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**After 25 Years of Flight, Menhaden Spotter Plane
Crash Lands for Science**

WASHINGTON (Menhaden Fisheries Coalition) – September 2, 2015 -- After retiring from his career as a menhaden spotter pilot last fall, Bill Corbett saw his long-time plane enjoy a brief second life as a science experiment last Wednesday. NASA’s Langley Research Center in Hampton, Virginia, which acquired the plane from Mr. Corbett, intentionally crashed the aircraft to test the effectiveness of emergency locator transmitters (ELTs), devices used to locate downed airplanes in the event of an emergency.

A spotter pilot for 35 years, Mr. Corbett has experience across the menhaden fishery, flying for companies based out of Florida, Mississippi, and Virginia before coming to work for Omega Protein, a Menhaden Fisheries Coalition member based out of Reedville, Virginia, in 1990. Mr. Corbett owned and operated his plane, a Cessna 172, for over 25 years, and logged over 26,000 flight hours on the aircraft. He proudly noted that, at the time of his retirement, the plane remained in top shape, despite over two decades in the air.

“I would have flown it to California,” he said. “No one really knows how long these things are going to last.”

After retiring in 2014, Mr. Corbett sold the plane to a broker working to acquire test planes for the Langley Center. Mr. Corbett cited the benefits that the experiments would provide to aviation research as one of the main reasons he decided to sell to NASA.

“I was aware that it was going to be crashed to destruction, and I had mixed feelings about that,” Mr. Corbett said. But he added, “I can go to bed knowing that the airplane went to good use for aviation.”

The test, which took place on August 26, was the final of three conducted this summer by the Center, and funded by NASA's Search and Rescue Mission Office. The tests are designed to crash airplanes in a way that mimics real world conditions to test the resiliency of the transmitters. These transmitters send location data to rescue personnel in the event of an emergency. For this test, Mr. Corbett's plane was dropped from 100 feet above the ground, crashing onto its tail. A statement from the Langley Center explains the experiment was intended to simulate a "severe but survivable plane accident."

[According to the Center](#), this research into ELTs "is designed to find practical ways to improve ELT system performance and robustness, giving rescue workers the best chance of saving lives."

Spotter pilots have long been an integral part of the menhaden fishery. Since the end of World War II, they have assisted menhaden boats and fishermen in locating the dense schools of menhaden that are best seen from the air. Their flight experience and skills in finding menhaden have proven to be an invaluable asset to the fishery.

About the Menhaden Fisheries Coalition

The Menhaden Fisheries Coalition is a collective of menhaden fisherman, related businesses, and supporting industries. Comprised of over 30 businesses along the Atlantic and Gulf coasts, the Menhaden Fisheries Coalition conducts media and public outreach on behalf of the menhaden industry to ensure that members of the public, media, and government are informed of important issues, events, and facts about the fishery.