

“WHATZIT/DUNNO” REDUX

Volume 54, 30 January, 2026

(LAST VOLUME - SEE LAST SLIDE)



AN INFORMAL, IRREVERENT COLLECTION OF LITTLE-KNOWN FACTS, CURIOS, AND TRIVIA, OFTEN REGARDING EXHIBITS AT THE NMUSAF.

GOALS:

1. PROMOTE INTELLECTUAL INTERCOURSE
2. SHARE FACTS THAT ARE NOT READILY AVAILABLE IN NMUSAF SOURCES
3. ENCOURAGE COMRADERY AND LEARNING AMONG NMUSAF VOLUNTEERS

ANY/ALL COMMENTS WELCOME TO

jeff.robson@gmail.com

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Notes on the Final Whatzit/Dunno (Redux)

I've shared a brief history of this work of love in the "next to last" Volume, but wanted to provide quick "calibration" for this last one.

First, I hope you'll forgive a little sentimentality and perhaps a ripple in the rhythm of W/D I've tried to maintain over many months. Resolved to end this (at least for a significant respite), I've now gotten the heebie-jeebies... kind of like Neil Armstrong choosing words appropriate for stepping on the moon (but about 10^8 times less significant!).

Second, I apologize to many I know are on secondary distributions, because I want very much for this last W/D to be very NMUSAF-centric. Thus no items regarding the Mars helicopter, Navy hypersonics or the latest on Ukraine drones...

I'll save my final comments on this experience on the last slides. Hope you enjoy.

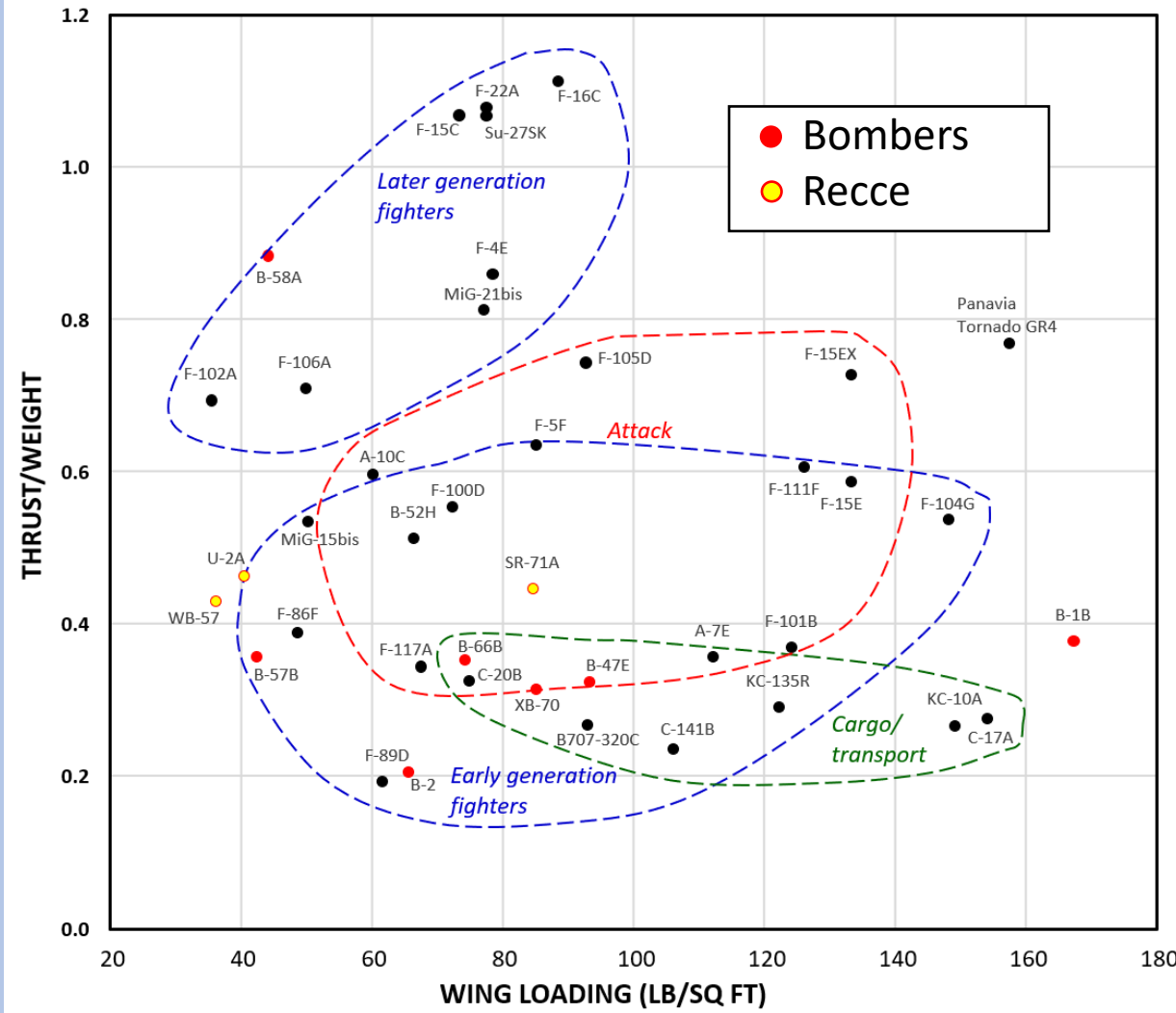
Sometimes Planned Slides Just Don't Fulfil

