The Time of Their Lives
C-133 veterans gather at Dover AFB
— Page 4

The Last Flight of 54-0146
On April 13, 1958, C-133 No. 54-0146 took off from Dover AFB, Del. Its flight ended minutes later in a Delaware forest.
— Page 8

The Men
The crew of 54-0146 were top-notch airmen — and more
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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.

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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

Exciting new exhibits, diorama span Air Force history

There is an old saying, supposedly an ancient curse, “May you live in interesting times.”

Well we certainly are living in interesting times here. Our stalwart restoration team working at Massey Airport with Mr. Jim Douglass (who also happens to be on the Foundation board of directors) has completed the fabric covering of both the forward and aft sections of the CG-4A glider. What that means is that the team is a bit ahead of schedule to have the glider assembled and installed in the main hangar before the end of the year. No pressure -- but I’m betting on before the leaves fall. This will be a wonderful and rare addition to our World War II airlift exhibit. There are only about a dozen CG-4As worldwide. To my knowledge the U.S. Air Force only has two, one at the National Museum of the USAF and ours.

Another unique feature of our CG-4A is that one side of the glider has been left exposed so you can see everything inside. It will be exhibited near the specialized World War II engineering equipment it hauled into combat-such as a bulldozer, a tractor and a dump trailer. The role of the glider in combat airlift is virtually unknown to the general public but one of my favorite “fun facts” about the CG-4A is the fact that in case of a “hard landing” there was a cable attached to, say, a jeep that would hoist the cockpit up out of the way if the jeep tore loose from the deck on landing. It saved a few pilots’ lives in combat.

Master Sgt. Brad Bronov spent many years here at Dover Air Force Base as a C-5 flight engineer; he retired this spring and moved out west to become a railroad engineer driving diesel locomotives for the Burlington Northern and Santa Fe rail line. Both these jobs involve large complex machinery. Brad has some exceptional skills when it comes to working with very small complex items as well. Before he moved he presented to us four top of their class model aircraft so we could complete a diorama showing a famous publicity stunt put together by the Tactical Air Command in the early 1960s.

Like all the other commands, TAC always had to take a back seat to the Strategic Air Command for equipment priorities. SAC got the new KC-135 tankers while TAC had to make do with recycled propeller driven B-50 bombers converted to serve as tankers for TAC’s fighter force. TAC made the best of it and provided exceptional service to the nation.

In a widely published photo a TAC KB-50 tanker is shown refueling three different types of aircraft at once -- a B-66 bomber, an F-100 and an F-101 fighter. Not a normal procedure but it was excellent publicitiy. With Brad’s assistance we were able to recreate that event as a three dimensional addition to our air refueling exhibit. Thanks to Brad, and to Debbie and Hal Sellars from Dunrovin Design, our in-house graphics experts, for the great job.

We recently were offered the C-5 Cockpit Procedures Trainer that was used here at Dover from the 1970s to train ground and aircrews in the proper operation of aircraft systems and in proper crew coordination. If you are sitting in the CPT, the only clue that you are not on the flight deck of a real C-5 is that the windows are frosted. This is a major addition to our collection because even after we receive a real C-5 for our collection we will not be able to give visitors access to the cockpit on a regular basis, and visitors love to see the “business office” of big aircraft.

The only challenge is that we had to move it ourselves. This complex includes closet-size computer cabinets full of individual computer cards that belong in a museum exhibit all by themselves -- and a living room-size cockpit mockup that had to be broken down into three sections just to move it. Our great volunteers pulled out a pile of redundant wiring as big as a couch and disassembled everything in about four days. We hope to have the CPT ready for public display within a month. It may take a little longer than that to get some of the lights back on but very soon you too can get to feel sitting at the controls of a C-5, America’s largest military airlifter.

— Mike

Is it real or is it — well, you know ...

OK, so it’s not that hard — the photo on the left is the real thing; the one on the right is Master Sgt. Brad Bronov’s breathtaking recreation of a Tactical Air Command KB-50 of the 431 Air Refueling Squadron at the former Biggs AFB, El Paso, Texas, acting as an inflight gas station for a B-66, left, an F-100 Super Sabre, bottom, and an F-101 Voodoo.
Reunions

C-133 veterans: ‘It was a time like no other in our lives’
Cargomaster fliers hold seventh gathering at AMC Museum

It was a family reunion of sorts Monday, June 11, at the Air Mobility Command Museum.

But this wasn’t your typical family. Instead of gathering around a beloved ancestor, these men were brought together by the common experience of having served aboard a very unique aircraft, the C-133 Douglas Cargomaster.

In all, the event reunited 30 former crewmen with more than 133,000 flying hours in the Cargomaster.

Host retired Lt. Col. Rick Spencer welcomed the group, noting the C-133 years were “a grand and glorious interval of our lives.”

“Given the size of the U.S. Air Force and the years gone by, we were a very small group of people maintaining and flying a very large airplane all over the world,” Spencer said.

“Should we use the word ‘elite’ to describe us? I think so! When one surveys today’s aero technology, we were iron men in wooden ships.”

“We were young then, very young,” Spencer added, “and it was a time like no other in our lives.”

