History for the asking
Information galore in AMCM’s library

FOUNDATION NOTES
Meet the AMCM’s new directors

GLIDER REBORN
Volunteers bring CG-4A back to life

I WANT YOU FOR AMCM’S ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

PAGE 8
Air Mobility Command Museum

Mission Statement

The mission of the Air Mobility Command Museum is twofold:

- To present the history and development of military airlift and tanker operations.
- In a goal closely aligned with the first, to portray the rich history of Dover Air Force Base and its predecessor, Dover Army Airfield.

AMC Museum Staff

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Curator
Jim Leech
Operations Manager
John Taylor
Archivist
Lt. Col. Harry E. Heist, USAF (Ret.)
Collections Manager
Deborah Sellars
Educator
Dick Caldwell
Museum Store Manager
Jim Stewart
Volunteer Coordinator
Janice Caldwell
Librarian
MSgt. Bob Wikso, USAF (Ret.)
Membership Manager
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Website (www.amcmuseum.org)
Hal Sellars

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What is the Air Mobility Command Museum?

Located in Building 1301 on Dover Air Force Base, Kent County, Delaware, the AMC Museum is part of the National Museum of the United States Air Force’s field museum system. Building 1301 was built in 1944 and used in World War II by the 4146 Base Unit as a secret rocket development site at what was known as the Dover Army Airfield. During the 1950s through 1970s, the area was home to various fighter squadrons serving the base. Following several years of inactivity, the facility was renovated to house the AMC Museum. The Museum consists of the former hangar, administrative offices, shop and heating plant, and now counts more than 30 planes as part of its inventory.

Building 1301 was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1994.

Although located on Dover-AFB proper, entrance to the Museum may be made from Delaware Route 9, south of the base. Admission to and parking at the Museum is free and military identification is not required. The Air Mobility Command Museum is open from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., Tuesday through Sunday, every day of the year except Thanksgiving and Christmas.

For more information, call 302-677-5939.

The Hangar Digest is printed and mailed by the Farley Printing Company, Dover, Del.
From the Director

Budget cutbacks mean major loss for AMC Museum

I wish you all a great 2012. Remember it was just 100 years ago that Army Signal Corps airplanes were allowed to participate in Army maneuvers for the first time.

On a bright note, the garden train display put on by the Shoreline Garden Railroad Club has been a big success for the second year. We had more than 7,000 visitors in December. I’m not sure who has more fun, the visiting children or our volunteers who have learned to run the trains.

There is some other very good news on a completely different note. Darrell Smoker of Strasburg, Pa., has agreed to loan the Museum three rare and wonderful items from the World War II era. Now, some of you may immediately note we don’t normally take loans; that is true but in this case we obtained permission from the AMC Command Curator to accept these three things because Darrell’s intention is, at this point, to consider making them a permanent donation in a year.

And what are these artifacts that have us so excited? During the early days of the war, the Army realized a need for combat engineering equipment that could be hauled on the transport aircraft and gliders in use at the time. A whole series of items were developed that could build runways and roads but were small enough and light enough they could fit inside a CG-4A glider. If you walk by the tail of our C-47 you will see a Clark Airborne Bulldozer and it is a virtually perfect restoration, so good that I got to drive it into place. It runs like a champ. As soon as we have the new Quonset hut completed we will put on display a Case Airborne Tractor and a Converto Dump trailer as well. These help tell the story of when airlift became a major factor in strategic planning and humanitarian operations.

Last issue I had to pass on the bad news that we were required to terminate our temporary exhibit technician due to Air Force-wide budget cuts. If you read the newspaper or watch the news you know the military is downsizing and we have to be part of that process. Losing an employee we only had here for three months hurt since we were making great progress on updating some exhibits and on our aircraft maintenance. Now we are going to lose one of our three core positions, a much bigger loss.

In 1986, the wing commander here was the illustrious Walt Kross, later commander of the U.S. Transportation Command and Air Mobility Command. Col. Kross wanted to start a historical center to preserve our base and airlift heritage. Along with two fliers I was asked to make something happen. The deputy commander for maintenance allowed me to steal one of his best master sergeants from the flight line “for a year;” thus Master Sgt. Jim Leech became our first full time employee. At that time the Museum consisted of one wrecked airplane and about 1,200 square feet of floor space. Jim hit the ground running and never looked back. At that time the museum was just an “additional duty” for me; I did the paperwork and coordination, and Jim did all the real work. One year turned into several and Jim had to make a decision. If he stayed at the Museum he would not get promoted to senior master sergeant. Jim elected to stay, he loved this place.

When it was time for him to retire from the Air Force he had to wait six months before he was eligible to apply for the civil service position we were working on to raise the Historical Center to the next level. He worked at the museum as a volunteer during that period. We had become the Dover AFB Museum and we needed a professional curator. There were several applicants for the curator’s job. Some had good résumés but nobody came close to matching Jim’s expertise. He was hired in 1991 and has been our “go to” guy ever since.

