



Gateway to the Texas Hill Country

Burnet airport is home to the Commemorative Air Force (CAF) Highland Lakes Squadron

BY BRAD POTTER

At the moment, I wished I were flying a seaplane. On a typical thermal-filled Texas summer day, letting down on Lake Buchanan’s inviting waters looked like the cool thing to do. The outside temperature

hovered around the 100-degree mark as I crossed the lake en route to Burnet Municipal Kate Craddock Field.

Burnet is a small town of about 4,700 and is one of the gateways to the Texas Hill Country. This rolling expanse of mesas, valleys, lakes, and rivers stretches between Austin, San Antonio, Del Rio, and San Angelo. Its diverse ecosystem makes deer hunters, bird watchers, fishermen, and anyone with a passion for the outdoors wish they had property nearby.

My visit, though, was to check out the home of the Commemorative Air Force (CAF) Highland Lakes Squadron. The CAF (formerly the Confederate Air Force) was founded in 1957 and exists to “preserve in flying condition a complete collection of combat aircraft which were flown by all military services of the United States during World War II.” CAF squadrons are scattered across the country and even overseas. They are made up of aircraft enthusiasts who restore, maintain,

and, most important, fly World War II warbirds.

Burnet Municipal is one of those out-of-the-way fields that pilots love to come across. Less than 45 miles northwest of Austin, the field features a 5,000-by-75-foot asphalt Runway 1/19 with a precision approach path indicator (PAPI) on Runway 19. The unicom frequency is 122.8 MHz, and fuel (100LL and Jet-A) and other services are available through Faulkner’s Air Shop.

plays, but you're also free to wander about on your own.

The museum features include small arms from both Allied and Axis forces, knives, insignia, original letters, and photographs. Detailed descriptions of the artifacts and their involvement and use in various theaters of the war accompany the artifacts. There are also a number of scale ship and aircraft

models, as well as an actual B-24 nose turret. Its size makes you wonder how the Army Air Force found airmen small enough to man it.

A problem touring the museum is that the aircraft in the adjacent hangar are visible through the window and seem to subtly wave and encourage you to hurry through the museum and out to the hangar. I soon succumbed and

found myself strolling through history. Different aircraft are in residence at any given time, depending on their owners' schedules and their attendance at various airshows. I was privileged to see three pristine Stearmans, a PT-17, an L5, and a PT-19. There are also vintage automobiles the squadron uses in its airshows. From the hangar rafters, large scale aircraft models dangle in mock

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The Bluebonnet Airshow (top) draws warbirds from squadrons around the state. Burnet Airport Kate Craddock Field is 45 miles northwest of Austin, Texas.



POSTCARDS

From the pattern, you'll see several pilot magnets beckoning you to land and explore. An F-100 Super Sabre, a T-37, and a T-38 Talon are on display outside the CAF hangar. The static displays also draw motorists from adjacent State Highway 281.

After tying down outside Faulkner's FBO, head toward the cavernous CAF hangar just a short stroll across the tarmac past the fuel farm. For many years the base was home to Lefty Gardner's *White Lightning*, a distinctive P-38 instantly recognizable by warbird and air race fans. During my visit, the museum docent told me that Lefty had been forced to set the *Lightnin'* down in a

Mississippi field a short time earlier. Lefty came out OK, but the P-38 is going to take several years of restoration once the money is raised.

The hangar still has much to offer the wayward aviator, however. The entrance opens onto a small but lovingly maintained museum with many World War II displays. A docent is always available to guide visitors through the dis-



Large scale aircraft models hang from the ceilings in the Highland Lakes Squadron Museum.



Another busy day at Burnet airport; warbirds get special care from members of the CAF.

POSTCARDS

rare aoudad sheep can be spotted clambering over seemingly impassible crevasses. Waterfalls and unexpected rock formations come into view with each bend of the river. This cruise itself is worth a flight to Burnet. Visit the Web site (www.canyonoftheeagles.com) for more information.

Burnet Municipal Kate Craddock Field is at 1,283 feet msl and is about a mile southwest of the city. Pattern altitude is 2,288 msl; Runway 1 uses a right-

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BURNET MUNICIPAL AIRPORT

This section printed by City of Burnet.