I picked one of my many future W/D slides in work just to illustrate how sometimes plans simply do not gel or grow like you thought. This one was selected just because I spent so much time gathering and plotting data for many familiar NMUSAF jet-powered vehicles.

I was somehow convinced that this plot would reveal great insights into how missions drive design etc., but bluntly it ended up in a scatter plot that I feebly tried to draw some trends about.

I've generally been proud of my W/D material (although looking back at the early 2020 versions, I see pride of product was still in the future).

So with minor misgivings, I throw this out for your consideration. Any epiphanies should of course be reported to me asap.



Dayton History: Slide 1 of 47 (ha ha)

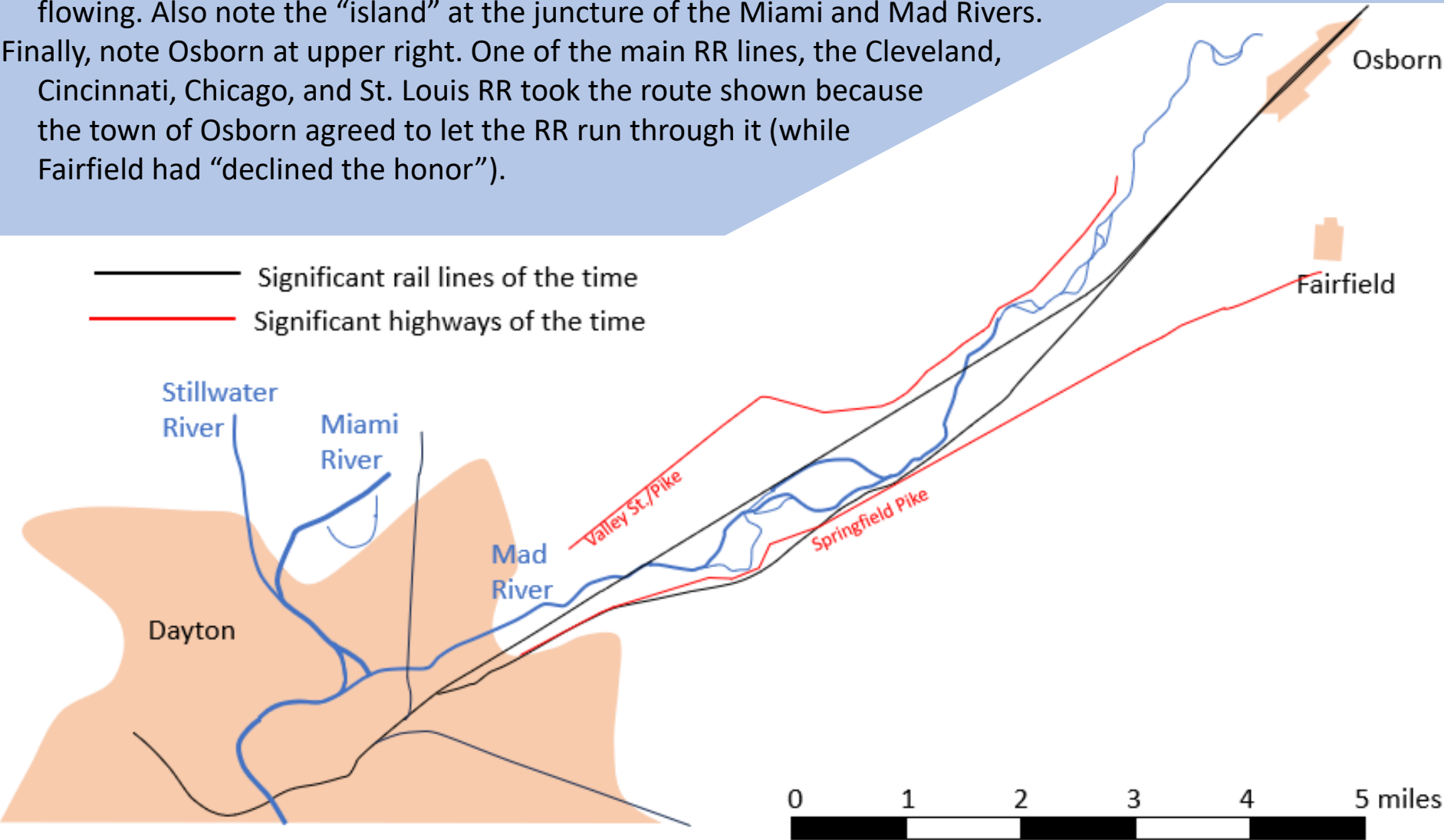
Went ahead and cramped area reserved for text to present largest possible view of this photo taken ~1924. Most interesting of a nice collection Ken Wood recently shared with me, and it motivated me to learn a lot.

