NAVAL AIR STATION FORT LAUDERDALE
HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION & MUSEUM
(Link Trainer Building # 8)

U.S National Register of Historic Places
Florida Heritage Landmark

Naval Air Station Fort Lauderdale Museum
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Mission Statement

Educating. Preserving. Honoring our Heroes

Our mission is to develop and maintain a national and internationally recognized naval aviation museum that educates young and old alike, to preserve history by honoring the memory of Naval Air Station Fort Lauderdale and the men & women who defended freedom during World War II.

Images of NAS Fort Lauderdale in WWII. Copyright © NAS Fort Lauderdale Museum

Impact statement

The NAS Fort Lauderdale Museum has been instrumental in preserving the memory of Flight 19, one of the great aviation mysteries. Flight 19 flew out of NAS Fort Lauderdale on 5 December 1945, to vanish into the Bermuda Triangle. In addition, 19 year old future US President George H. W. Bush lived at this base as an Ensign, to train as a torpedo/bomber pilot. From October 1942 to October 1946 the base would train American and British pilots and thousands of aircrewmen from the U.S and other countries. In December 1999, the building was relocated to its permanent site at 4000 West Perimeter Rd., 2 blocks west from its original location.
The Link Trainer Building # 8 is on the U.S National Register of Historic Places, and a Florida Heritage Site. It is the only remaining structure from WWII left on the naval base property. This building now houses the Naval Air Station Fort Lauderdale Museum (also known as NAS Fort Lauderdale Museum, or NASFL Museum). It is the only Military Museum in Broward County, and a 501(c) 3 non-profit organization. This Museum is managed and maintained by the Naval Air Station Fort Lauderdale Historical Association, Inc., which consists of an all volunteer Board of Directors (17), and an all volunteer staff (12 on regular basis, and several others on sporadic basis).

**NAS Fort Lauderdale Historical Association**

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It might have begun with an empty, shuttered building, a handful of volunteers, a $200,000 and hand-me-down equipment, but in time, and layer upon layer, the Naval Air Station Fort Lauderdale Museum is shaping into an institution where history can be found, experienced and enjoyed.

Allan McElhiney, a former sailor aboard the USS Asheville operating out of Port Everglades during WWII, began his quest —over the course of 30 years— as a naval historian inspiring people to get to know the story of the NAS Fort Lauderdale. Thanks to his efforts, a Historical Association was formed and the Link Trainer Building #8 (our current Museum) was preserved and added to the National Register of Historic Places.

For many years, this building has served solely as a private repository of thousands of historical pieces of paperwork and photography that McElhiney collected, as well as donations of World War II artifacts.

Years passed, and the dream of opening to the public became stagnant. The challenges were many, and supporters moved on, gave up, or forgot; but McElhiney remained faithful to his cause. Then, a fresh wave of inspiration began taking place with a renewed interest in making this Museum accessible to the general public. These words describe our current goal: *Educate, Preserve, and Honor our Heroes.*

With rapidly changing technologies comes a new way of learning and growing and the Museum is moving forward, with replenished strength, a clearer vision, and more cohesive goals.

Many more challenges remain on the horizon, but we are closer to the goal of having a modern Museum. We have a unique history, and if you haven't visited in awhile, this would be a good time to set aside a Saturday afternoon and drop by for a couple of hours. Volunteers are encouraged to contribute their time or ideas or organize an event. There is something for everyone. While you're enjoying the past, you'll get a glimpse at the future of this Museum too.

Sincerely,

John D. Bloom, Jr., M.D
NAS Fort Lauderdale Museum Director
Background History of  
**Naval Air Station Fort Lauderdale 1942 – 1946**

Prior to WWII, Fort Lauderdale was a vacation retreat in the midst of economic struggles. By December 1941, the Army Corps of Engineers began transforming an abandoned 9-hole golf course and the Merle Fogg Field (known now as the Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport) into a naval base. The NASFL base was completed and commissioned October 1, 1942. With the close proximity of a protected deep-water port, Fort Lauderdale, a resort town of 20,000 people, was an ideal place. The good weather allowed many hours of flying time, the open sea was good for training, and the Everglades provided a natural bombing range as there was no heavy industry or other military targets to draw enemy fire.