The seventh get-together was a dinner and a chance to get reacquainted for the former crewmen, most of who flew the Cargomaster out of Dover Air Force Base during the plane’s heyday, from 1957 to 1971. Over the course of the evening, they talked about long ago missions, toured the Museum’s restored C-133B, and caught up on each others’ lives.

It actually was a mini-reunion of sorts, a sequel to a full-blown two-day gathering at Dover Downs in 2010 that included speakers, an orchestra and a formal dance.

And although not quite as spry as the young men seen in carefully saved photos and memorabilia, each was eager to salute the plane and honor their crewmates, both living and those who have flown their final missions.

From blueprints to runway

The C-133 came about as the Cold War heated up during the late 1950s. The Cargomaster was ordered into development when Air Force officials realized a new aircraft was needed for long range transport missions and later to move intercontinental ballistic missiles from factory to silo. The plane went directly from drawing board to production and assignment to Dover and its west coast counterpart, Travis AFB, Calif.

“We had some big decisions to make in the early 1950s,” said retired flight engineer Senior Master Sgt. Hank Baker, 78, of Camden, Del. “We had the C-124, but it couldn’t move a missile. It could move

(Continued on page 5)
things that were big and round, but not things that were long.

“We depended on the B-52 and the B-36 in the air and the missiles in the ground as a deterrent to war. Those missiles were the justification in buying the C-133.”

Because it was the first pressurized cargo aircraft, flying in the Cargomaster was more comfortable than in the C-124. The four big turboprop Pratt and Whitney engines could carry the 133 up to more than 23,000 feet, above most rough weather, weather the smaller C-124s either had to avoid or face head-on.

Because of the long distances covered during each mission, each Cargomaster had other creature comforts, including reclining seats with footrests and passenger seats on the flight deck that folded into bunks. And in those days when smoking was allowed on aircraft, the seats even had ashtrays and cup holders.

“It was such you didn’t mind flying for such a long time,” said Baker, who earlier had flown as a flight engineer aboard the B-47 Stratojet.

“On bombers, you’d be ultra-cramped,” he said. “You couldn’t move or stand up. It was miserable.”

Although it was relatively quiet up on the flight deck, the noise generated by the T-34 engines reverberated through the cargo compartment like a swarm of angry, super-sized hornets. More than one former loadmaster or flight engineer at the reunion sported a hearing aid, which many attributed to long hours spent aboard the Cargomaster.

Pilots generally liked the C-133.

“It was easy to fly,” said former 1st Lt. Bob Becht, 73, of Avon, Ohio. “There was a lot going on with all the systems, but it was a good airplane to fly. I don’t think there was anything I didn’t like about it.”

“It was like a Cadillac,” recalled retired Col. Art Couture, 87, of Springfield, Va. A World War II veteran with 28 combat missions to his credit, Couture initially was assigned to a C-124 squadron when he came to Dover in 1959.

“Right when I checked in they said they wanted people in the C-133,” he said. “I was interested in getting in turboprops, so I was happy to do it. To me, it was a new aircraft and you’re always interested in that.”

As time went on and the C-124 neared the end of its service life, Air Force officials used the Cargomaster for additional types of transport missions, including bringing cargo and personnel into bases in South Vietnam. It was just another indication of the plane’s ability to serve almost anywhere in the world.

“You really got to see a lot of things and go to a lot of places,” said Becht. The right plane at the right time

But the plane also had its problems. Because it was rushed into service without even a prototype being built, aircrews were forced to solve its problems in the midst of carrying out their missions.

For example, a major trouble area was the mechanism controlling the propellers, Baker said. If an engine failed – which happened more often than they liked – pilots locked the propeller in the direction of flight to prevent windmilling. Sometimes the clutch or brake on the propeller failed, causing it to spin so fast it would literally fly off the engine.

“With that much propeller and that much power, it could go right into the fuselage and make a big hole,” Baker said. The crew, he added, would “never have time to call for help.”

But overall, the former crew members think the C-133 performed its role at an important time in history, even though today’s airmen seem to have forgotten about the aircraft and its contributions.

“Back then, it filled a great void for moving outsized cargo,” said Couture. “We flew a lot of cargo, outsized cargo, until the C-5 came along,” noted retired Lt. Col. Bill Arnold, 75, of Maumelle, Ark.

“The problem with the aircraft was that there were so few of them. Very few people in the Air Force today even know we had the C-133.”

“We felt like we were doing a hell of a job and were very proud of what we did,” Baker said. “We were motivated by the fact that we made a difference.”

And perhaps it is that motivation that still prompts the Cargomaster vets to reunite at Dover every few years.

“When you are living and working together for three years or so, you really get to know people,” Becht said. “Flying the C-133 was a good assignment.”

“We were a real close-knit group,” Arnold said. “We all knew each other and were closer than other aircraft crews, probably closer than any others except guys in combat.”

“We 133 people just love to tell war stories,” noted Baker. “We’re just a bunch of guys who knew each other a bunch of years ago. We just enjoy seeing each other.”