Before proceeding, you might see what you recognize... we're looking WNW from roughly high over present WPAFB main runway.



Dayton History: 1906 Had to get grounded before the McCook and Wright Field(s) era, so this map shows some features from a 1906 topographic map that are relevant to our understanding of changes that came soon (and quickly). Note the curve just below where I labeled the Miami River... it was an “oxbow lake” - a remnant of an earlier meander in the Miami that was then separated and no longer flowing. Also note the “island” at the juncture of the Miami and Mad Rivers.

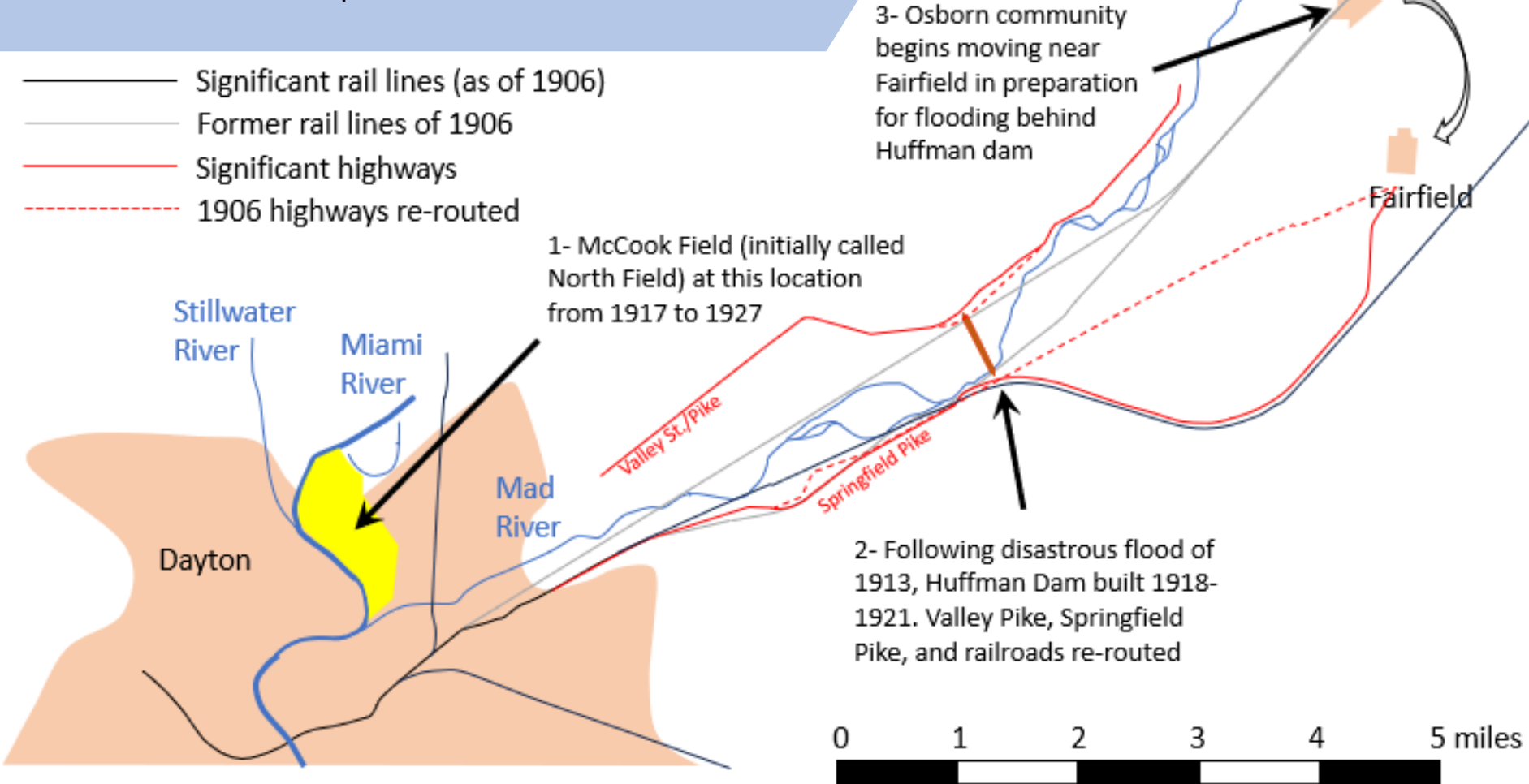
Finally, note Osborn at upper right. One of the main RR lines, the Cleveland, Cincinnati, Chicago, and St. Louis RR took the route shown because the town of Osborn agreed to let the RR run through it (while Fairfield had “declined the honor”).



Dayton History: 1920's

This map is my estimate of the layout around 1924 (time of aerial photo). For us, the most significant developments were McCook Field (1915-1927) and construction of Huffman Dam and its implications to Osborn and later construction. Osborn has begun its move to Fairfield, and significant reroutings of highways and railroads have taken place.

