

AVIATION REPAIR DEPOT

Indiana State Historical Marker
<http://www.in.gov/history/3926.htm>

April 3, 2018

Town of Speedway
5620 Crawfordsville Road
Suite M
Speedway, IN 46224

Attention: Jacob Blasdel Town Manager

We are pleased to share news of the forthcoming dedication of an Indiana Historical Bureau marker on Main Street to recognize the site of the World War I era US Army's Aviation Repair Depot in Speedway. The marker site is the east side of Main Street's intersection at future B&O Rail Trail and is shown on Attachment No. 1. The marker is sponsored by Rolls-Royce North America and its location and installation was coordinated with the assistance of the Town of Speedway Manager, Jacob Blasdel, and his team. A dedication and unveiling of the marker is planned for April 24, 2018 at 12:45 PM.

Established in February 1918, the Aviation Repair Depot advanced military aviation and stood as "as an example of the determination and resourcefulness of the United States to play its part" in World War I.³⁰ Bound by Main Street at the west, the road between the former Ed Carpenter Racing and Dallara at the north, roughly present-day Allison Way at the east, and the B&O Rail line, at the south, the depot was well-positioned to receive wrecked and damaged aircraft via rail. The large site contained aircraft and engine repair shops, four barracks to house repair workers of the 809, 810, 811, and 821st squadrons, officers' quarters, hospital, a YMCA and other buildings to support the operation. Rebuilt aircraft were towed up Main Street to the Indianapolis Motor Speedway where they were test flown from the infield.

From the arrival of the first wreck in April 1918 to the close of that year, 313 planes were repaired at the depot. Following the end of the war, most of the facility was dismantled, but aviation work continued as the engine repair shop and site were taken over by the evolving Allison Engineering Company. The historical significance of the depot site in Speedway cannot be denied as the depot history is intertwined with the World War I work of Allison Experimental Company and the Indianapolis Motor Speedway.

(continued)

³⁰ (1918, October 5). Repair Depot built up in a few months. *Speedway Dope*, 1(2), 1. Indiana State Library, ISLI 940.44 S742D.

Today, nothing of this facility remains and few in Speedway know of this history. The historical marker will bring recognition and more fully illustrate the rich engineering and manufacturing legacy along Speedway's Main Street, while complimenting Main Street's cultural development.

Attached please find:

- 1) The outline of the Depot overlaid on a Google map showing current businesses relative to the Depot.
- 2) An 1918 aerial photo of the Repair Depot with principal buildings identified.
- 3) A photo of the 819th Repair Squadron staff & repaired aircraft on the Speedway infield
- 4) Upper front page of the Repair Depot employee newspaper, the "Speedway Dope".

Please feel free to contact us with any questions.



