dad and train trips with his mother to San Francisco on Sunday mornings for dinner with his grandmother, his Aunt Mil (his mother's twin sister) and cousins. As a child during World War II, he was fascinated with airplanes and his boyhood room was covered with pictures of aircraft, big and small. It began a lifetime love of aviation and all things mechanical. He would go on to attend San Jose Junior College and graduate from Northrop University. He enlisted in the U.S. Air Force in 1953 and was stationed at Chanute Air Force Base in Illinois. He and his high school sweetheart, Barbara, were married in Champaign, Ill., on Aug. 6, 1953. Theirs was a love affair that was to last more than 54 years with hundreds, no, thousands of wonderful memories. Their marriage was to be an example for their sons and friends who knew them. They were blessed with three sons who were the pride of his life. They became fine men, who were not only sons, but also best friends and comrades. Their wives were the daughters he never had and their children his delight and pride. Lee was a man of boundless energy with an interest in all things of this world. He loved to travel, whether to drive, fly or boat. He spent his career in the cockpit of many airplanes, from the Aeronca Champ in which he soloed to Falcon 10, which in his heart he considered to be his "own" airplane, only allowing others to pay the bills! His aviation career spanned 50 years with more than 17,000 hours in the air with never an incident or damage to an airplane. His career brought him friends and respect from coast to coast, rich and poor, famous and ordinary good people. Along the road of life, he touched so many people and became a part of so many lives. His family, his friends, his associates will always remember him as a man of integrity, honesty, compassion, humor and tender love. What more can a man leave in the memories of his loved ones. Thanks to God for giving him to us for 73 years. Lee was a member of the Elks Club and the Precision Gun Shooters. Lee is survived by his wife, Barbara of Missoula; son, Rick (Pat) and their sons Ryan and Andrew, all of Tacoma, Wash.; son, Rob and his daughters Morgan and Camille of Missoula; son, Tom (Carol) and their daughter Taylor of Scottsdale, Ariz.; and brother-in-law, Rod (Linda) of San Diego. Our sympathy and prayers are with the Ford family.

## Hysham Airport Dedication and Fly In Breakfast Big Success



*The Hysham Airport fly in/drive in breakfast was a big success. The Hysham Lions Club served 135 people breakfast. Eleven airplanes flew in from various locales around the state. The weather was perfect which helped considerably for the success of the event. There were also displays by some of the young flying enthusiasts in the community. The Lions Club would like to thank all who attended and all who worked and helped to make the morning a fun and enjoyable time. Pictured (l-r) Scott Ferguson of Billings, retired Air Force Colonel with more than 4,000 hours of flying time and still flying; Frank Borman, Big Horn, former astronaut who in 1965 circled the earth for two weeks and in December of 1968 circled the moon. Frank is still flying; Bob Miller, of Hysham, pilot and airport manager; Jim Almond of Billings, pilot and Rocky Mountain College board of directors. He is very involved with the Rocky Mountain College Aviation program.*



*Pictured are some of the airplanes that flew in. Also pictured (l-r) are Morris Spannagel, assistant airport manager and Bob Miller, manager of Hysham Airport.*

# Fires Still Burn Near Schafer Meadows Airport

Because of the fire danger surrounding Schafer Meadows and fires already burning to the south of the airport, this year's annual fly-in was cancelled. Thanks to everyone for adapting their plans and not flying in when fire danger was at an all time high.

Bob and Peggy Lipscomb, Lanny Hanson, and Scott and Mary Newpower braved the elements and tolerated the smoke and heat of the weekend. They replaced an existing decaying picnic table with a new picnic table pre-made by Ken Wilhelm of MDT. They also completed a few other tasks that weekend with the assistance of Deb Mucklow, District Ranger and Forest Service staff. Work completed consisted of installing new windsocks, filling holes in the runway and taking down a few trees. Thank you to all who helped complete these projects.

Mike Rogan, MDT, recently flew back in to pick up the tools that had been left for the fly in weekend. The smoke was still hanging low in the valleys and the grass was drier than he ever remembers in Schafer. The Forest Service wrapped the outhouse with a protective metal foil wrap in anticipation of a fire that thankfully has not made it to the campground, and we're hoping it never does.



*The outhouse is wrapped with protective foil wrap.*

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