

# Entertainment

Ethel Simmons editor/644-1100



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107C

## Wing walking

### Action! is the word for new air-show documentary

By Victor E. Swanson  
special writer

**I**MAGINE STANDING on the wing of an open-cockpit biplane while the plane is several hundred feet in the air, undoing your harness, and turning upside down so that you stand on your head. Feel the wind. Imagine thousands of people watching you from below. Wave to the crowd! Try to smile!

Now, that's action! That's why documentary filmmaker Philip Handelman of Handelman Filmworks, Birmingham, is so excited about his latest project, "Action Air Show," a half-hour documentary focusing on an air show held Oct. 3-4 at Willow Run Airport. The film includes footage of a wing walker.

"We have in-flight footage of Lori Lynn Ross, a very well-known Hollywood stunt woman and wing walker,

unstrapping herself from the wing-walk strut on top of a big, old open-cockpit biplane, turning herself upside down, and doing a headstand, for the very first time in public," Handelman said, during an interview on a day that was perfect for flying. "We have that not just from the ground looking up at the airplane and her, but also from the perspective of the leading edge of the wing." Ross was a Southfield resident for part of her childhood.

Wing walking was only one of many thrilling activities that took place during the air show, which Handelman and his crew captured on thousands of feet of videotape.

"Action Air Show" is about the Willow Run Air Show and the Yankee Air Force, which is a volunteer group that's headquartered at Willow Run Airport, dedicated to preserving old war planes," Handelman said. "It's really kind of a visual,

non-stop montage of what an average spectator would see at the Willow Run Airport on those days, with all the extraneous material stripped away."

"IT REALLY DOES give you the highlights of that air show and, I think, through extrapolation, the highlights of most of our major air shows in this country."

Reasons were many for making the documentary. Willow Run Airport is close to his home and production facilities. Handelman, as producer and director, knew Willow Run Airport had been the site of a lot of aviation history.

"Part of the reason the Yankee Air Force located at Willow Run Airport is because of that history, the fact that, oh, 40-some years ago, one of the most famous military aircraft in our nation's history, the B-24 Liberator, was built in large numbers at Willow Run Airport. And, indeed, the hanger that the Yankee Air Force is located in today was part of that production facility."

He also chose to make the documentary at Willow Run because the Blue Angels were scheduled to appear.

"And much of it is predicated on my personal love of aviation," Handelman said, sitting before a large pile of books, most of which are about aviation. About 40 percent of his more than 3,000 books cover aviation. "I guess that's really the heart of it."

Handelman wrote the narration for the documentary, which could be called low budget but should not be thought of as low-quality, and got none other than U.S. Navy Commander Randall (Randy) "Duke" Cunningham (retired) to read the narration.

"RANDY CUNNINGHAM was the first American ace of the Vietnam War," Handelman noted. "It's also the first missile ace — not just in the Vietnam War but in history, first all-missile ace in history. He went on to become the commanding officer of

what's known as the Aggressor Squadron at the Navy Fighter Weapons School at naval air station Miramar, which is popularly known as Top Gun."

"He became an ace by shooting down the infamous Col. Tomb . . . the leading North Vietnamese ace . . . They engaged in what is believed to be the longest single aerial combat in the history of air fighting. It was a 4½-minute dogfight. It's regarded as a classic."

The documentary uses historical photographs. "They are stills that were obtained in some form of archive for history purposes to try to show some of the history, particularly the B-24 Liberator."

"We also have some still photographs of the 95th Pursuit Squadron, which was the all-black pursuit squadron of World War II," some of whom appear in the documentary in interviews.

Of course, the documentary has music, too, which Handelman said "complements" the action.

"Part of the music was obtained from one of the major record companies . . . Most of the music, however, was obtained through a broadcast music library in town and was matched — after spending many, many hours — to the video sequences." He thought a moment and then said, "For a program that's 26 minutes long, I think we have roughly 16 to 18 minutes . . . covered with background music."

HANDELMAN HAS spent more than eight months producing "Action Air Show." However, the work really isn't completely done. Currently, he's working to get the program on television, perhaps on PBS.

He has had programs on television before. Last year he put together "Star-Spangled Music," a program featuring the Detroit Concert Band and conductor Dr. Leonard B. Smith, which was shown on Channel 56 on the Fourth of July. And during the 1981-82 season he was executive producer of "Medal of Honor Rag," a presentation shown under the PBS



U.S. Navy Commander Randall (Randy) "Duke" Cunningham (retired) narrates "Action Air Show," produced by Philip Handelman of Birmingham.

umbrella title "American Playhouse."

In the future Handelman hopes to tackle such topics in documentaries as medicine and health care in our society and the learning process as it relates to children. "And I'd like to follow up on the last few aviation programs I've made."

"It was a lot of fun on the one hand — making that program, and

on the other hand, it was a lot of hard work, and there were some disappointments along the way, as there always seem to be when you embark upon a significant undertaking of this type. But in the end, I think it was worthwhile."

Handelman hopes to have "Action Air Show" on television soon, so watch for it in your television listings.

## Holocaust, fly-in are film themes

Two documentaries produced by Philip Handelman are on tap from Handelman Filmworks. "Remembering the Holocaust" will be telecast for the first time at 11:30 a.m. Sunday, July 10, on CBET, Channel 9, Windsor.

The story of the Holocaust is told in interview segments with seven survivors. These seven, along with many other survivors, were interviewed as part of an ongoing audiovisual history program set up by the Holocaust Memorial Center in West Bloomfield.

All interviews and archival material in "Remembering the Holocaust" were provided by the center.

Handelman also produced and

directed "Stearman Fly-in," which is being distributed nationally to public TV stations by the Central Educational Network. Seven live scenes, representing 25 public TV stations from Connecticut to California, have agreed to broadcast the documentary. No air date has been set for the Detroit area.

"Stearman Fly-in" captures the scene at the 15th annual national gathering of Stearman biplanes at Galesburg, Ill. Walter J. Byrne, former director of the Smithsonian Institution's National Air and Space Museum, narrates the film. Handelman is the pilot of a Stearman and led the formation flight in the documentary's opening flight scene.

## upcoming things to do

Deadline for the Upcoming calendar is one week ahead of publication. Items must be received by Thursday to be considered for publication the following Thursday. Send to: Ethel Simmons, En-

tertainment Editor, the Observer & Eccentric, 35241 Schoolcraft Road, Livonia 48150.

● **MUSICAL EXTENDED**  
The George and Ira Gershwin mu-

sical hit "Girl Crazy" has been extended through Sunday, July 10, at the Birmingham Theatre. The production starring Lorna Luft is being considered for a national tour and a possible New York engagement. For

ticket information, call 644-3533.

### ● PLAYERS AUCTION

The Village Players of Birmingham will stage an auction at 5 p.m. Saturday, June 11, at the playhouse

in Birmingham. Nothing in the auction is valued at less than \$30, and many items are valued at several thousand dollars. Bob Allison, Sonny Elliott, Sen. Jack Faxon and other local celebrities will be in atten-

dance. Tickets at \$10 are available by calling Julie or Tim McGee at 643-0971.

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