Whether it was towing an aircraft into a tight hangar or figuring out how to fix something with nothing, Jim has always been there. We are not sure when Jim is actually going to put down his toolbox, so to speak, but I’m going to be the first person to say he carried this place on his back in the beginning and his continued efforts have made it what it is today.

People who know us know that Jim and I fight like brothers sometimes but he has always put the interest of this Museum first and he has always been the right guy for the job. I will miss him.

— Mike

The AMC Museum recently obtained the loan of a Clark Airborne Bulldozer, courtesy of Darrell Smoker of Strasburg, Pa. The small dozers were designed to be flown either in the C-47, an example of which can be seen in the background, or in the CG-4A Waco glider. Approximately 1,500 of the two-ton dozers were manufactured by the Clark Equipment Company of Buchanan, Mich.
Cruisin’ with the Curator

C-7, C-119, Waco glider refurbishments cap a busy 2011

Here we are folks, yet another year upon us. Where is time going? Since our last episode (or newsletter), the time of year and the holiday period kind of slowed things down just a bit, but … we still got things done. Our C-130 has been repainted and really looks good. It appears darker than normal but the color is accurate with the Mil Spec NSN chip chart. For those of you unfamiliar with the jargon, we’re good to go!

Hey, before I forget, if you didn’t get a chance to stop by the Museum in December to see the train setup, shame, shame. The Shoreline Garden Railroad Club set up a spectacular train display around the Museum Christmas tree and hundreds of visitors stopped by to see it all. Hopefully the club will be available to once again treat our guests to another great train layout this coming holiday season. After all, as of Jan. 1, there’s only 356 days until Christmas!

Okay, back to the planes. The C-7 Caribou restoration team is still moving along with the rehab of the plane’s interior. All of the soundproofing insulation has been removed and new Velcro and material will be installed. The entire cargo deck has been removed and new pieces have been cut and painted and are awaiting installation. The cockpit is pretty much cleared out and as time permits, repainting will be accomplished.

The CG-4 glider work is on-going with the good folks at the Massey Air Museum providing excellent on-site fabric recovering of flight controls and sections of the fuselage. There’s currently no completion date but the project is moving ahead steadily and more and more the glider is beginning to look like an aircraft. We’ll keep you advised on the progress.

Back on the main ramp, the C-119 group is also moving along on the restoration of the interior of that aircraft. As parts arrive from sources west, the crew rehabs them and installs as required. Now if I can just keep them away from the coffee pot, I might just get the plane finished. Shhhhhhhhh … that’ll be between you and me!

The control tower is up and running for tours. It took some time but we finally have it in “visitor” condition and it’s proving to be a hit. Just as a heads up for those who want to experience the view, it’s quite a climb to the top especially the last dozen steps, so if you’re not physically fit or you are afraid of heights, this stop on the tour isn’t for you. We have a wide screen TV at the base of the tower connected to a camera in the tower so you can get the same view as those upstairs, but without the climb.

One last item and that’s our VC-9 (aka Air Force 2). We’ve had a steady stream of visitors hoping to get an up close look at this historic aircraft, especially the interior. Beginning March 17, the plane will be open for walk-throughs from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. every third Saturday of the month.

That’s all for now folks. Hope to talk with you again soon. Take care and smooth landings!

— Jim

Sixteen honored in AMC Museum’s Commemoration Park

An additional 16 memorial bricks were placed in the AMC Museum’s Commemoration Park on Veterans Day, 2012, said Museum volunteer Paul Gillis. The bricks were installed in the walkway leading to the park’s memorial wall, and are available for viewing during normal Museum hours, Gillis said.


For more information on ordering a memorial to be placed in the AMCM Commemoration Park, see page 14. Bricks are installed in the park each Memorial Day and Veterans Day.
Got books?

AMCM librarian Bob Wikso helps open portals of the past

It’s not quite the ancient Royal Library at Alexandria, Egypt, but the Air Mobility Command Museum’s own collection is quite a wonder in its own right.

Tucked away in the southeast corner of Hangar 1301, the library contains items ranging from old 16mm films to biographies of noted airmen to books on almost every aspect of airlift and airlift transportation, and is regularly available for public use.

Like almost every other function at the Museum, the library is run on a volunteer basis, with retired USAF flight engineer Master Sgt. Bob Wikso heading a staff of one – himself.

Over the past dozen years, Wikso is credited with singlehandedly reorganizing the library’s collection as well as overseeing a two-fold expansion of its floor space.

In all, Wikso estimates he’s spent more than 2,000 hours keeping the library ready for use by anyone who wants to take advantage of its storehouse of information.