Note: Cargomaster veterans interested in staying in touch with their friends and comrades should check out Edward “Sandy” Sandstrom’s Internet site, http://cargomasterraster.blogspot.com.
Volunteers of All Ages Needed -- If you have an interest in our Air Force heritage and if you like working with kids from 3 to 103, the Air Mobility Command Museum has an opportunity for you! Do you need a “Community Involvement” bullet for your performance report? Do you want something interesting to do that will give you a great feeling of accomplishment and won’t cost you money? Consider becoming an AMC Museum volunteer. You could be a tour guide, aircraft restoration technician, store associate or flight simulator operator to name a few opportunities. Whether working with grade school kids, foreign visitors, community or base leaders or World War II veterans, this place rocks. For more information, contact Museum Director Mike Leister at 302-677-5939 or Volunteer Coordinator Jan Caldwell at volcoordinatoramcm@comcast.net. Do it today! Join the fun.

Annual AMC Museum Foundation Mixer -- Are you ready for some plane talk? The AMC Museum Foundation will be hosting our Annual Member Mixer at 5 p.m. Friday, Sept. 7 at the Museum. The event is FREE for members who have joined at the Squadron Commander category and above. All other friends will have an opportunity to join The AMC Museum Foundation that evening, and waive the $10 donation for the event.

The event will begin with free door prize tickets, free hors d’oeuvres, and a pay-as-you-go bar. Both the Boeing KC-97 Stratofreighter and the Boeing KC-135 Stratotanker will be open that night, showing the leap from the 1950s technology to what we are using today for refueling America’s Air Force. And as a special treat we’ll be giving tours through our newest arrival, the VC-9C, better known as Air Force Two!

We purposely schedule very little agenda for the event in order to let you visit with old friends and meet new ones who share your interest in airlift and air-refueling history. At about 6:15 p.m., we’ll have a brief introduction of staff and a few of our 130-plus Museum volunteers. Foundation President retired USAF Reserve Col. Don Sloan will inform you on the board’s activities for the past year, followed by Museum Director Mike Leister, who will describe the latest Museum restorations and acquisitions. Expect the active duty and Reserve wing commanders to give us their annual “State of the Wing” synopsis. That will be followed up with a drawing for several aviation-type door prizes. The evening’s program will wrap up with the drawing for our original David Godek oil painting, From Out of the Past. The AMC Museum Foundation’s Member Mixer is a way of saying “Thank you” for your financial support in helping to preserve our airlift and tanker heritage.

Our recent Silent Auction was a great success. Let me start by saying I’m sure I’m leaving someone off these lists — please accept my apology. We had more than 170 items up for bid, ranging from aviation books and models to five-star hotel stays, a catered dinner for 24 on our own C-133 and a New York City sightseeing flight. We owe a special THANK YOU to board members Lorraine Dion and Bob Mench for their many, many hours of cataloging all the items, many dozens of which Bob personally donated. Bob and Lorraine were joined by Bettie Campbell to form the committee. For auction support/donations/sponsorships, we thank Dover Mayor Carleton E. Carey Sr., BBQ Grills’ Rob Fox, Dover Downs, Monster Racing’s Sonny Kruhm, Phil White, Mike and Claudia Leister, local artist Joyce Lapp, Shooter’s Choice, the Dover Post, Dover Federal Credit Union, Mike Quarnaccio, Olive Garden, Applebee’s, Mike Frebert, MainStay Suites, The Rookery, Matt Boller at Tip Top Trim Shop, Rob Dant, John Williamson, Ralph DeGroot, Delaware State Auditor R. Thomas Wagner, Dover International Speedway, AutoZone, Redbud Ridge Quilts’ Karen Bilak, Fenwick Island Wine Cellars, Dover’s Fordham Brewery, Clarion La Fontainebleau in OC, Tidewater Utilities, Pepsi Bottling Ventures, and Standard Distributing Co.
Carol and Paul Gillis, Ed and Pat Perkowski, Ruth and Larry Tasker, Bill Hare, David Bever, Jeff Brown, Paul George, Bob Berglund, Claudia Leister, Kevin Wysopal, Polly Steenhagen and Leonard Heavner all worked throughout the evening. As usual, John Taylor did loads of behind-the-scenes work. Chas Meehan helped simplify the bidding close-out with his Excel expertise. Lorraine brought her Kent County Tourism shop over to help, including Cindy and David Small, AJ and Dee Adriance, Kathleen Williams, Linda Georgules and Russ Dion. And last, but not least, if you haven’t seen retired USAF chaplain John Groth work a room with a live auction, you’ve missed a treat! As you can see, it takes a lot of work and a lot of volunteers to make something like this come to fruition! If you’d like to join the “crew,” c’mon out!

This VC-9C, serial number 73-1682, transported America’s top leadership from 1975 until 2011. Much of that time it served as Air Force Two for vice presidents Walter Mondale, George H.W. Bush, Dan Quayle, Al Gore and Dick Cheney. When this aircraft was needed to transport presidents into smaller airports -- Ronald Reagan, George H.W. Bush, Bill Clinton, and George W. Bush -- it served as Air Force One.

It also served several of America’s First Ladies -- Rosalynn Carter, Nancy Reagan, Barbara Bush, Hillary R. Clinton, Laura Bush, and Michelle Obama -- and transported visiting world leaders such as Queen Elizabeth II and the Chief of Staff of the People’s Republic of China.