Burnet Municipal Airport, Kate Craddock Field, is located approximately one mile south of Texas Highway 29 on U.S. Highway 281. It has a 5,000 foot lighted runway with a full length taxiway, which can accommodate aircraft with up to 34,000 pounds per wheel. Also available are two instrument approaches. Both Avgas and jet fuel are available on-site. There is no landing fee, parking fee or tie down fee. Space is available for 56 tie downs on paved parking. Contact Mr. Bobby Bradshaw at (512) 756-6093 for prices and availability of T-hangars.

Faulkner's Air Shop, Inc. provides aircraft maintenance services and flight instructions. Call (512) 756-6655 for current conditions and airport information. Covered tie-downs available.



This cramped B-24 nose turret could house only the smallest Army aviator.

hand pattern. Approaches include GPS, RNAV, NDB, and VOR/DME RNAV. Dial 122.25 for the San Angelo Flight Service Station. Unicom/CTAF for Burnet is 122.8. Weather information is available through the field's ASOS (automated surface observation system) on 119.925 or at 512/756-7277.

Be sure to check notams before flight, of course. Fort Hood, a sprawling Army training facility, is northeast of Burnet and has some associated military operations areas as well as restricted airspace over the base itself. Also, Texas aviators have become familiar with a new restricted area near Waco. The small town of Crawford is home to President Bush's ranch. These days it pays to stay current on notams and be aware of your location lest you find an F-16 off one wing with a scowling pilot at the stick. **AOPA**

i Links to additional information about Burnet airport may be found on AOPA Online (www.aopa.org/pilot/links.shtml).

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POSTCARDS

dives. I spotted an old target drone, a cavernous parachute intended for vehicle drops, and of course, flags. United States and Texas flags complete the arrangement—few organizations are as patriotic as the CAF.

The museum hosts an annual April airshow to help defray maintenance and restoration costs. The event draws warbirds from squadrons around the state. Last year these included appearances by such aircraft as the A-26 Invader, B-25 Mitchell, P-40 Warhawk, B-17 Flying Fortress, F4F Wildcat, TBM

Spacious cruise boats wind up the gentle curves of the river to provide unique views of the wild ranch lands.

Avenger, and R4D Skytrain. Contact the Highland Lakes Squadron (512/756-2226) or online (www.gtwn-sqr.com/caf/index-1.htm) for details.

Once you drag yourself away from the CAF facilities, consider taking time to explore the rest of what the area offers. Quality Taxi serves the airfield and surrounding areas. Local motels and restaurants are a short distance down the highway, but I suggest Canyon of the Eagles Lodge for a great Hill Country experience. The lodge sits on a bluff overlooking Lake Buchanan. Rustic cabins dot the area, widely spaced around a beautifully landscaped pool and central recreation room. The lodge's restaurant features gourmet fare in a tin-topped stone building with a view of the lake. Herb and vegetable gardens planted around the property provide fresh touches to the chef's specials.

The cabins are cozy retreats with a definite rough western accent. Rooms have a bath, telephone, and air conditioning, but no television. Electronic amenities are replaced by inviting covered porches with scenic Hill Country views. Whitetail deer, armadillos,

turkeys, rabbits, and coyotes might make appearances at dusk. What better setting to enjoy a book and a good cigar as evening settles across the water?

Canyon of the Eagles is operated in partnership with the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. Conservation and respect for the local environment figured heavily into the resort's design. Exterior lighting, for example, is minimal to maintain the "dark sky" quality of the site (cabin keys come on rings with small flashlights to help navigate the pathways after dark). This arrangement couples nicely with the Canyon's tele-

scopic observing stations and nightly star-gazing sessions. Hiking trails also abound, so visitors are seldom at a loss for something to do.

This resort is also known for its Vanishing Texas River Cruise, which features two-hour trips up the Colorado River. The trips are popular with birders, as the upper reaches of the river are winter homes to bald- and golden eagles. Spacious cruise boats wind up the gentle curves of the river to provide unique views of the wild adjacent ranch lands. These private properties bordering the river feature steep limestone cliffs where



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