True to the Museum’s charge of showcasing air transport throughout the decades, the library focuses mostly on the planes and people who have carried out missions for the Air Mobility Command, the Military Airlift Command and their predecessors.

It was Wikso’s love of history that brought him to the librarian’s post. The Long Island, N.Y., native enlisted in the Air Force as an airplane engine mechanic in 1953, but retrained as a flight engineer in 1966. With the new job came an assignment to fly the C-141 Starlifter out of Dover Air Force Base; four years later he transitioned to the C-5 Galaxy, which he flew for three more years. Following his retirement from active duty, he flew with Dover’s Air Force Reserve 512th Airlift Wing for an additional 10 years.

While at Dover, Wikso earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in history from Delaware State College (now University) and shortly afterward wound up back at Dover as a simulator instructor. In all, Wikso has spent about 40 of the past 45 years associated with Dover AFB.

It was in 1999, while working as editor of the 20th Airlift Squadron Alumni Association newsletter that Wikso first came to the AMC Museum.

“I did my first newsletter at about the time I needed to do some research,” Wikso said. “I ran into [Museum Archivist] Harry Leister, who said, ‘Come over and let me show you our library.’”

The tiny library was “a bit disorganized,” but Wikso recognized a diamond in the rough. Leister asked if Wikso might consider doing some volunteer work at the library and Wikso immediately jumped on the opportunity.

“I thought this is a goldmine for anyone wanting to do research. I’ll give it a whirl.”

The first thing Museum Director Mike Heist wanted Wikso to do was find a way to organize what he called just “a collection of books.”

“‘I went to him when he volunteered and said we couldn’t find the books we have, and having them doesn’t do us any good if we can’t find them when we need them,’” Leister said. “He got right to work.”

Having become familiar with library organization during his college years but also knowing he had no practical experience in the field, Wikso immediately set about reorganizing the stacks along the lines of the Dewey Decimal System, the American standard for library organization. He got valuable help from a representative from the Kent County library, although she first thought he was in over his head.

“She came out and saw what we had and just shook her head,” Wikso recalled. “She said, ‘I don’t know what you’re going to do, but keep in mind this is your library, so do what you want.’”

“Bob did a wonderful job of cataloguing all those books from scratch and then loading them into a database so they’d be easy to find,” Leister said. “That wasn’t easy, but he learned it and is pretty much a one-man operation.”

Today, more than 12 years after he started, the library’s 1,200 books are arranged in a collection that is neat, well cared for, and, most importantly, easy to use. That number includes approximately 500 books added to the collection since Wikso took over; like most museum libraries, the collection has grown over the years primarily through donations of books rather than outright purchases.

A good library is an important tool for any museum, but especially for one such as the AMC Museum. While the collection is open to anyone needing to do research, it also is an invaluable asset to the Museum’s volunteer staff, who use it to refresh their memories on facts and tidbits they use to spice up presentations to Museum visitors.

“It helps them to know what they’re talking about,” Wikso said. “They can talk to the public. It’s important they know about each airplane because if someone asks them a question and they try to fake their way

(See AMC Library on page 12)
By way of kicking off 2012, I’d like to introduce the AMC Museum’s Foundation board members to you each year. In accordance with our constitution and bylaws, the Museum Foundation elects five board members annually, with each serving a three-year term. Occasionally a member has to leave the board early and we elect a replacement member who serves out the remainder of that three-year term. We introduced Bettie Campbell in our last issue, so here are our other four 2011-2014 AMC Museum Foundation board members and one replacement member.

**Bob Berglund,** born and raised in Dover, is the retired owner of the former Dover Hardware, once a staple on Loockerman Street in Dover. A longtime community volunteer, Bob is starting his fourth year as a Museum Foundation board member. He has served as state president of the Air Force Association and has been a board member of Bayhealth, Bayhealth Foundation and the Cancer Institute at Bayhealth, as well as other health related charitable organizations. He’s also served as a city of Dover planning commissioner, president of the Central Delaware Chamber of Commerce and the Downtown Dover Development Corporation. For fun, he likes to dine with friends and talk politics. The last three years, Bob’s been a central figure in saving your Foundation dollars by closely monitoring our advertising budget. We’ve also used his retail experience to help monitor our store activities, including our recent renovation. You’ll frequently see him hanging out at the Museum helping with most of our AMC Museum and Foundation functions.