This VC-9C has extended range fuel tanks and also was the first to have a special communications suite installed for the vice president. From 1975 until 2006 it was assigned to the 89th Airlift Wing at Andrews AFB, Md. From 2005 until 2011 it was assigned to the 932nd Airlift Wing at Scott AFB, Ill. Although 37 years old when retired, it only had 16,300 flying hours, not much by airlift standards.

You know, of course, that you can get this kind of information on all our aircraft. Simply visit our website at www.amcmuseum.org.

And now, a word from our sponsor … Just what is The AMC Museum Foundation and what happens to that money? The AMC Museum Foundation is a non-profit, educational organization that raises money and generates support for the Air Mobility Command Museum. That allows us to help carry out our museum’s mission of being an aviation and aerospace, education, scientific, cultural, historical and inspirational facility for the general public and the Air Force community. Funds we raise will be used for restoring and maintaining the museum’s aircraft, caring for our artifact collection, designing and constructing new exhibits, developing educational programs and/or some of our many other “support” functions. Contributions are tax-deductible in accordance with IRS regulations.

Finally, a SAVE THE DATE for you: Veterans Day 2012 – Ed Perkowski, Phil White, Bettie Campbell and Paul Gillis are working hard to create a memorable Veterans Day at the AMC Museum, a first for us. Though we’re normally closed on Mondays, this FREE event will be held Monday, Nov. 12. Seating will begin at 10 a.m. with Posting of the Colors at 11 a.m., sharp. We’re waiting for the final confirmation from our speaker, a Medal of Honor recipient. We’ll also feature some open-aircraft tours, be entertained with music from the Milford Community Band (www.milfordcommunityband.org) and enjoy a show presented by the Sweet Adelines International’s First State Harmonettes chorus. Light snacks and coffee will be provided. Come out and help us honor America’s veterans!

Fly safe!
Don Sloan

Silent Auction photo, Jeff Brown; other photos and artwork submitted by individuals concerned
Cargomaster down

April 1958 C-133 crash stunned Dover AFB community

In 1957, the U.S. Air Force began flying a plane that was the largest transport aircraft in the world, the C-133 Cargomaster.

With a length of 157 feet, 6 inches, the Cargomaster was almost 27 feet longer than the military’s standard workhorse, the C-124 Globemaster. Powered by four turboprop engines, the 133 could hit a maximum speed of almost 400 mph and fly more than 4,000 miles without stopping.

Air Force officials selected Dover Air Force Base, Del., and Travis AFB, Calif., as the East and West Coast home ports for the giant aircraft, and reconfigured units at both bases to fly the planes and train their crews.

On April 13, 1958, one of those crews, flying C-133 tail number 54-0146, left Dover on a training mission. Aboard the plane were Capt. Raymond R. Bern, pilot; 1st Lt. Herbert T. Palisch, copilot; and Tech. Sgts. Marvin A. Aust and Edward L. McKinley Jr., flight engineers. Their flight ended tragically, only minutes after it began, when 54-0146 dived into a pine forest just 26 miles from the Dover runway.

While the crash, the first involving the C-133, is mentioned in historical reports about Dover AFB, very little has been told about what happened that day, either in the air and on the ground.

A bigger, faster, more advanced aircraft

The C-133 came into being in the early 1950s when military planners decided a large capacity vehicle was needed for strategic airlift missions.

The Air Force contracted with the Douglas Aircraft Company in February 1953 to develop the C-133. The plane was completely different from the venerable C-124: it was pressurized, it had a truck-level cargo deck, rear loading doors and a wing mounted above the fuselage, allowing an almost obstruction-free cargo area.

The C-133 went almost directly from the drawing board to the production line without any prototype aircraft being built. Changes made to the design were implemented during the building process or after the planes were delivered. Eventually Douglas built 50 of the aircraft, the first of which took to the air April 23, 1956.

The plane was subjected to more than a year of tests that revealed several problems, most notable being the plane’s critical stall characteristics.

Stalls occur when an aircraft’s wing loses lift, causing that wing to drop, sometimes abruptly. In most C-133s, the right wing stalled first and the nose yawed to the left. Recovery required nose-down elevator and increased power, usually in a right side-slip with several hundred feet in altitude loss. A fully developed stall could result in rudder lock, a condition nearly impossible to overcome.

Exactly why the 133 tended to stall was not completely understood and thus there was no immediate fix to the problem. Instead, recommendations to combat stalls included a warning system to keep pilots out of an unintentional stall and a prohibition against intentional stalls.

At Dover, the Cargomaster was assigned to the 39th Air Transport Squadron (Medium), under the 1607th Air Transport Wing, Military Air Transport Service, and as of July 1, 1957, had only two officers and one airman on its rosters, as opposed to the 119 officers and 123 airmen authorized.

The 39th eventually was staffed with an influx of officers and enlisted personnel who had received extensive training on the C-133. Many were veterans of the 1700 Test Squadron at Kelly AFB, Texas, formed specifically to evaluate the turboprop engines used in the Cargomaster and other aircraft.

Arrival at Dover

On Aug. 28, 1957, Col. Claude W. “Snuffy” Smith, and a crew delivered Dover’s first Cargomaster, tail number 54-0143. In addition to the flight crew, the plane carried 25 passengers, including representatives from Douglas and members of the media.