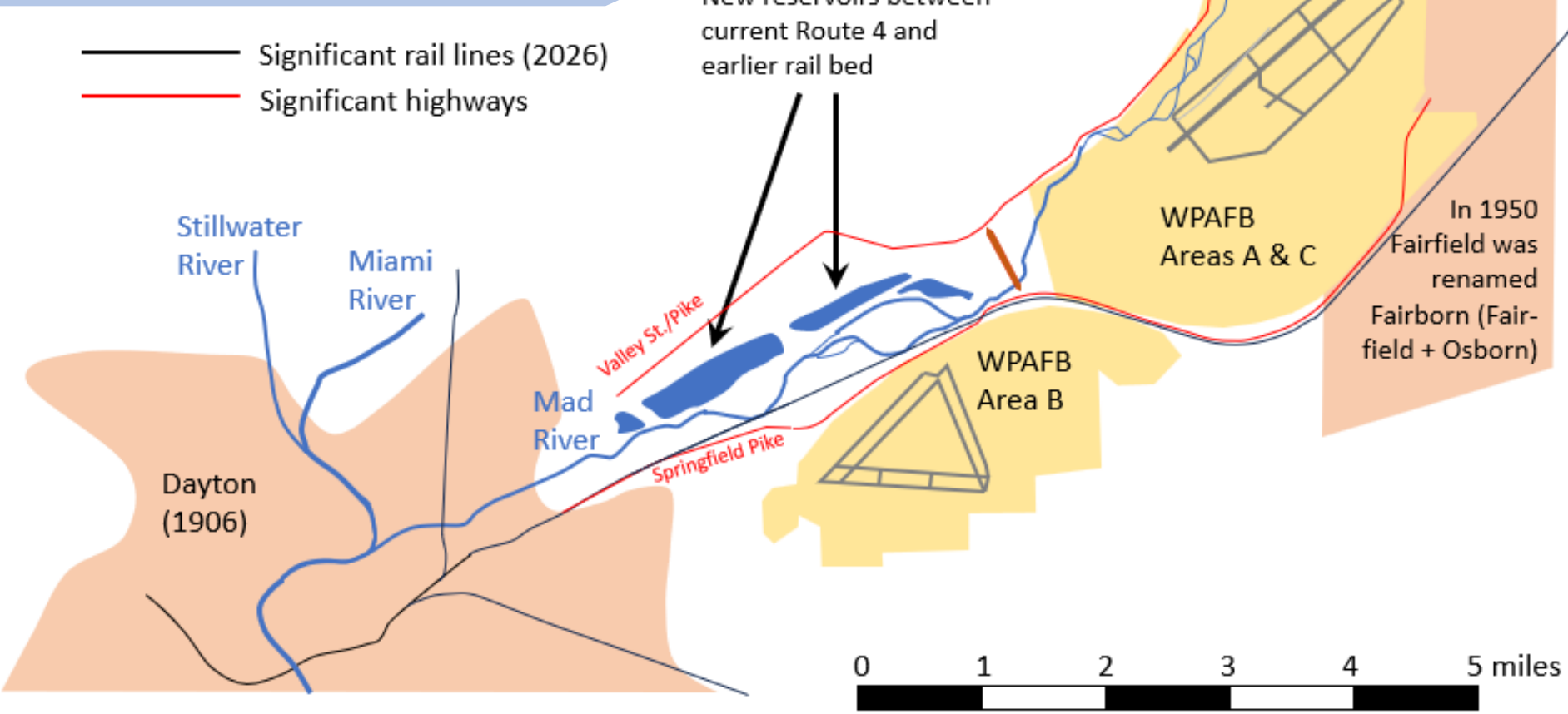
Note the oxbow lake is still present adjacent to McCook, but the island downtown is gone. Osborn has begun its move to Fairfield, and significant reroutings of highways and railroads have taken place.



Dayton History: Present Day

This last map should match your current understanding. Note I have not enlarged Dayton from the 1906 footprint for simplicity, but the new Fairborn has grown considerably and is indicated east of WPAFB. The oxbow lake is long gone with no trace, but the Dayton neighborhood of McCook Field preserves the memory, and within that Kettering Fields still preserves some flat grassy areas that harken back to visiting LUSACs or DH-4's.

Many buildings in Osborn were physically moved to the new location, many now preserved in the "Osborn Historic District". The old Osborn cemetery remained, and is still preserved just 400 ft. off the northern threshold of the main runway at WPAFB!

