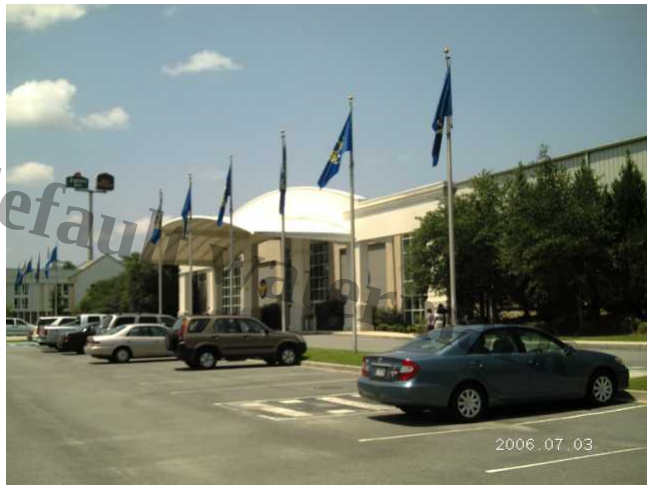
The Mighty 8th Museum in Savannah, GA

Description

Over the weekend of the 4th of July, I was on the road and finally found time to stop and visit the museum for the Mighty 8th Air Force. Itâ€™s right there on the side of I-95, just south of Savannah, GA, featuring a B-47 static display next to the interstate. I wasnâ€™t sure what Iâ€™d find, but, the interior of the building did have some things I hadnâ€™t seen at an air museum before.



The museum starts you out with a little walk through the history leading up to WWII, with some history of the rise of German power, and the attack at Pearl harbor. From there, itâ€™s a lot of info on the planes and men who became the 8th Air Force, stationed in the British Isles. I did note that the aircraft types memorialized were almost exclusively bomber or fighter models, with nothing discussing the logistical planes, which, after checking with my friend Jim, indeed discovered the C-47s and gliders of the troop carrying groups all were in the chain of command. Savannah is the appropriate place for the museum, for, as I found out on my excursion, it was the place where the unit was established in 1942.

Be that as it may, the museum is still a worthwhile side trip, if youâ€™re traveling the East Coast. Hereâ€™s what was in the central gallery display area, which took me by surprise:



Yep, a real war trophy, the venerable ME-163B â€œKometâ€• rocket fighter! Armed with 30mm cannons, they launched this thing vertically (or horizontally with a drop away set of wheels), it then got above the bomber formations, swooped down through them in a high speed, gravity assisted glide, before it landed, sometimes blowing up when it hit the runway, due to the use of hydrogen peroxide as the fuel for the rocket motor.

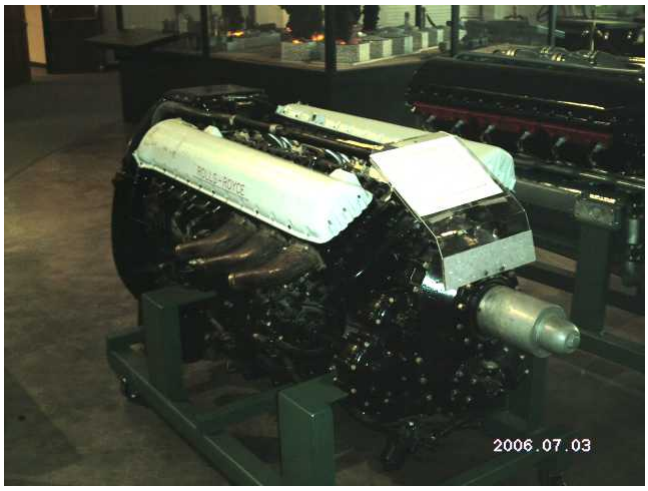
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Hereâ€™s a picture of the business end of this interesting piece of history:



There were displays galore, and several movie theaters looping historical films. Displays included a POW Camp barracks, forged documents from the escape and evasion efforts, aviation art, log books, etc, etcâ€¦the kinds of things youâ€™d expect. As you near the end of the displays, there is the nose section of a MiG-21, with a walk up platform, so you can get a good view of the cockpit. One memorable display was a painting of a ME-109 escorting a battle damaged B-17. The story was the fighter swooped in to strike, and could see several of the crew being treated by others, so he flew alongside the bomber. It wasnâ€™t until about 30 some years later, the German pilot discussed his moment of compassion, and he was able to meet some of the crewmen of the B-17 he declined to shoot down.

Here are some of the other displays:



The Rolls-Royce Merlin engine made famous for its use in the Spitfire and the later Mustangs. I came to know the sound of this Rolls-Royce/V1650 mill when it powered the Unlimited Class hydroplanes in the early â€™60s. If youâ€™re not familiar with that water sport, they were doing 200+ mph with the WWII fighter engines when I was in grade school and now they do 200 plus a little with helicopter turbines, just without the studly roar of the 12 cylinders hammering away.

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There was also a Cyclone engine on a stand. The powerplant of the B-17s and B-24s:



A real P-51D hung proudly on the tail of an ME-109:





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They had a PT-17 Steerman, a scale P-47 and the nose section of a B-24 Liberator in the center gallery. They also had the two waist gunner stations from a B-17, set up with an aerial gunnery simulator, where you could wield a real M2 Browning against FW-190s and ME-109s coming from various attack angles.

Static display outside included the B-47 Stratojet, a MiG-17 â€œFRESCOâ€•



and one of the longest serving aircraft with the US Armed Forces, the F-4 Phantom:



So, thereâ€™s my vacation travel report.

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Category

1. Air Force
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admin