**Mike Frebert** was president of Dover Litho Printing Company for 24 years, a company founded by his father, George Frebert, in 1957. Mike, born in Dover, graduated with a degree in architecture from the University of Maryland. He worked for Tetra-Tech Architects in Wilmington, Del., on large commercial projects for five years and continued his education in business administration at Goldey Beacom College and accounting at Delaware Technical and Community College. His aviation interests started as a child flying with his dad. As actual planes were being worked on in their garage, Mike was building model planes. He enjoyed flying with his dad in their 1966 Alon Aircoupe and his love for aviation has never ended -- he still flies at a much smaller scale, teaching his youngest son, Noah, on remote controlled planes. Mike is very involved with our local community, helping with many local projects and fundraisers. He has served on the board of directors for the Central Delaware Chamber of Commerce, as a past president of the Capital City Rotary, on the board of directors for the Capitol Theater, and as an honorary commander for the Dover Air Force Base 436th Airlift Wing. The National Republican Congressional Committee, in Washington D.C., appointed Mike to the Business Advisory Council representing small business for the state of Delaware. After a day is done, Mike enjoys time with his wife, Diane and three children Matthew, Rachel, and Noah. Matthew, soon to be promoted to captain, is stationed at Kunsan Air Base, South Korea. Adding to the fun is his German shepherd, Bailey, who often goes to work with Mike. Mike has been a long-time Friend of the Museum, frequently supporting our printing needs, from raffle tickets and brochures to publishing the Hangar Digest. We’re looking forward to his expertise and continued support in the future.

**Leonard Heavner** is a gas supply analyst for Chesapeake Utilities Corporation in Dover, Del. He is responsible for the daily purchase of natural gas for the company’s Delaware and Maryland divisions. Leonard graduated from the U.S. Air Force Academy in 1981. He commanded the 60th Operations Support Squadron and the 436th Operations Group. Leonard also has served as a program analyst on the Joint Staff and Air Staff, was a chief of wing safety, and the director of staff for Eighteenth Air Force. He was a command pilot with over 3,100 hours in the C-141 and C-5. After retiring from active duty in 2007, Leonard completed a Bachelor of Science degree in accounting and was hired by Chesapeake Utilities as an accountant in their corporate office. His responsibilities today include purchasing the daily natural gas requirements to meet their customer needs and managing the company’s storage inventories for the winter heating demands. He also serves on the board of Chesapeake’s Sharing Fund. The fund helps the elderly, ill, and those facing financial hardship with their

*(Continued on page 7)*
energy bills during the winter months. Leonard and his wife, Melody, have been married 26 years and have one son, Jack. They have made their “forever home” in Dover, Del. As the AMC Museum Foundation Board Treasurer, Leonard has been directly responsible for getting us into the computer age. As we’ve grown over the years, our budgeting needs have grown as well and Leonard has certainly taken the stick and kept us flying right! It’s questionable whether or not the recent store renovation could have been completed as efficiently without his expertise. He’s spent many, many hours of “home work” getting our income and expense data in the right columns, allowing us to finally get a working budget on paper. His work is directly responsible for saving us lots of bucks that we’ve spent on our tax accountants.

Bob Mench, of Smyrna, Delaware, is a retiring business owner whose career spans six decades of multiple successful businesses founded and sold. In January 2011, he sold his latest business, Bob’s Bird House in Townsend, Del., an international mail-order business supplying restoration parts and services for vintage Thunderbirds. He is an avid aviation and military enthusiast with memberships to over a dozen museums including the Air Mobility Command Museum at Dover Air Force Base, Del., the Massey Air Museum in Massey, Md., the Golden Age Air Museum in Bethel, Pa., and the Smithsonian National Air & Space Museum in Washington, D.C. Bob’s also a student pilot, with more than 80 hours in Piper Tri-pacer, Piper Warrior and others. He collects classic cars and Ford Thunderbird memorabilia, large and small model aircraft, ships and trains, and aviation art. He volunteers with the American Hero Memorial in Concord Township, Pa., Operation Christmas Child – Samaritan’s Purse International, Townsend Free Will Baptist Church in Townsend, and the Sons of the American Legion in Middletown, Del. Bob was selected to replace an outgoing board member whose term will be up in September 2012. At his first meeting, he volunteered to work on a committee to increase the AMC Museum Foundation’s membership – and prior to his second meeting, he personally had signed up 11 new members!

Don Sloan spent most of his Air Force/Air Force Reserve career at McGuire Air Force Base, N.J., flying 12,500 hours in C-141s. In 2001, just as he was starting to get used to the Starlifter, he moved to Dover to become the commander of the 512th Operations Group, undoubtedly the best job of his career. He immediately got excited about the AMC Museum during his units’ promotion ceremonies and changes-of-command and soon had the opportunity to become a Foundation Board member. Don began his “general aviation” flying in 1994, after buying a 1969 Piper Arrow. A couple of thousand Arrow hours later, and about a year before retiring, he met a World War II pilot, retired U.S. Air Force Major Bob Bean, who had a 1941 Stearman for sale. The major also introduced Don to Massey Aerodrome, a local grassroots aviation sod air strip where they’re constantly doing aircraft restorations. What an opportunity! He bought the open-cockpit biplane in December 2005, began the restoration, and made the first flight in April 2007. His first passenger? Major Bean! Biggest thrills? Flying World War II veterans who began their flight in April 2007. His first passenger? Major Bean! Biggest thrills? Flying World War II veterans who began their flight in April 2007. His first passenger? Major Bean! Biggest thrills? Flying World War II veterans who began their flight in April 2007. His first passenger? Major Bean! Biggest thrills? Flying World War II veterans who began their flight in April 2007.