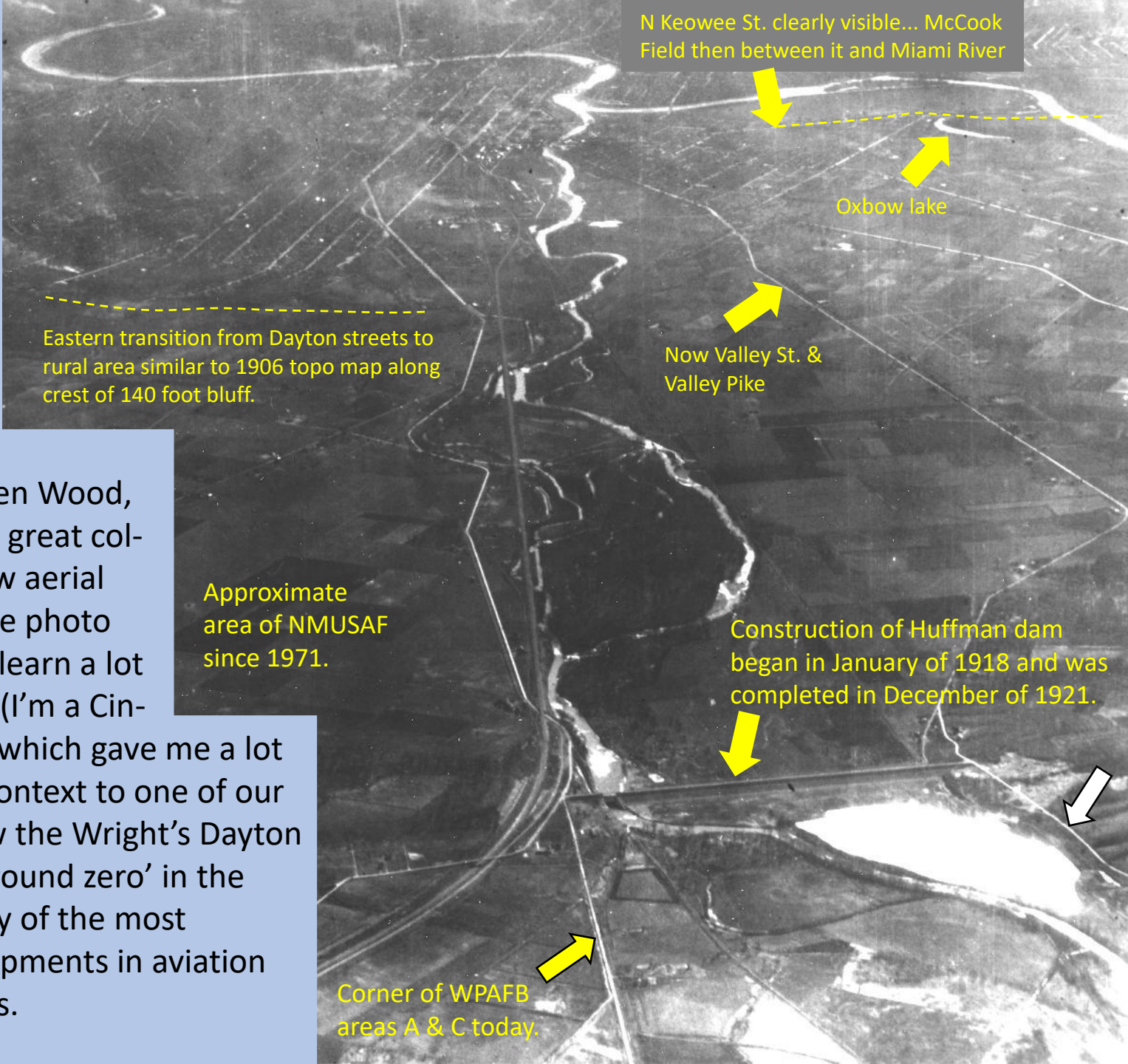


Dayton

History: (concluded)

So here's the earlier photo with notes that may be better understood after the previous maps.

Special thanks to Ken Wood, who loaned me a great collection of old b&w aerial photos. This single photo motivated me to learn a lot about the region (I'm a Cincinnati denizen), which gave me a lot of geographical context to one of our best **stories** - how the Wright's Dayton home became 'ground zero' in the evolution of many of the most important developments in aviation for over 100 years.



N Keowee St. clearly visible... McCook Field then between it and Miami River

Oxbow lake

Eastern transition from Dayton streets to rural area similar to 1906 topo map along crest of 140 foot bluff.

Now Valley St. & Valley Pike

Approximate area of NMUSAF since 1971.

Construction of Huffman dam began in January of 1918 and was completed in December of 1921.

Corner of WPAFB areas A & C today.

Our B-24D and Joe Baugher

Regarding the history of our artifact, the NMUSAF only tells us that “The B-24D on display flew combat missions from North Africa in 1943-1944 with the 512th Bomb Squadron. It was flown to the museum in May 1959.” Anxious to learn more (and confirm this is the real deal), I turned to a thorough and reliable source that all should become familiar with - Joe Baugher. Joe spent a career in physics, not connected at all to aeronautics, but he had a lifetime interest in aviation and when he retired, began a website that is incredible in scope and detail. Example, if you look up “B-24” in his website, you then choose one of 39 articles on each model you’ve heard of, plus several XB’s, navy variants, Liberators in various countries etc. Sadly he passed a few years ago, but you can try out this source at link below (cut & paste):

