



HEIDT
CENTER OF EXCELLENCE
BY THE CHILDREN'S HOME

Heidt Center students visit Natl. Museum of Air Force

by Steven Wilson, Ed.D.



Docent Ted Valley (right) explains to Heidt Center of Excellence students how wood and fabric aircraft evolved into modern fighters.

Students in the autism services program at the Heidt Center of Excellence recently spent the day at the National Museum of the United States Air Force, located at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Dayton, Ohio.

“If anyone tells you that the [Orville and Wilbur] Wright brothers were the first to fly, you can tell them they’re technically wrong,” said Ted Valley, volunteer docent at the museum who lead the tour group.

Valley explained others before the Wright Brothers had accomplished aerial flight in balloons and gliders but the Wrights were the first to achieve controlled flight.

“What Orville and Wilbur Wright figured out was how to make an engine provide power and lift to wings and how to control the aircraft,” he said.

But, some of the students on the tour may have the makings of aviation historians themselves.

“This airplane has a gun on it right above the propeller,” valley said, indicating a World War

I era Spad VII biplane. “Does anyone know where that came from?” The Germans perfected an interrupter gear that synchronized the propeller with the gun, explained Heidt Center student Finn Davitt.

“You’re right!” Valley said.

Valley went on to describe to the class how early fighter planes fired bullets through the propeller and steel plates were used to deflect bullets. This worked for the allied French and British forces but not so well for the German aviators, as their bullets were also steel and chewed through the propellers before Anthony Fokker invented the interrupter gear Davitt was referring to.

While the Heidt Center students had a chance to learn about our nation’s military and civil aviation history in the world’s largest museum dedicated to flight, there was another aspect of learning as well, unique to this program by The Children’s Home.



Heidt Center of Excellence student Finn Davitt (right) answered docent Ted Valley's question that began the part of the tour illustrating how modern fighter aircraft evolved. Davitt was one of several students who provided answers pertaining to the characteristics of powered flight.

"One important aspect of our program at the Heidt Center is developing social skills," said April Carter, autism associate principal at the Heidt Center of Excellence. "So, field trips for us are a double-learning experience. Our students get some hands-on and real world examples of things they learn in their academic studies and we combine that with the socialization and behavioral health training we provide," she said. "Most people say our students are well-mannered, inquisitive, and ask very thoughtful questions when we take them to outside learning opportunities like the Air Force Museum."