Well, there you have it—you’ve met some of your board. One additional note: many of you are on, or have been on boards or committees where the “90-10” rule applies— you know, 90% of the work is done by 10% of the members. I’m happy to report that’s NOT the case with your Foundation Board. The only purpose of the AMC Museum Foundation is to support the Air Mobility Command Museum in its mission as an aviation and aerospace, education, scientific, cultural, historical and inspirational facility for the general public and the Air Force community. There’s a lot of behind-the-scenes activity that goes on to keep the Foundation capable of supporting that mission, our terrific base of volunteers and in turn, you, our customer.
**Airlift vets invited to take part in AMCM oral history project**


If you’ve ever held any of these jobs -- or some of the myriad of others connected with military air transport or airlift -- Mary Sidebotham is looking for you.

Sidebotham, who is serving an internship at the AMC Museum as part of her master’s degree program at the University of Delaware, is working to gather the history of air transportation and refueling operations as told by the men and women who actually carried out those jobs.

Conducted with the blessing of Museum Director Mike Leister, Sidebotham is interested in talking with anyone who served in the Air Mobility Command or any of its predecessors, from World War II to the present time. The Newark resident has a considerable background conducting in oral histories: for the past several years she and her husband, UD professor Steve Sidebotham, have been gathering the oral histories of World War II veterans.

“I had asked my advisor if I could get an internship at the AMC Museum because it’s the only thing related to military history in the area,” Mary said while discussing how the project came about.

Leister thought the project was a great idea; moreover, saving the veterans’ stories using digital video recordings would be a unique way to both preserve their histories and make them available to the general public.

“We’ve used interns in the past from various colleges to do projects for us,” Leister said. “Mary has been the best we’ve had.

“She knows how to do history interviews and she has a wonderful capability of not only asking what needs to be asked but of relating to the people she’s interviewing.”

Because the interviews augment the Museum’s own history collection, Sidebotham has been gathering the oral histories of World War II veterans.

“Told the groom’s father in-law had been a combat engineer on Omaha Beach, “I immediately decided I was going to invite myself to his wedding.”

The result was his first World War II interview.

“Mary Sidebotham works out of the Museum’s conference room when conducting and editing her interviews.

C-133 all over the world, dwelling on what it was like to navigate such craft in an age before computers and global satellite positioning systems.

In addition, Sidebotham has interviewed two Berlin Airlift pilots, including Dover’s Bill Voigt, as well as a veteran of the China/Burma/India theater.

A confirmed history buff, Sidebotham particularly relishes the opportunity to hear veterans’ stories first-hand and to have a part in preserving those tales.

“When they’re telling their stories, you get caught up in the emotion,” she said. “You get the feeling of history, living history.”

Note: Anyone interested in participating in the Air Mobility Command Museum’s oral history project should go to the “Eyewitness to History” page on the Museum’s website, www.amcmuseum.com.

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**World War II veterans tell their stories to University of Delaware professor**

Since the nation’s founding, more than 42 million men and women have worn the uniform of the United States military. A number of them achieved great rank or earned great honors on the battlefield. But the majority just did their duty, whether it was standing guard in the snows of Valley Forge or patching up a helicopter at a forward operating base in Afghanistan.

Some of these veterans recorded their experiences in books or private journals, but most simply returned home, put their medals and uniforms away and got on with their lives.

It is these veterans Steve and Mary Sidebotham want to talk to.

A professor of ancient Greek and Roman history at the University of Delaware, Steve also has a strong interest in World War II and in preserving the stories of its veterans. His work is a labor of necessity: of the 16.1 million who served in the war, only 1.7 million are alive today, and that number is dwindling fast.

Mary, who is working on her master’s degree in history, is using an internship at the Air Mobility Command Museum to record the experiences of veterans who have served in AMC and its predecessors, or those who took part in airlift or air transportation missions.

Steve got started on the self-appointed project – done in their spare time with all expenses paid out of their own pockets – shortly after a fellow professor set his wedding date for June 6, 2004, the sixtieth anniversary of the D-Day invasion of Normandy.

“My radar picked up on that and said, ‘Why the anniversary of the Normandy landings?’”

Told the groom’s father-in-law had been a combat engineer on Omaha Beach, “I immediately decided I was going to invite myself to his wedding.”