Lydia Spotts, Archivist

Marker Applicant

317 | 916 6987

lydspotts@gmail.com

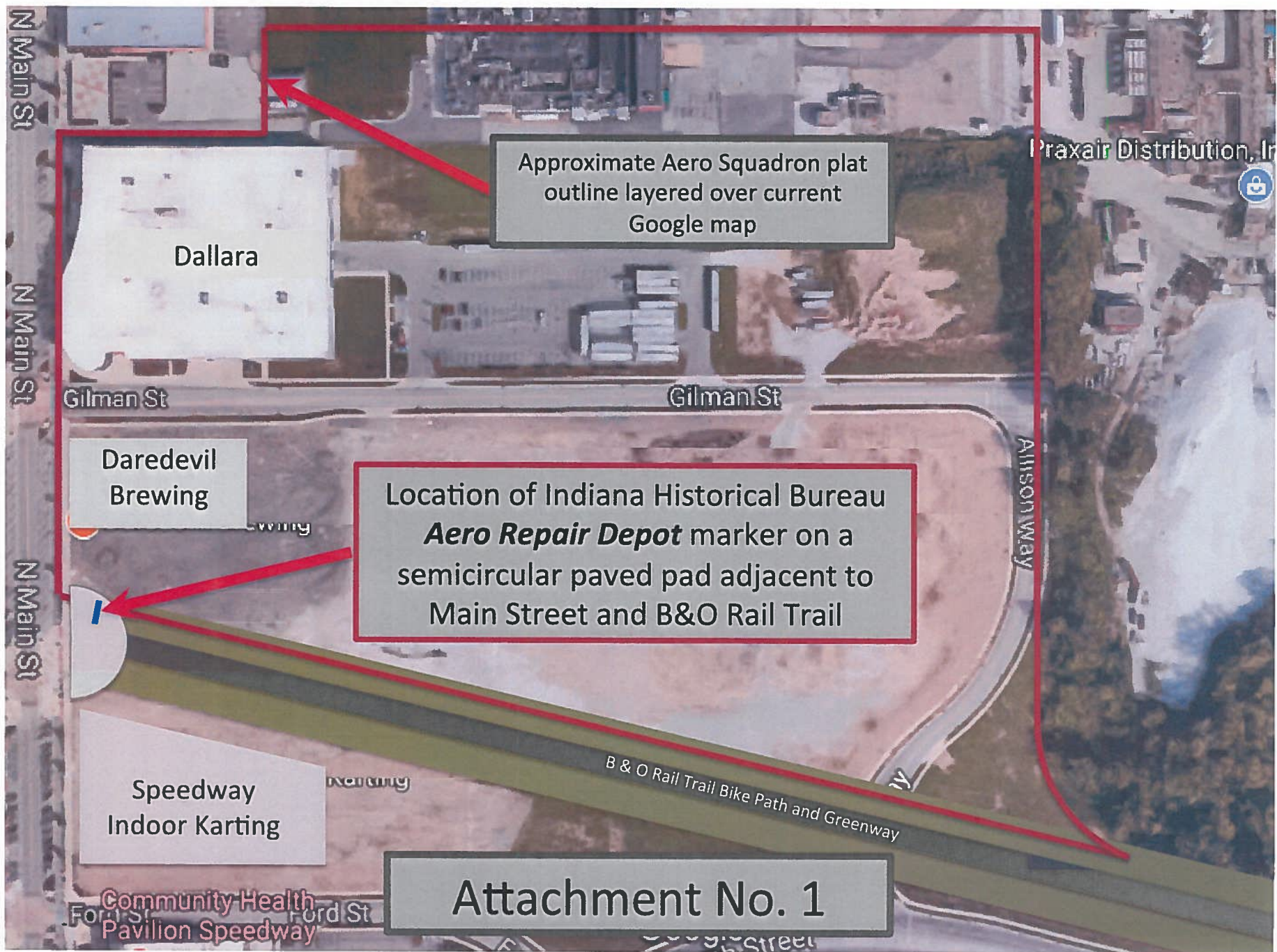


Paul Jablonski, Project Coordinator

Rolls-Royce Heritage Trust - Allison Branch

317 | 514 8992

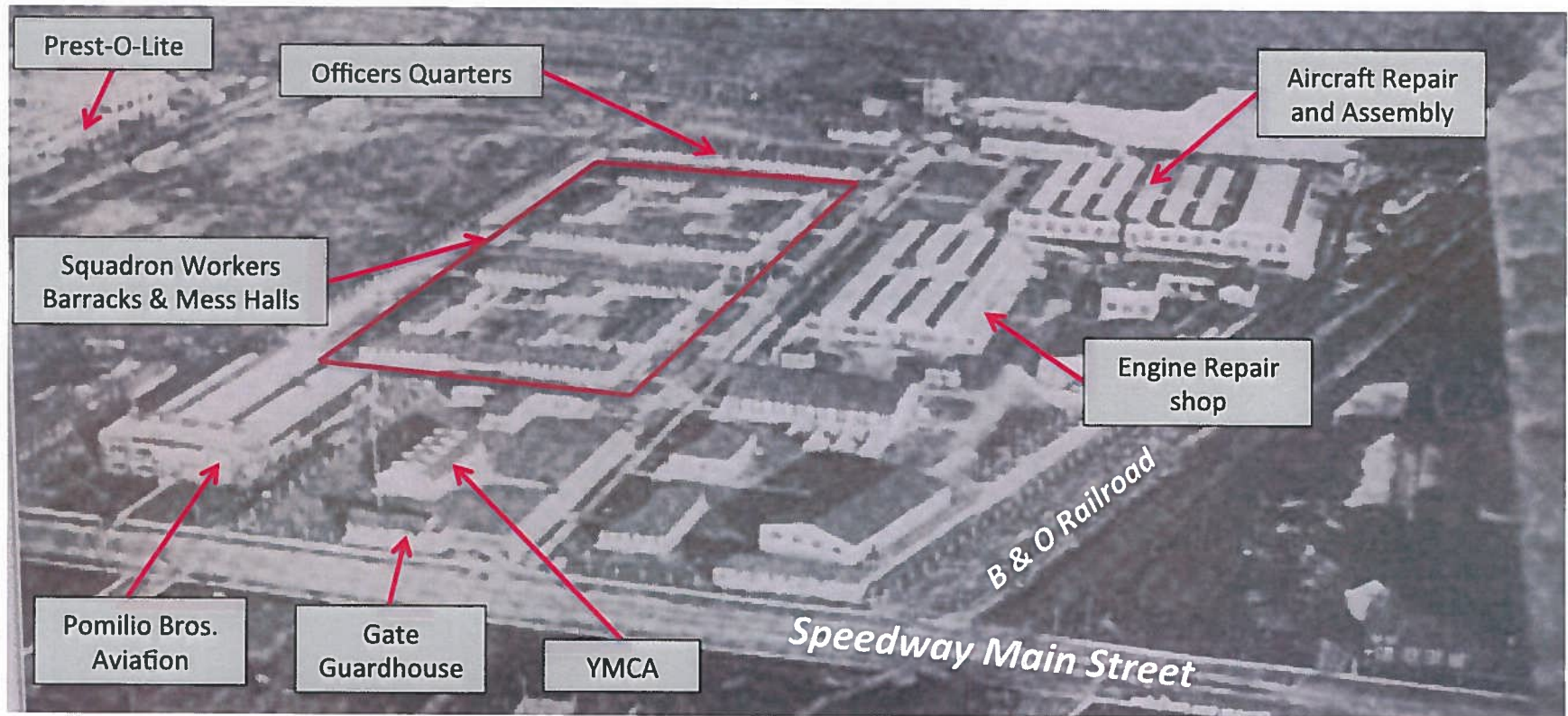
pmjrolls@gmail.com



Jablonski, P. (2017). Google Maps, annotated. <https://drive.google.com/open?id=1BLIyuyYUWGLIA0jCi-Q4aCVgVcjXXWHk&usp=sharing>

US Army Aero Repair Depot, Speedway, Indiana

Aerial photo circa 1918-19



Attachment No. 2

Menkel, W. (1919 September 1). "New planes for old," The work of the Aviation Repair Depots. *Aerial Age Weekly*, 9(25). 1130-1131. Google Books. <https://books.google.com/books?id=r9dLAAAAYAAJ&vq=speedway&num=14&pg=PA1129#v=onepage&q&f=false>

821st Aero Squadron of the Speedway, Indiana Aviation Repair Depot December 1918

Photo is taken in the Indianapolis Motor Speedway infield



Attachment No. 3

Attachment No. 4

SPEEDWAY DOPE

Published by the Enlisted Men of the Aviation Repair Depot, Speedway, Indianapolis, Indiana.

Volume I

Speedway, Indianapolis, Ind., Saturday, Nov. 16, 1918

Number 8



A GROUP OF THE AVIATION REPAIR DEPOT OFFICERS AT THE FLYING FIELD, SPEEDWAY MOTOR TRACK.

Left to right—Lt. A. D. Melvaine, Sen. Instructor Frank Mills, Lt. James Wallace, Lt. William Groom, Lt. Col. A. W. Robins, Capt. Edward Laughlin, Lt. A. L. Maurer, Lt. Ralph M. Snyder, Lt. H. A. Knudson, Lt. R. J. Brandt, Lt. R. A. Ballard, Lt. Kincaid.

Note that "Dope" has two meanings: 1) Information provided as via this newspaper and 2) The flexible paint applied to the cloth covering the aircraft wings and fuselage making it tight and protected from rain.