Johnny Bones and other eerie residents at NRC Solomons

Interesting tales for the Halloween season

By Donna Cipolloni
NAS Patuxent River Public Affairs

Flying his L-39 Albatros, Art Nalls makes a low pass over the runway at St. Mary’s County Regional Airport during an Oct. 17 vintage aircraft and car show attended by instructors from the U.S. Naval Test Pilot School.

Nall Aviation’s Albatros was designed and built in what is now the Czech Republic in 1982. The Czech spelling of “Albatros” traditionally only has one “s” at the end, versus the westernized spelling.

The L-39 is a two-seat, single-engine jet trainer, capable of speeds up to 480 knots. It can take off and land in approximately 2,000 feet of paved runway, making it ideal to operate as a civilian jet from smaller runways.

The first L-39 took to the skies in 1968. The aircraft was in full-scale production from 1971 until 1999. The L-39 was the first, turbofan-powered jet training aircraft and has been the most widely used advanced trainer in the world. At one time, it was used in 27 countries and has been adapted as a light, ground-attack aircraft.

“Over time it wouldn’t stop, but if I clapped my hands as if to indicate ‘that’s enough,’ it would stop,” she noted. “Whenever that would happen, Madison would just laugh and say it’s Johnny Bones.”

As Madison got a little older, she didn’t refer to Johnny Bones as much.

“But occasionally, as we’d be sitting there talking, she’d look up and smile and then go back to what she was doing,” Gaddis said. “When I’d ask her about it, she’d say Johnny Bones came into the room.”

Also living in the house was the family’s pet, a golden retriever named Bella.

“Sometimes, Bella would jump up and stand in the middle of the room with her tail wagging back and forth, as if she was happy to see someone, but there was never anyone there,” Gaddis said.

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“I first thought I was having dreams, but when I’d go to sleep and roll over on my side, there’s no doubt in my mind that an older woman would hug me from behind,” she said. “She would put her arms around my chest and hug me, a tight hug, like a lonely person would do. I never saw or heard anything, but I sensed it was an older woman. I just knew. It happened so often that if I didn’t feel it for a few nights in a row, I would wonder where she went. It was never a scary thing though, it was actually comforting. And Johnny Bones always seemed friendly; even our dog thought so.”

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Located onboard Navy Recreation Center (NRC) Solomons at the end of the facility and somewhat set apart from the main complex, Quarters A is a brick masonry structure with a gabled roof that now serves as family housing for flag officers stationed at NAS Patuxent River. The house, situated on a knoll from which a long narrow spit of land extends out into the Patuxent River, actually dates back to the 1940s, is built upon the original foundation of a previous structure erected in 1820.

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