“It flies like a fighter plane,” Smith told reporters after the ship touched down.

“Usually a big plane handles like a big plane, just as a big car,” Smith said. “But this aircraft makes it easy. It has every new design known to aeronautics, making it a real pleasure to fly.”

Just a few weeks later, on Sept. 24, the second C-133, No. 54-1044, arrived at Dover, followed by a third, tail number 54-0145 on Oct. 3. Throughout this time, the 39th worked to get in as many flying hours as possible to bring crews up to speed, but that goal was hampered by maintenance issues primarily involving the propeller pitch control gears as well as inclement weather.

The fourth Cargomaster delivered in 1957 arrived on Nov. 2. This aircraft carried tail number 54-0146.

An ordinary airplane

Aircraft 54-0146 was a typical example of the C-133. It was built under Douglas contract number 44716, accepted by the Air Force on Oct. 31, 1957 and flown to Dover.

(See C-133 accident on page 9)
C-133 accident

(Continued from page 8)

two days later. It served there five months and 11 days, the shortest service life of all the planes in the fleet.

The accident was not the first for the 1607th, but it was the first time a transport and its entire crew had been lost. Of the 48 C-133s flown by the Air Force from 1957 to 1971, nine were lost to crashes and one was destroyed by fire after a refueling accident.

During its service life, 54-0146 flew several important missions. In December 1957 it served as part of a missile loading demonstration in Colorado and in January 1958 was the lead plane in a history-making flight that saw the aircraft and its twin, tail number 54-0144, make the Cargomaster’s first trans-Atlantic flight.

Capt. Ray Bern served as first pilot aboard 54-0144, while 1607th Air Transport Wing commander Brig. Gen. Francis G. Gideon flew as command pilot aboard 54-0146.

Last flight

By all accounts, Sunday, April 13, 1958 was an ordinary weekend day at Dover AFB. Bern, Palisch, Aust and McKinley planned a routine, 90-minute mission that would take them over the lower Delmarva Peninsula. Apparently there were no problems during the plane’s preflight inspection, and 54-0146 lifted off at 8:28 a.m. carrying 50,000 pounds of fuel, enough for a six hour flight. The temperature at Dover AFB was 52 degrees, with an unlimited ceiling and good visibility. Winds were blowing at about 20 to 25 mph, slightly higher than normal for a spring morning in Delaware.

Although Bern would have received departure information from the base control tower as he was preparing for launch, records show there was no radio contact between the Dover tower and the airplane during the flight.

The flight facility at Andrews AFB, Md., made routine contact with the aircraft at 8:34 a.m., six minutes after it left Dover, followed by a second contact at 8:40.

Then, silence.

The crash

Around the town of Ellendale and the Sussex County seat of Georgetown, people were used to military aircraft flying overhead and the sight of a C-124 or the new C-133 droning by was almost routine.

Things would not be routine that Sunday morning.

James Rust, then 18 years old, was awakened by his father and some friends talking excitedly outside his Redden, Del., home. “I heard one of them say, ‘that plane is going down,’” Rust, now 73, recalled. “I ran outside, but by that time the plane was gone.”

“I was getting ready for church and we heard this noise,” said Ted Walius, who was 12 years old at the time. “It was really loud and it was almost like a whining sound. I knew it was an aircraft. We went outside, but didn’t see anything. We didn’t hear an explosion, just that whining.”

Sighting in on a rising plume of smoke, Rust and the others jumped into a station wagon, arriving at the scene minutes later.

“There was a lot of fire, and it looked like it had cratered into the ground,” Rust said. “We thought maybe we could help someone, but realized after seeing it that we couldn’t.”

At approximately 8:43 a.m. 54-0146 had smashed into the ground, landing upside down in the heavily wooded Ellendale State Forest, between Ellendale and Georgetown. Witnesses said the craft exploded approximately 30 seconds later, the 25 tons of JP-4 fuel immediately igniting the trees and turning the pine forest into a maelstrom of flame.

An Ellendale fireman sounded the town fire alarm, bringing its fire company to the scene with firefighting equipment and an ambulance. Firemen from other nearby towns rushed to the scene and were quickly augmented by more than 100 firemen from as far south as Salisbury, Md., some of who were on their way north for a training session. Later they were joined by Air Force firefighters, ambulances and wreckers, as well as security forces who worked to keep back curious crowds.

A call also went out via the local media for anyone who might have witnessed the accident to come forward and talk to investigators. Scores of people said they had witnessed the plane’s last moments, giving sometimes contradictory reports of what they saw.

Many said the C-133 was circling the area about 2,000 feet above the forest and descending slowly when the engine sounds

(See C-133 accident on page 12)
The men

C-133’s crew were exceptional airmen — and much more

“There’s been an accident.”

With a base chaplain at his side, Lt. Col. John K. Thompson would have delivered those words at four Dover-area homes the afternoon of April 13, 1958. As commander of the 39th Air Transport Squadron at Dover Air Force Base, Del., he only could verify the news of the crash that had suddenly turned four Air Force wives into widows. He did not know why their husbands’ C-133 Cargomaster suddenly dropped from the sky. All he could do that day was to try to answer tearful, perhaps desperate, questions, reassure the women there would be an investigation, and promise the Air Force would do everything possible to help.