The result was his first World War II interview.

“It was very crudely done,” he said. “We didn’t have a video camera, we simply had a tape recorder and a camera and we were interviewing him during the reception so it was all very noisy.”

But it was a beginning. Steve since has conducted more than 140 interviews with veterans on both sides of the conflict, to include Soviet, Polish, British, Italian, German and Belgian soldiers. He and Mary, who joined the effort after their 2009 marriage, plan to archive the interviews, now conducted with state of the art digital video cameras and other recording gear. They also hope to write a book sharing the veterans’ experiences.

(See WWII Vets on page 9)
Steve’s interest in both ancient and World War II history comes naturally. The son of a career soldier, he recalls taking trips to Roman ruins while his father was stationed in Turkey. Along the way, he’d read about the Second World War.

Mary’s work at the Museum comes in tandem with her pursuit of a degree in history with a concentration on World War II and museum studies. The daughter of a World War II veteran herself, she came to Delaware in 1997 and taught social studies for four years at William Penn High School in New Castle.

The pair is interested in interviewing anyone who served during the war, particularly to get a view of service life that includes the mundane along with the exciting. While naturally interested in learning about an individual’s participation in combat, they also want to find out what life was like behind the lines for staff personnel, cooks, truck drivers and the like.

They’ve traveled across the United States and even to Europe in search of stories, Steve said.

“We’ll go anywhere within reason,” he said.

Trips abroad are a combination of looking through ancient ruins to sate Steve’s passion for classic Greek and Roman history as well as scouring battlefields of more recent conflicts. Many of those who agreed to the interviews do so after hearing about the couple through friends or word of mouth.

It’s a particular change of pace for Steve, having the opportunity to interview the living instead of trying to interpret the words of people long dead.

“My research is normally, of course, with people who are dust,” he said. “And this way it’s hands-on. I mean, we actually get to sit across from these people, we get to talk to them, we hear the intonations of their voices, we see the expressions on their faces. You get the emotions.

“We’ve had guys cry, we’ve had guys tell us, please turn the camera off because they wanted to tell us something. We’ve had the whole range of emotions with these guys. That’s a very different kind of research from normal historical research where you’re in an archive or, in my case, you’re out on a dig somewhere.”

One of the couple’s most recent interviews was with Lt. Richard E. Cole, who served as copilot with Lt. Col. Jimmy Doolittle during the April 1942 raid on Tokyo. Cole is one of only five surviving Doolittle Raiders.

“To sit across from this guy, the one guy who had sat next to Jimmy Doolittle in the copilot’s seat for the 13 hours they were on this mission was pretty incredible,” Steve said. “That’s something, of course, ancient history and archaeology can’t do for you.”

Other interviews, for example, have been with women who worked for the Office of Strategic Services, forerunner to the CIA, a female Russian truck driver and Pfc. Sid Phillips and Cpl. Romus V. Burgin, whose stories were part of the basis for the HBO series “The Pacific.”

On the average, each interview takes between three and four hours, although one marathon session ran to almost nine hours.

When learning of a possible interview subject, the couple sends that person a letter explaining what they do, how they learned about the individual and information about their own background. Some turn down the request, but Steve estimates approximately 80% take them up on the offer.

“Most of the people we find we find through word of mouth,” Mary said, adding that sometimes the interviewee himself will call an acquaintance and set up a session with the couple.

“They’re a little more likely to talk to us because we’ve been vouched for by somebody that they know,” she said.

The couple feel their work allows a lot of information, some previously unknown, to finally get into the historic record.

“Some of these guys have been interviewed repeatedly, other guys rarely, if at all,” Steve said.

“We’ve learned a whole lot of stuff about details of operations and stuff we knew nothing about.”

Because of the very nature of armed conflict, many World War II veterans ended their service with a reluctance to talk about some of the things they saw and did, and many passed away without being able to put down their thoughts for posterity, Mary said. That’s been changing as the years go by.

“What we have found that when they came back from the war they wanted to just get on with their lives, and they weren’t encouraged or inspired to talk to their families, so it just kind of went unsaid, whether purposely or because it just didn’t come up.”

But in the past 10 years, particularly with films such as “Saving Private Ryan” and “Band of Brothers,” there’s been a marked increase in interest about World War II, Mary said. There’s also been more of an awareness on the part of the vets, and the fact that many realize they’re approaching the end of their lives has caused them to tell their stories.

“If we do find any reluctance, we remind them that they’re not only telling their stories but they’re telling the stories of the men who did not come back.”

“More and more they’re willing to talk to us,” she said.

One veteran who opened up was a former B-17 pilot who calmly told the Sidebothams about a mission where an enemy pilot shot up the Flying Fortress’s cockpit and he finished the mission with his copilot’s mangled corpse sitting only a few feet away.