https://www.aircraftinformation.info/JB_AIF/index.htm

His s/n index for USAF, USAAF and earlier air force aircraft goes from 1908 to 2023 and while the entries are often brief, sometimes you get a bonanza, like what I found for our 42-72843: it was accepted by the USAAF in 1943, and assigned to Herington Army Air Base, KS. In August 1943 it began its flight to Egypt, via Maine, Newfoundland, Scotland, Cornwall, England, Morocco, and Algeria, arriving in Egypt in September. After combat modifications, it was delivered to the 512th Bombardment Squadron, 376th BG, at Benghazi, Libya. After two combat missions, the squadron moved to Tunisia, from where it flew seven combat missions (once sustaining damage from anti-aircraft fire) November when it moved to Italy, where it picked up the names, “Vargas Girl” and “Strawberry Bitch”. It flew 8 more combat missions, until February 1944. Due to its age and obsolescence, the plane was sent back to the USA that April. In 1945 it was stored at Freeman Field, IL, intended for use as a museum aircraft, and in 1946 it was



flown to Orchard Place, IL (now known as Chicago O’Hare), and then to Davis-Monthan AFB, AZ for storage. In May 1959 the plane was flown to the Air Force Museum at Patterson Field, OH. In October 1970 it was towed to the new museum facility at Wright Field.

Answering One Question Usually Spawns More

... and the previous slide is a good example - did you catch that Chicago O'Hare was formerly called Orchard Place? Who would have guessed that's a clue to why O'Hare is coded ORD?

Actually, Orchard Place was simply a farming community. Douglas Aircraft built a plant during WWII to make C-54 Skymasters and the adjoining airport became known as Douglas Field. Shortly after the war, the field stored many captured enemy aircraft. When Douglas departed, the field became Orchard (Douglas) Airport, and soon was coded ORD. In 1949 ORD was renamed O'Hare Airport after Edward J O'Hare, the first navy pilot to become an ace when he shot down 5 Japanese torpedo bombers. A Grumman F4F Wildcat in Terminal 2 commemorates his sacrifice.



Douglas C-54

Well, here's one of the inconsistencies I warned you about - I'm sidetracked on IATA airport codes. Some beggar explanation like ILM (Wilmington), EYW (Key West), and ORF (Norfolk), but the reason is the FCC reserves W's and K's for radio stations (east and west), and the USN reserves the N's so they get skipped.

Here's a few others that seem odd:

- LCK - Rickenbacker Int'l Airport in Columbus - from earlier Lockbourne AFB
- MCO - Orlando Int'l Airport - from McCoy AFB
- MCI - Kansas City Int'l Airport - from earlier Mid-Continent Int'l Airport (also K banned in US)
- CVG - Cincinnati/Northern Ky Int'l Airport - named after nearby Covington, KY
- BNA - Nashville - formerly Berry Field, or Berry Nashville Airport
- TYS - Knoxville - the Tyson family donated the land for the first airport in Knoxville
- CGN - Cologne, Germany - IATA code uses English name Cologne instead of German Köln

