

'MAGNOLIAIR'



Sopwith Pup Aero on Red 9 - 1916

Photos: Editor

THEN...

During World War I, a few of the fairways at Magnolia Point did double duty as landing strips for the warplanes of the era. A unit of American volunteer pilots trained in Green Cove Springs, and went on to fight for France before the United States entered World War I in April 1917. Though in jest at first, 'Magnolair', a clumsy portmanteu of 'Magnolia' and 'debonair' was born, and pilots took to decorating their planes with it.

The golf course provided a unique training ground. The lush fairways and challenging sand traps offered an unusual but effective environment for honing their flying and combat skills. The sight of biplanes, like the iconic Sopwith Pup, taking off and landing amidst the manicured lawns became a common yet surreal scene. The unit favored the Red 9. They found that the shape of its fairways, the doglegs in particular, were very effective in teaching low level bombing and strafing.

As the war intensified, the Magnolair squadron proved themselves in the fight against the Central Powers. By

early 1917, they were deployed to the Western Front, integrating into the Lafayette Escadrille, a renowned squadron of American volunteer pilots. Their experience on the golf course translated surprisingly well to the battlefield. The skills and camaraderie they developed in Florida paid off as they engaged in dogfights and reconnaissance missions over the trenches. After the war, Magnolair hosted a few fly-ins, and promoted a crop-dusting service in the area.

Magnolair as an air combat unit was revived at the start of World War II, and relocated to the nascent Lee Field in what is now Reynolds Park. Their primary aircraft was the Vought F4U Corsair, known for its speed and durability, which was crucial for the upcoming missions in the Pacific Theater. Magnolair was deployed to the



Magnolair FOB - Solomon Islands - 1943



'Maggie P' - Solomons - 1944

Continued



Solomon Islands in early 1944 as part of the larger Allied effort to neutralize Japanese strongholds. The Solomons were strategically important for controlling sea routes and providing bases for further operations in the Pacific.

Not all the unit's heroes saw air combat directly. Ensign Margaret "Maggie P": One of the few female pilots in the squadron, serving as a ferry pilot and later as an invaluable support officer. Her logistical skills and determination were crucial in maintaining the squadron's operational readiness. She earned the nickname 'Miracle Maggie' after organizing an emergency airlift of critical supplies during a typhoon. Her quick thinking and piloting skills ensured that the squadron and indeed a large part of the Allied AirSols joint command in that area of the Solomons remained operational despite the severe weather conditions.



AND NOW...

From a young age, he was fascinated by the sleek, powerful jets that occasionally roared over the ponds and marshes of Magnolia Point. With his relentless enthusiasm and a bit of clever disguise involving a pair of aviator goggles and a flight suit, Nute managed to sneak into the pilot training program at NAS Magnolia's storied Magnoliar.

His instructors quickly realized he was an 'Ace' in the making. His small size, balance and ability to absorb extreme g-forces unfazed, allowed him to make rapid maneuvers that human pilots couldn't match. If necessary, he could combine front and rear paws to operate switches and controls simultaneously throughout the cockpit. And, his instinctive navigation skills—honed from years of swimming through murky backwaters and swamps—proved invaluable in dogfights.

Earning the call sign "Nute," he's become a legend among his peers. Despite his unorthodox entry into the Air Force, Nute's performance, at first in flight simulators, and finally, after a longer probationary period than human pilots, in the air. His performance in combat exercises has been nothing short of spectacular. He even managed to save the base from an unexpected squirrel uprising, utilizing his diplomatic skills and a well-timed very low-altitude barrel roll to defuse the situation.

Off duty, Nute is known for his peculiar habits. He's often seen gnawing on his clipboard, much to the amusement of his squadmates. His locker is filled with aquatic plants, a reminder of his humble beginnings, and he insisted on a small water feature being installed in his quarters, claiming it helps him think better.

The irony of a water-loving Nutria becoming a top jet fighter pilot wasn't lost on anyone. Nute's become a symbol of breaking barriers and defying expectations. His story has spread far and wide, inspiring other animals to pursue their unlikely dreams.

To this day, Nute flies high, a testament to the idea that no dream is too big, no matter how outlandish it may seem. And every time he takes to the skies, he does so with a mischievous glint in his eye, knowing he's proved the doubters wrong. And if need be, water landings will never be a problem.

- EDITOR