The accident marked the first loss of the giant $3.8 million cargo transport, which had entered the Air Force inventory only eight months earlier. It also caused the loss of four outstanding airmen, Capt. Raymond R. Bern, 1st Lt. Herbert T. Palisch, Tech. Sgt. Marvin A. Aust and Tech. Sgt. Edward L. McKinley Jr.

Little is known of these men today, but more than 50 years after their lives ended in a Delaware forest, but they live on in the memories of their families and of the friends they served with at Dover.

Capt. Raymond Ray Bern was a tinkerer.

“My mom said he loved putting things together,” said Bern’s daughter, Vickie Bern Guion, who was 4 years old when her father died. “We could never eat on the dining room table because he was always working on engines and motors.”

“He built his own model airplanes and flew them in shows and won many trophies with them,” added Guion’s sister, Nancy Bern Edwards. “He’d chase us through the house looking for pilot training. They were married in December in their home town of St. Louis.”

The couple were college sweethearts, having dated since their first day on campus. Palisch earned his second lieutenant’s bars upon graduation on June 9, 1954 and thereafter set out for pilot training. They were married in December in their home town of St. Louis.

Mrs. Lambert followed her husband to bases in Texas and Florida as he went through his flying instruction. Palisch earned his wings on April 12, 1956 and was assigned to fly C-124s out of Dover.

At Dover, Palisch had a friendly rivalry with 1st Lt. (later Col.) Robert “Bob” McCartney. The pair flew together occasionally, both looking to get in as many hours flying the Cargomaster as possible.

For McCartney, his competition with Palisch might have saved his life.

“That day I was supposed to go out and fly a local training mission,” he said.

“I got out there in my flight suit and everything, but Ted already was at the plane. They were getting ready to crank engines and take off, and so he bumped me off that flight.”

Mrs. Lambert said on the morning of April 13, 1958, she drove her husband out to the base, and then returned home. She was reading the Sunday newspaper when an Air Force staff car appeared in front of her home.

“A couple of guys in uniform came to the... (See The Crew on page 11)
door, and I thought, “This is bad.”’” she said.

Receiving the news “was just terrible,” Mrs. Lambert said. “You think, ‘What could I have said to him?’ but of course nothing would have made a difference.”

Mrs. Lambert remained in Dover for a while, but eventually moved to Philadelphia. Later, McCartney introduced her to 1st Lt. (later Col.) Luther Lambert, who, even though he had been to at least one party at the Palisch home, had never noticed her before. A courtship followed, and the pair were married at the Dover AFB chapel.

“We started going out, and it was good,” Mrs. Lambert said. “He got along with my family, and it all worked out.”

Like Capt. Ray Bern, Tech. Sgt. Marvin Adair Aust was a Midwest farmer’s son. Born May 31, 1928, in Hays, Kans., Aust attended high school in Hays, and played center on the school’s football team, said his sister, Doris Groff, 80. Despite his schedule, he was expected to complete all of his schoolwork as well as his farm chores, particularly after a heart attack took his father’s life. “He definitely was raised on the farm and worked it with our father,” said Aust’s younger brother, Edgar, 68. “I was born in September 1944, and my father had died about a month before I was born. My brother basically took over trying to run the farm with my mother.

“At some point, however, he decided he didn’t want to be a farmer and that’s when he decided to join the Air Force.”

Aust enlisted in March 1949 and went into aircraft maintenance, aiming to become a flight engineer.

In September 1953, while assigned to the 374th Troop Carrier Wing at Tachikawa AB, Japan, Aust was part of a handpicked C-124 crew that transported a Soviet MiG-15 on its way to the United States. An official Air Force photo shows Aust and another crewman, both decked out in leather flying jackets, reading about their flight in a local paper.

To his family, it was apparent Aust loved what he was doing.

“He was really into it,” Edgar Aust recalled. “He’d bring home things I’d never seen before. He enjoyed the travel, the people and the flying.”

Aust’s career soon took him to Dover AFB, where he settled in as a flight engineer in the 39th Air Transport Squadron. He also married while in Dover; his wife, Betty Lou, gave him a stepdaughter, Debra Jo, and eventually a son, Mark, who was born seven months before his father’s death.

Because the Aust’s Kansas home was so remote, there were no Air Force officials on hand to deliver the news of the crash. Instead, the town fire and police chiefs notified the family. “My mother was devastated,” Mrs. Groff said. “She’d lost her husband and then her eldest son. It was almost too much.”

“I guess the biggest thing that hit us was that he’d just gotten married, had a child and was starting his family life,” Edgar Aust said. “All of that had been taken away. I guess my biggest concern is that I never got to say goodbye.”

Betty Lou Aust eventually remarried, but her former in-laws have lost touch with her and their nephew. Despite the tragedy, both Mr. Aust and Mrs. Groff know their brother loved the life he had chosen.

“He was very happy, outgoing and liked people,” Mr. Aust said. “I think he really enjoyed being in the Air Force and he didn’t have any regrets.”

Like most Air Force flight engineers, Tech. Sgt. Edward Lowry McKinley Jr. was no stranger to life as an aircrew member.