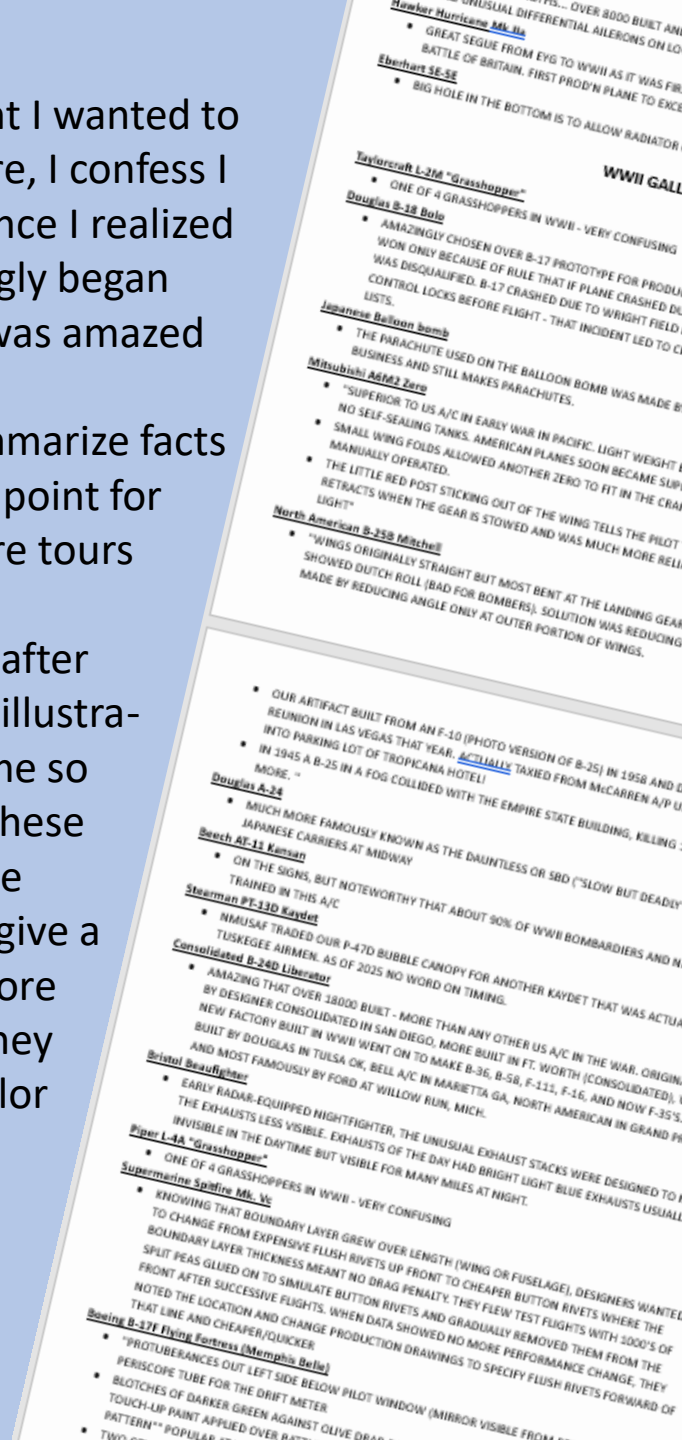
W/D "Parting Gift"

I resolved early in my Volunteer career at NMUSAF that as a Docent I wanted to be able to present all the daily Gallery tours. Before coming here, I confess I had NO interest in early stuff like balloons, biplanes, etc., but once I realized the EYG was an integral part of "telling their story", I begrudgingly began reading about the artifacts and designers of this early era and was amazed at the ideas, technology, and innovations of 100+ years ago.

As I studied for each gallery, I began a running list of bullets to summarize facts on various artifacts and exhibits - not only to provide a starting point for my education, but a living list that I still refer to to refresh before tours and update as new facts are revealed.

I very much appreciate the many kind emails I've already received after announcing the last W/D and I've noted a recurring sentiment, illustrated by this comment: "Sharing all this information has helped me so much in giving tours and trying to answer visitors' questions". These comments reminded me of my original motivation for W/D - the assumption that most of us at NMUSAF want to be able not to give a good factual overview, but be able to answer questions. Therefore I've excerpted many of the bullets for your consideration and they are provided in a Word document so that those inclined can tailor it for their interests.

Further notes on the first page of the attachment - hope this is of benefit.



Ending "Whatzit/Dunno Redux"... for Good?