The base was initially used for refitting civil airliners for military service before they were ferried across the South Atlantic to Europe and then North Africa. It later became a main training base for Naval aviators and enlisted Naval air-crewmen of the U.S Navy and Marine Corps aboard aircraft carriers and from expeditionary airfields ashore. Originally conceived as an adjunct to NAS Miami, the NAS Fort Lauderdale became an independent naval base part of the *Naval Air Operational Training Command*, specializing in TBM/TBF Avenger torpedo bombers. The Avenger was the largest single engine plane used during the war. It was the first design to feature a new wing-folding mechanism created by Grumman, intended to maximize storage space on an aircraft carrier. TBM/TBF Avenger Pilot training was taught among other degrees: Radiomen, Machinist's Mates and Ordnancemen, along with radar and fire control operator training. The base was decommissioned October 1, 1946.
Naval Air Station Fort Lauderdale Museum Strengths

- National Register of Historic Places.
- Florida Heritage Site.
- Only military museum in Broward County.
- Flight 19 aviation mystery.
- Ensign George H.W. Bush history.
- Original Link Trainer flight simulator on exhibit: an Engineering & Mechanical landmark.
- Aviation mural signed by President George H. W. Bush, Senator John McCain, and other military brass.
- Original naval paintings, drawings, and WWII cartoons.
- A large collection of WWII artifacts.
- History of Broward County during WWII exhibits.
- Research library with over 3,000 volumes and a 10,000+ photograph collection.
- Growing collection of WWII veterans interviews: Veterans History Project.
- Non-profit organization.
Charting Impact

What is the organization aiming to accomplish?
To develop and maintain a national and internationally recognized naval aviation museum.

What are the organization's key strategies for making this happen?

• Outreach programs.
• Expanding advertising and social media exposure.
• Streamlined Exhibits.
• Bi-monthly Luncheons.
• Newsletters filled with museum updates.
• Annual Flight 19 Memorial Ceremony (5 December), opened to the public.
• Grant Proposals.

What are the organization's capabilities for doing this?

• The dedication, passion, and enthusiasm of our volunteers.
• A growing and supportive *membership roster (national and international).
• Internship Program.
• Keepers of one of the great aviation mysteries: Flight 19.
• A one-of-a-kind place for documentarians, producers, and writers.

*Our membership includes individuals from a variety of sectors: active military; veterans; government; business organizations; professionals; boy scout organizations; history, aviation, and naval enthusiasts; construction and engineering, and other sectors.
How will your organization know if you are making progress?

We have learned that students from Elementary school to College as well as adults from all walks of life, are fascinated about the history of Flight 19. They find our website and are interested to learn and research more. There is also interest in the stories from World War II veterans and we continue to record their biographies with our "Veterans History Project". We also learned that there is much interest in Florida at War, and learning more about former President H.W. Bush (who lived and trained at this base). And because the Museum has a one-of-a-kind history, there is always great interest about Flight 19. Every year the Museum is approached by media companies, producers, and writers. With various documentaries in the works every year, we have been able to expand our reach.

We are learning that visitor’s reviews are important and we developed a "Feedback/Comments Form" which visitors fill out. This gives us the opportunity to understand what is working and what is not. We also track online reviews from several travel or social media websites such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Trip Advisor—from which we recently were awarded a "Certificate of Excellence".

What have and haven't you accomplished so far?

With an all volunteer staff we have accomplished the following for the NAS Museum:

- Restoration of hallways and exhibit rooms.
- Built an on-site library & research center.
- Built an on-site gift-shop.
- Updated office equipment.
- Installed WiFi connection.
- Expanded our website and social media presence.
• Sorted and curated hundreds of WWII artifacts, documents, and photographs.
• Restored a WWII Link Trainer Flight simulator.
• Updated exhibit props.
• Created and printed promo materials.
• Built outdoor signs and banners.
• Refurbished the wood railings, ramps, and steps of the building.
• Installed the Historic Marker.

We are in the process of the following:
• Building an outdoor Memorial Garden.
• Building a Memorial Bricks walkway.
• WWII historical exhibit at the Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport.
• WWII historical exhibit at Port Everglades.

We have not yet accomplished the following:
• Doors
• Windows
• New carpet for hallway
• Improved lighting
• Refurbishment of small kitchen
• Outside gutters
• Permanent Signage
What are your organization's top three most pressing funding needs?

In order to secure this historic building against damage and for security reasons, we are in pressing need to replace the following: All existing windows (30) need to be replaced with hurricane protection windows. Exit doors (8) should be replaced as well for security reasons. Improved inside and outside lightning is necessary.

**Need # 1:** Hurricane Windows – Amount: $35,000

**Need # 2:** Doors – Amount: $5,000

**Need # 3:** Improved lighting – Amount: $5,000

**Closing Statement**

The Naval Air Station Fort Lauderdale Museum is still very much a work-in-progress. We need all the help available outhere. If you are interested in preserving a gem, an historic landmark, and a one-of-a-kind place, please help us. There is still much work to do to bring excellence to this Museum. Your input, your effort as volunteer, donor, or adviser, will be invaluable. Be part of history! Please help us to educate, preserve, remember, and honor our heroes!

**In Summary**

We believe that the Naval Air Station Fort Lauderdale Museum is uniquely qualified to succeed, as it already has a great head-start in the field of history and preservation. And as keeper of one of the great aviation mysteries—this museum holds a special place in history.