Born Sept. 28, 1924, in Meridian, Miss., McKinley was the son of Edward L. Sr. and Carrie Riggin McKinley. He graduated from Meridian High School and for a time had worked for Sears, Roebuck and Co.

The senior McKinley was known throughout town as “Doc,” even though he was not a physician, so it seemed natural his son would be dubbed “Little Doc,” a name he often signed on letters home. McKinley enlisted in the U.S. Army Air Forces a year after the Pearl Harbor attack, and was called to active duty in April 1943. During World War II, he flew combat cargo missions out of Papua, New Guinea. He left the military after the war but was recalled during the Korean war and sent to Ashiya AFB, Japan.

McKinley received a commendation ribbon, the forerunner of today’s Air Force Commendation Medal, for his efforts at an occupied North Korean airfield, where he worked on the planes that delivered vital supplies to soldiers and Marines fighting Chinese forces at the Chosin Reservoir.

Writing to his grandmother, Isabelle McKinley, in March 1951, McKinley asked her to look in on his wife, Connie, and two-year-old daughter, Faye. “I know they get awfully lonely in that big house all by themselves, and just a little company will help their morale a lot,” he wrote.

Faye McKinley Siano was 9 years old when her father was killed, but she has some very special memories of the time they spent together.

“He would always bring me back something, even if it was just those nasty K-rations,” she said. “But I’d eat them anyhow.

“He’d also bring me dolls, and I had hundreds of them.”

McKinley loved to spoil his only child, but also was very strict. While Faye was expected to answer the phone in a military style, her father also showed his softer side by taking her out to buy new dresses and the latest hits from Elvis Presley.

“Elvis was really big,” she recalled. “My dad and I bought all his records and we went to see all his movies together. He’d splurge on me, and get in trouble with my mother because of it.”

Faye and her mother dropped her father off at Dover AFB the morning of April 13, and she then went to Sunday school. On the way home from church, her mother had a premonition something was very wrong.

After her father’s death, Faye and Mrs. McKinley returned to Meridian and moved in with her grandparents. Mrs. McKinley died in July 1986, and was buried next to her husband.

Now retired, Faye went on to a career in radio, writing copy and playing records as well as writing and producing commercials and doing voiceover work.

The loss of the four crewmen of C-133 54-0146 shocked and saddened the Dover Air Force Base community. Their families received letters of condolence and support from Brig. Gen. Francis C. Gideon, commander of the 1607th Air Transport Wing at Dover AFB and Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Thomas D. White. Some of the wives stayed connected to the Air Force, while others returned to communities where the sight of a military uniform was the exception rather than the rule.

In all, the men left behind five children, all of whom had to grow up without their fathers, perhaps missing a bit of what would have been a normal childhood. They were sometimes asked to mature a little faster and take on adult responsibilities a little sooner than they would have otherwise.

“It really hurts to lose your dad, and at such a young age,” Faye Siano said. “It really leaves a hole in your life.”

Note: photos courtesy of the respective crew members’ families.
C-133 accident

(Continued from page 9)

suddenly increased, as if Bern were trying to gain altitude. Some said they saw flames before the craft fell, others thought something might have dropped from the ship.

Firemen fought the fuel-fed fire for more than two hours before bringing the blaze under control, taking an additional four hours to completely extinguish the fire. Workers built a small road into the site and as night fell, set up banks of searchlights around the perimeter. Air Force security officers put up a 24-hour guard at the site.

Delaware Chief Forest Ranger Oscar D. Bailey knew the plane was in trouble when he spotted it from the yard of his home. Now 103 years old, Bailey’s memories of the last few seconds of 54-0146’s flight remain vivid.

“It was flying south, counter clockwise, and as I watched the plane it was beginning to circle to the left. I wondered why it was circling at that time in the morning.”

Completing the circle, the 133 headed back north, Bailey said.

“The first thing I noticed was the left wing dropped down about five degrees,” he said. “It moved a little further and the nose dropped down a little bit and then come back up level. It was still headed north.

“All this happened quick. Then the left wing made another dip. As soon as it did that the nose went down and when it did it didn’t come back up.

“It started to roll to the left. As it rolled over, the wingtip kept going down. It was a quarter of the way in the roll and I knew it would never come out because with a plane that big, with the position it was in, that roll would have turned into a dive.

“It turned over, completely over and went straight down.”

Even as the 133 entered its final moments, the propellers on the four engines continued to turn, and Bailey saw no debris, smoke or flame as the plane went down.

Watching the disaster unfold, Bailey knew the crew had only seconds to live. Moments after the plane disappeared over the tree line, the noise from the engines stopped suddenly.

“The next thing I saw was a big ball of black smoke way above the trees and I heard the explosion.”

Bailey jumped into his pickup and was one of the first on the scene.

“The left wing had exploded and blew that fuel all through the trees,” he said. “The tail was upside down and I believe that if any crew member had been in the end of the tail, he’d have survived. It wasn’t burned or nothing.”

Investigators combed through the wreckage for days. Searchers found only bits of the crew’s personal belongings, including a shattered pair of glasses and what could have been metal ID tags. The crew’s remains were recovered the day after the crash.

Bailey remained at the site two weeks as workers searched for clues and then cleaned up the area. When they left, construction equipment was brought in to smooth over the area.

