



Top row)
World War II re-enactors camp at Beverly Municipal Airport the day of the dance. (Photo by Maj. Thomas Lyons)

(Second row, right)
The dance is in full swing. (Photo by Maj. Gregory Carter)

(Second row, left)
The Beverly Composite Squadron staff for pose for a fittingly vintage-style photo -- (from left) 1st Lt. Daniel Parsons and Maj. Thomas Lyons and Gregory Carter. (Photo by Capt. Joel Heusser)



(Third row, left)
Work to transform Hangar III is under way. (Photo by Maj. James McIntosh)

Work on the hangar nears completion. (Photo by Maj. James McIntosh)

(Bottom row, left)
The setting sun provides a picturesque setting for the dance. (Photo by Maj. Gregory Carter)



(Bottom row, right)
Bill Hefler of Exeter, N.H., waves to onlookers after the B-17 ride he won in a drawing at the dance the night before. (Photo by Maj. Gregory Carter)



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MASSACHUSETTS -- After almost a year of planning and preparation, for four hours the east side of Beverly Municipal Airport was transported through time and space, back 65 years to the setting for a World War II bomber base.

The occasion was the Beverly Composite Squadron's World War II Hangar Dance, held Sept. 20 as a fundraiser for the unit.

In a hectic six-hour period that afternoon, the airport's Hangar III was emptied of airplanes, cleaned up and decorated, a bandstand erected and a table-edged dance floor created.

While the squadron's senior members were inside racing against the clock to send Hangar III back in time, the cadets filled the traditional role of providing air show perimeter security with a minimum of supervision and a maximum of professionalism.

The bandstand was still in the final stages of construction when the members of the Compaq Big Band arrived and started setting up their music stands and instruments.

People lined up at 5 p.m., a full two hours before the doors were scheduled to open for the dance. Ticket sales were brisk.

When 7 p.m. finally arrived, the squadron's commander, Maj. Tom Lyons, asked bandleader Al Saloky if he wanted an introduction to get the music started.

"We'll take care of it," Saloky assured him, and on his direction the band began playing Glenn Miller's signature standard, "In the

Mood." Two measure into the song, the dance floor was crowded with dancers dressed in period uniforms and civilian attire, and within another measure the transformation was complete.

The night was clear and cool as the big band sounds provided created the appropriate audio complement the three large green bombers and the smaller silver P-51 Mustang forming the visual backdrop. The right music, the right decor and the vintage aircraft right outside the hangar made for a magical night.

We've played a lot 1940s music at a lot of venues," Saloky confided to Lyons, "but this is just awesome."

Lyons said the band rose to the occasion by providing excellent music for the entire evening. "True professionals, from start to finish," he said. "They were a pleasure to work with and a pleasure to listen to, as well."

During the day World War II re-enactors had camped out near the airport diner, dressed in the work clothes of American and German soldiers and airmen of the era. For the dance they changed into more formal uniforms and put the finishing touch on the ambiance for the evening. It was even rumored that Mata Hari was spotted on the dance floor.

At 8:30 p.m., as part of the Beverly squadron's fundraising activities, a B-17 ride donated by the Collings Foundation was raffled off. The winner, Bill Hefler of Exeter, N.H., was present at the dance and seemed to take the announcement in stride. Following his flight the next morning, though, the beaming smile on his face as he exited the aircraft told observers how he really felt about the raffle win.

later Lyons addressed the squadron members at the opening formation of the unit's regular Wednesday night meeting. "In 1996, when I first saw the Collings Foundation Wings of Freedom airplanes on the Beverly airport tarmac, I started telling everyone that we should sponsor a World War II hangar dance," he recalled.

Shortly after assuming command of the squadron in November 2007 Lyons started to plan such an activity in earnest, with his unwavering drive to hold the event inspiring his team to continue to push forward. His dance committee -- Lyons and his top two staff members, Maj. Gregory Carter, deputy commander of cadets, and 1st Lt. Daniel Parsons, deputy commander for seniors -- worked many long hours making plans and addressing concerns.

With the date for the dance nailed down and fast approaching, Lyons continued, "Two months ago I asked for cadet parents to get involved and support us. I asked you cadets and seniors to put up posters and sell tickets.

"Parents answered the call to help with setup, support during and cleanup after the dance. Posters went up all over town and tickets were sold.

"You, the members of the squadron, cadet and seniors, turned a dream into a reality, and what a reality it was!"

Paul Vitale, Beverly Airport Commission chairman, told the assembled squadron that "we are very fortunate to have the Civil Air Patrol a part of the Beverly airport family. On behalf of the entire airport commission, I wanted to come down here tonight to congratulate you, and thank you for a wonderful and memorable event."

In a quiet moment of reflection with his staff the night of the meeting, Lyons summed up the event: "As a fundraiser it was a success, as a dance it was a success, and as an old-fashioned good time it was a success."

Carter said the dance marked "one the most hectic, stressful and enjoyable days of my life. The band was awesome, every guest had a smile, the cadets performed spectacularly and the parents were extremely generous with their time and assistance.

"When can we do this again?"

Added Parsons, "What a night!! I am so impressed by all of the senior members and cadets who put so much time into making this happen. This once again proves that no matter how big the challenge, Beverly Composite Squadron can make it happen. "

The dance is over, the planes are back in the hangar, the bar and bandstand dismantled ... and the planning and preparations for the Second Annual World War II Hangar Dance are already under way.