Well, I ended W/D back in 2021 and thought it was done, but it came back for another incarnation and I am so glad. W/D Redux encouraged me to get to know a lot more - more wonderful stories, more technical facts for this nerd, more friends that wanted to play in my court and share their knowledge, experience, and curiosity.

So kind of like when I retired from GE, I knew it was time to get away from "the grind", but did not know then and don't know now exactly where I'll divert my energies. No comment on whether this is the final end or not, but after a healthy hiatus... well, never say never.

I again want to acknowledge my thanks to former NMUSAF Volunteer Barry Kolano, who gave me my first gallery tours in 2019 and regaled me with interesting stories you never see on the signage. His knowledge and joy in sharing it motivated me very early - I simply wanted to be like Barry. When I removed his name from W/D distribution following his death in September 2020, I was disappointed that I hadn't told him he directly inspired not just W/D but my continuing level of engagement at NMUSAF. Thanks again to Barry and many other Volunteers I've met who make me proud to help tell the incredibly rich story of the USAF.

During this indeterminate hiatus, don't be a stranger. I am happy to share past volumes and would love to share in interesting "Whatzit's" or questions you run across, but more one-on-one than for mass distribution.

And finally, a sincere thank-you to all of you who have ridden along - especially for emails or live comments on ideas and encouragement. Hope to see you all soon.

- Jeff Robeson

1/30/26