He also told of a tall turret gunner whose station was shot up and his guns rendered useless during an enemy strafing run. Mortally wounded, the dying man kept the turret moving as if he still were targeting oncoming fighters.

“Eventually when they got through that, the pilot goes back and holds the kid in his arms as he is dying,” Steve said.

“I mean, how can you not be moved by that?”

Even though they’re willing to talk, sometimes the interviewees can get so caught up in reliving the past their emotions overtake
Volunteers

Waco CG-4A glider restoration project nears completion

What could be harder than thinking about assembling a rusty 70-year-old jigsaw puzzle?
Answer: actually doing it.

It has taken more than two years, hundreds of man hours, and the perseverance of a hardy group of volunteers, but work on restoring a World War II-vintage Waco CG-4A glider for the AMC Museum is just about complete.

The Museum’s Waco, tail number 45-15009, is one of more than 12,000 of the engineless aircraft built during World War II. Fashioned of a fabric-covered metal frame, towed by another aircraft and manned by a pilot and copilot, the Waco could carry either a jeep, quarter-ton truck, 75 mm howitzer or a baker’s dozen of fully equipped troops.

“The military bought into it because they needed to move people and equipment,” said Ed Barnes, an Air Force retiree in charge of the project. “They could not build airplanes and put engines on them fast enough to meet the demand.”

More than a dozen firms eventually were contracted to build the CG-4A. These included companies with woodworking expertise such as piano and furniture manufacturers. Like a number of other wartime industries, many of the gliders were built by women filling in for men who were away fighting the war.

If all goes according to plan, the finished work eventually will take its place on the Museum floor not far from the C-47 Skytrain, the type of aircraft that towed Waco gliders into battle.

“This is a very rare type of aircraft and we appreciate that,” said Museum Director Mike Leister. “For this Museum, it’s a very significant piece of history.”

Restoring this singular piece of American aviation history, of which there are perhaps only eight remaining in the world, is vital to understanding the evolution of not only the Air Force but American industrial expertise, said retired U.S. Air Force pilot Larry Phillips, who assisted in spearheading the reconstruction work.

“We want to preserve our history,” Phillips said. “When you look at what we have in the Museum, you’re looking at changes in technology, from generation to generation. The Air Force of today is not the same Air Force as when I was in, and the Air Force of the men who flew this glider is not the Air Force of my day.”

First up: the cockpit

Work on restoring the glider actually went along in two steps: first reconstructing the cockpit and then rebuilding the fuselage. Working almost by himself for three years, Museum volunteer John Demory brought the Waco’s two-man office back into almost pristine condition. The cockpit includes nearly every piece of the factory-spec original, to include the tow release mechanism, a distress flare pistol and a vintage load adjust calculator, which was used to calculate the placement of cargo, in its original leather case.

The Museum obtained the entire glider in pieces on April 20, 1995, from the National Museum of the United States Air Force at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Ohio, but a lack of resources and other priorities put off work for more than a decade.

When the restorers started in 2009, they faced a rusted jumble of metal framework and wood, of which only a small percentage was usable. The rest was a pile of rotted, broken scraps.

“We looked at it and it was just a bundle of pieces,” Phillips said. “We had no clue how to bring this thing together.”

Seeking guidance, the Museum sent a crew to the Airborne and Special Operations Museum in Fayetteville, N.C.; examining that museum’s restored glider, plus documentation found through the Internet was the key to reassembling the glider.

“It was like putting together a puzzle, trying to figure out where the pieces go,” Phillips said. “The Internet was very helpful to us in quite a few areas. We found graphics that gave close up looks at flight controls and the overall structure.”

Using this guidance, the team reconstructed many of the pieces of the glider’s fuselage and tail section, or if necessary, built them from scratch. At first they worked out of Hangar 789 on Dover AFB, but in 2010 moved the entire operation to Hangar 1315, adjacent to the Museum. The old alert hangar lacked some of the basic necessities, including heat and running water, although these problems were eventually overcome. The crews dealt with the sultry summer of 2011 by opening the hangar doors as wide as possible and by using large fans to keep the air moving.

Tape? Yes, tape

Although glider manufacturers during World War II used a sturdy (See Glider on page 11)
South American hardwood in the CG-4A, the men used combinations of plywood and pine to replicate the glider’s wooden parts. Because of its size and the limited room inside the Museum, the crew will not be recreating the Waco’s 88-foot wing but instead will construct foot long stubs to show visitors where the wings were located.

“We just don’t have the room inside. It’s too bad, but the wing-span is enormous,” Barnes said.

One side of the glider will be left open so visitors can see the CG-4A’s internal construction, including the feather-light wooden benches used by the glider’s complement of 13 troops.