A theory emerges

The formal crash inquiry began almost immediately with the convening of an investigation board. All C-133s were ordered back to Dover and all cargo carrying trips were cancelled pending the investigation.

The anxiety over the crash was heightened just 16 days later when the elevator on another C-133 locked up while the plane was landing at Dover. The crew physically forced the elevator to operate properly, and the plane landed without further incident.

Following this near-miss, MATS grounded all C-133s for the next three weeks. All Cargo masters eventually were sent to the Douglas factory for modifications.

The results of the investigation into the crash of 54-0146 never have been released to the public. The Report of AF Aircraft Accident lists only basic airplane and crew information as well as what was known of events leading up to the crash. The conclusions of the investigation board still are considered sensitive material.

Cal Taylor’s own research into this and the other fatal C-133 incidents indicated it was possible Bern’s plane had stalled. One former 39th ATS pilot said the fact that 54-0146 had flipped over before impact was the result of a power-on stall. Others still pointed at the troubles with the plane’s elevators.

Col. (then Maj.) Charles J. Gutekunst, now 93, served as maintenance officer for the investigation. A veteran of the 1700th Test Squadron, he also considered Bern a good friend.

About six months after the crash, he found what he and others think was the answer.

Asked by another pilot to look at a C-133 for a pending flight, Gutekunst tried unsuccessfully to move the plane’s elevators. They followed the cables to the rear pressure bulkhead where they attached to a rod that went through a tube and then connected to other cables.

“I said I’d be damned, but they looked like they were frozen,” Gutekunst said. “We went into the tail cone and found it was all wet in there from rain the night before.”

Knowing that it rained the night before Bern’s mission and that his flight plan had taken him up to altitudes where temperatures were well below freezing, Gutekunst theorized the rod on 54-0146 might have frozen, locking up the elevators and causing the stall and inverted roll Bailey and others witnessed.

Gutekunst recovered the pressure bulkhead from 54-0146 from the base salvage area and cut out the same section. He then made a trip to the base meat locker.

“We soaked the rod and started moving it back and forth,” he said. “The third time it went through, it froze solid.”

He called some Douglas engineers who immediately recognized the problem. All of Dover’s Cargomasters were immediately grounded until they came up with a fix.

The repair was unbelievably simple: maintenance crews cut a one-inch hole in the bulkhead and removed the tube.

The Douglas representatives later told Gutekunst a similar system was being used on the company’s DC-8 commercial transport.

“It was kind of startling to hear that because if it had happened on a DC-8, you’d have killed a lot more than just four people,” he said.

Whether this change could have prevented the loss of 54-0146 will never be known.

“I believe what we found was the answer,” Gutekunst said. “It wasn’t scientific, but it worked.”

The loss of 54-0146 was not the first time a Dover plane was involved in a fatal accident and it was not the last. But it was particularly noteworthy because four highly skilled and well-liked airmen died and because the C-133 was considered the largest and most advanced transport aircraft of its time. The base recovered and C-133s continued to fly from Dover for another 13 years.

In July 1971, Lt. Col. Benn H. Witterman wrote about his own reactions to incidents involving the Cargomaster just as the Air Force was retiring the last of the C-133 fleet.

A C-133 pilot and later C-133 safety monitor at MATS headquarters, Witterman served on accident investigation boards involving the Cargomaster.

“The C-133 always did have a flair for the spectacular, especially when it came to accidents,” Witterman wrote. “In most cases the accidents occurred in a sudden, violent manner that left no survivors and defied investigators to determine the cause.

“Sometimes even a broad guess was difficult,” he wrote.

Today, more than a half-century since the loss of 54-0146, natural forces have taken over the crash site, which lies along a two-lane blacktop directly south of Ellendale, behind a boarded up two-story house. The pine trees have returned and the site now looks like any other forested area in the state.

People in newer homes adjacent to the scene didn’t even know a major aircraft accident had occurred literally in their back yards.

“If you didn’t know where it was, you couldn’t tell a C-133 went down there,” Walius said.
She’s barely visible behind all that material, but Hartly seamstress Renate Brown took only one day to stitch together 24 yards of fabric for the Museum’s CG-4A glider restoration.

Shannon and Susie Kirkland, and Leola Kirkland-Williams, along with Shantel Kirkland and Ronald Williams Jr., of Chester, Pa, get a tour briefing from Dick Powell and Ev Sahrbeck.

The AMC Museum Foundation’s annual silent auction featured more than 20 tables, laden with donated items including four sightseeing airplane flights, including one along the Manhattan skyline; a two-night stay in a 5-star Ocean City, Md., hotel; dinner for 24 aboard the Museum’s C-133; and NASCAR and June Jam tickets.

AMC Foundation vice president and Museum volunteer Paul Gillis spent Memorial Day 2012 placing 19 engraved bricks in the walkway at the Museum’s Commemorative Park. The park now contains more than 300 tributes. “It’s a unique way to remember someone special,” he said.

City of Dover Mayor Carleton E. Carey Sr., left, shares a laugh with Russ Dion, center, and AMCM Foundation board member Bob Berglund during the Foundation’s June 8 silent auction.

Former Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich and wife Callista visited the AMC Museum April 21. Director Mike Leister, right, briefed the couple on the Museum’s exhibits.
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