

“FILL ‘ER UP!”

FURTHER SELECTION OF AVIATION-RELATED DISPLAYS
UTILIZED AS ROADSIDE ATTRACTIONS - PART TWO
BY ADAM STANTON

I was gratified when the Editor told me that my articles on “Fly-In Drive-Ins” and “Fill ‘Er Up” had attracted a considerable amount of reader attention. Therefore, we are presenting

Part Two
of “Fill
‘Er Up”

and I have to thank subscribers that have sent in more photographs while also relaying their memories. Roadside America has changed considerably from the pre-war years. As our citizens began to take to the roads in growing numbers, businesses began to cater to that particular segment of the population. At one point, if you were

taking a trip by surface streets then the main roads would often pass directly through towns that already had a social/business

structure in place, hence the term “Main Street America.” As the road system expanded, one would often find that highways would be created that would bypass the main streets in order to avoid congestion. This led to the creation of all sorts of individualized businesses that would pull out all stops to attract the traveler and to find ways of getting said traveler to part with cash for services or attractions.

As we mentioned in last month’s article, gas stations became prime focal points since all



I do not think anyone would dispute that the title for “Ultimate Warbird Gas Station” should go to the Flying Fortress perched over the pumps at Milwaukie, Oregon. The B-17G was purchased by businessman Art Lacey from the surplus field at Altus AAFB where hundreds of similar aircraft awaited the scrapman’s torch. Flown to Portland (Art was a great story teller and loved to tell about all the adventures he encountered when he flew the plane to Portland but, unfortunately, 99% were untrue. However, they have become part of the “record” on the bomber. In a past *Air Classics*, we published a letter from the pilot that actually flew the aircraft and that pretty much set the record straight). Once the bomber was placed atop its stout pylons, it became an instant attraction and customers pulled in for gas and the other items Art had for sale. Sadly, Art never did any

maintenance or attempt any form of preservation with the now increasingly-rare Fort and its condition went downhill over the decades with birds living inside and corrosion taking a deep hold on the airframe. When the Warbird movement started, Art sold the turrets (by now, extremely rare items) to the CAF and mock-up replacements were installed. In this view, The Bomber Gas Station is open and ready for business with a full crew of gas jockeys waiting to take care of the needs of every motorist. In the right background, we can see a slice of 1950s’ roadside life with small independent businesses including a barber shop, a paint/tile store, and the Bomber Café. Truly, a different time in America. Also, we have to wonder on what happened to that magnificent neon sign atop the Fort.