

Section Visits Southern Museum of Flight

*By Ken Philippart
All images courtesy of Lisa Philippart.*

The Greater Huntsville Section headed south for the spring to Birmingham to visit the Southern Museum of Flight and to meet and network with Birmingham area members.

Early on March 21, a mild spring Saturday, twenty members and guests converged on the Southern Museum of Flight from all points north and south. Some Huntsville area members met for a quick breakfast before caravanning to Birmingham while others met the group on site. The museum staff was expecting the group. Charley Phillips and the staff greeted each arrival at the door like a VIP and escorted them to the ‘squadron ready room’ waiting area to await the full group’s arrival. Once the group was complete, the staff gave a brief orientation to the museum and then escorted the group upstairs to view the Tuskegee Airman display consisting of a series of original paintings illustrating the history of the Red Tails.



Greater Huntsville Section with an A-12 Blackbird



The outdoor air park is not generally open to the public but as is well known, AIAA membership can open doors, or gates in this instance. The guided tour included aircraft ranging from the R4D Gooney Bird and T-28 to the A-12 Blackbird, F-104 and Beech Starship. Long time section member Earl Pearce, namesake of the section’s Earl Pearce Professional of the Year Award and a retired

The next stop on the tour was the outdoor air park collection. The group piled into the museum’s van and private vehicles for the short ride to the park. Blessed with ample outdoor storage on the grounds of Birmingham Airport (BHX), the Southern Museum of Flight has become something of an “airplane rescue” facility with a collection of over 100 aircraft.



Earl Pearce (center) discusses the MiG-15 with Wayne the tour guide (left) while Dr. Arloe Mayne looks on.

naval aviator, informed and entertained the group with his personal accounts of flying similar aircraft types during his illustrious career. Earl's stories of landing on the pitching decks of straight deck aircraft carriers truly brought the old iron birds to life.



The group then headed back to the museum building where they had time to explore on their own and learn about the history of aviation from the Wright Brothers era to today. The museum's signature display is a life-size diorama depicting the defection of North Korean pilot Lieutenant No Kum Sok with his MiG-15 at Kimpo Air Base on 21 September 1953.

district in Birmingham for lunch. A long line at the intended restaurant led to diverting to an alternate, less crowded venue, demonstrating once again that flexibility is the key to airpower and AIAA activities. The staff at the Southern Kitchen quickly seated the group and provided outstanding service. The members and guests enjoyed their lunches while getting to know one another better and discussing ways for the Birmingham area members to participate in section functions despite the geographical separation. One such way is to participate in paper judging, and Birmingham member Warren Ingram subsequently did just that two weeks later for the Human Rover Challenge Competition paper judging.

As lunch wound down, the members bid good bye to new friends and headed home, Another successful AIAA activity was Mission Complete.



The group enjoys lunch at the Southern Kitchen.