“This glider isn’t going anywhere, but we wanted to show as much of the real thing as possible,” Phillips said. “You’ll be able to see inside, see the wooden frame, tape and cables.”

Yes, tape. Much of the inside framework of the glider was held together either by pressure sensitive tape or by string tied around the various parts of the structure.

The need to deliver materiel and troops quickly was a driving force behind the glider idea, but economics also played a major role, Barnes said. Gliders could get vital equipment where it was needed and, because most were considered expendable single-use forms of transportation, there was little concern about trying to recover them.

“They were pretty flimsy,” Barnes said. “They needed to be sturdy but then again they didn’t. The amazing thing to me is they used friction tape, string and glue to hold the thing together.

“Pilots said they’d never get into one of the things. They thought it was a deathtrap – which it probably was – compared to modern-day aircraft.”

‘It’s been quite enjoyable’

The restoration crew is made up of about a dozen men who usually put in one to two days each week working on the glider, sometimes more, sometimes less.

“We’ve got some good mechanical expertise out here,” he said. “We’ve got three pilots, half-dozen flight engineers, a navigator and a couple of civilians who have no military experience but who just want to help. It’s quite a collection.”

Throughout the more than two years they’ve been working to-
AMC Library
(Continued from page 5)
around an answer, that’s not good. The library is there to keep that from happening.”

One of Wikso’s favorite tomes is the complete diary of World War II pilot Barney Welton, who flew C-47s in the 79th Troop Carrier Squadron during World War II. In all, Welton completed 130 missions over battlefields across Europe.

“His 124 R-4360-20WA engine probably could find everything he needs and then some, Wikso said.

With one exception, Wikso also maintains a compilation of every copy of the Dover AFB newspaper, the Airlifter, published since 1963. That exception is the collection for 1970, which someone borrowed years ago and never returned.

That incident prompted one of Wikso’s hard and fast rules about the Museum library: while people are welcome to come in and do all the research they want, books cannot be loaned out.

“When someone asks to check a book out, I have to say ‘No, but you can come back,’” Wikso said. “I don’t want to lose any of the books. People appreciate the value of what we have. These books aren’t mine, but they are entrusted to me.”

Wikso said he has no intention of leaving his volunteer work at the library any time soon.

“This is so important, it doesn’t matter that I’m not getting paid,” he said. “I want to keep my hands in the military life and be with the other guys who volunteer out here. I volunteered to enlist back in 1953, so why change now?”

WWII vets
(Continued from page 9)
them, as in the case of a 10th Mountain Division medic whose memories were so vivid he simply could not continue the interview. One story he did tell was of finding one of his unit’s advance scouts who had literally been crucified by the enemy.

“If that was one example that we did manage to [get] out of him, you can imagine what else he must have seen,” Steve said.

And it’s also difficult for the couple not to get emotionally involved with some of the stories.

“There have been times where I’ve been on the verge of crying,” he added. “I stop talking and try to compose myself.”

Interviewing former enemy soldiers also can be a test of one’s objectivity, as was the case with two meetings with a former SS operative. Born in the United States to a pair of German expatriates, the man’s father signed him up for the feared Schutzstaffel at the age of 17, and he ended up on the eastern front, fighting the Soviets.

“We interviewed this guy twice, and it was very difficult not to tell him that what he did was wrong,” Steve said. “He was a Nazi till the day he died.”

While in Russia, the soldier said he saw another unit – not his – preparing to use flame throwers against some enemy prisoners.

“He turned to us … and said, ‘That was OK, wasn’t it?’

“Well, what do you say to something like that? You want objectivity, so you’re not going to tell him obviously it was wrong. You just sort of say ‘uh-huh’ and move along to the next question.”

AMC Foundation welcomes new Friends of the Museum

The Air Mobility Command Museum Foundation welcomes all new and recurring members who signed up for Museum membership in 2011. Persons who joined the AMCM at the squadron commander level and above are:

The restored air traffic control tower offers a view of the AMC Museum’s plane collection, to include its most recent acquisition, the VC-9C also known as “Air Force Two.”

U.S. Army veteran Earl Taylor and his wife, Bonnie, look over displays in the Museum’s Hall of Heroes. Veterans Day 2011 marked the first Museum visit for the Selbyville, Del., couple.

Haden Mazurek, 2, of Middletown gives the Museum’s Wishing Well a whirl during a Nov. 22 outing with grandmother Becky Robinson of Clayton, Del.

Reporter Amy Cherry of WDEL-AM radio interviews volunteer Hank Baker shortly after dedication of the Museum’s Christmas display. The G-scale railroad layout around the tree was courtesy of the Delaware Shoreline Garden Railroad Club.

Decked out in his Thomas the Train engineer’s cap, Bryce Weaver, 18 months, of Felton, checks out the Museum’s holiday train display Nov. 22.

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Revisiting “FATS”

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