

## **HISTORIAN'S CORNER –**

### **July 2003 – Flying Tankers, New Denver Facility, Lowry Titan Silos**

By: Malt Grogan

I've received several items in the mail over the past months that I thought I should share with everyone.

Vern Morris sent information from a web site for a Canadian Company called Flying Tankers, Inc. (~~martinmars.com~~). Flying Tankers, located near Port Alberni on Vancouver Island in British Columbia, has been operating the last two WWII Martin Mars flying boats as water bombers to fight forest fires for about 40 years. Flying Tankers, Inc. was formed in 1959 by a consortium of BC forest companies after a disastrous fire season and acquired the only remaining four Mars aircraft for \$100,000 US. The US Navy had operated the aircraft during WWII as troop and cargo transports in the Pacific with great success. The Mars are big aircraft, with a 200 ft. wingspan and 165,000 lb max loaded weight. The four aircraft were ferried to BC in 1959 and two were fitted with 6000 US gallon tanks with two retractable scoops built into the hull. These two aircraft were destroyed in 1961 and 1962 (fire fighting operations and storm) but the remaining two aircraft (Philippine and Hawaii) were immediately converted and have operated since 1963 delivering foam or water on forest fires where needed. Together they can deliver as much as 7200 gallons of suppressant every seven minutes in sustained operations. Vern actually saw the aircraft on a trip to BC 15 years ago, and he followed up by finding the Flying Tankers web site which has pictures, video, history and much more. (I found a second website with data on the Mars aircraft as well as most all other aircraft (~~vectorsite.net/avcmast.html~~)). Thanks, Vern!

*[Editor's note (2022): The sites identified in this article are marked either inactive or suspicious security. You can search "Flying Tankers, Inc." and find several articles describing the tankers and their record as fire-fighting aircraft].*

Ron Ritz sent me a copy of "Your job at Martin Denver" dated April 1956, from Bastrop, Texas. The booklet was given to him when he joined the company in July 1956 and the Welcome Page was signed by A. L. Varneur, General Manager. In a section titled 'Transportation Between Facility Locations' the offices described were at 1845 Sherman Street, the Keith Building at 14th and Arapahoe, temporary manufacturing facilities at 1717 S. Acoma, St. and an Engineering Lab at 3595 S. Inca St. in Englewood. The next section makes note

of the "plans for the new Martin plant now being constructed ... where wholesome food will be provided on a non-profit basis. In the Safety Section, it advises against walking under ladders! The cover of the book has an artist's drawing of the planned new Denver facilities (the Engineering and Manufacturing Buildings). Ron also included a letter that noted he was with a Treadway Bridge Company in March 1945 that built a bridge across the Rhine between the towns of St. Goar and St. Goarhausen, after a strongly-contested battle for the eastern shore conducted by the 89th Division. Thanks, Ron!

Norma Emerson sent me the last item—the front page of the *Elbert County News* dated March 13, 2003. The front page has an article titled, "Cold War Secrets Surface" and is about the decommissioned Titan I Missile Complex located on the old Lowry Bombing Range beneath the Elbert County Compactor (landfill). According to the article, each year the county must assess the condition of two wells that were part of the Complex and report to the U. S. Secretary of HEW. This year, John Dunn, who worked for Martin from 1956 to 1972 and was a former Elbert County Commissioner, helped give the tour of the complex to county and municipal employees and elected officials. According to the article, John watched three Titan I missiles rise from their silos in preparation for launch during the Cuban missile crisis in 1962, and then watched with great relief as they were lowered back into their silos when the crisis was over. Thanks, Norma!