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Photos are by Jeff Brown, unless otherwise noted.


Errata: The photograph caption on Page 3 of the Oct-Dec 2018 Hangar Digest should have said the KB-50 was brought in from Florida. The online version of the story uses the correct information.
The Greatest Generation
WWII vet Tom Creekmore: 95 years and counting

December 7 has several meanings for Tom Creekmore: it marks the day of the Pearl Harbor attack that drew the United States into World War II and is the date in 1787 his adopted home state of Delaware ratified the U.S. Constitution, making it the First State. It’s also his birthday.

Creekmore, who turned 95 on Dec. 7, 2018, observed the milestone a day afterward at the Air Mobility Command Museum. Standing in the shadow of the B-17G Flying Fortress “Sleepy Time Gal,” the same type of aircraft he rode on 19 missions over Europe during the war, Creekmore reminisced about his life growing up in Depression-era Virginia, his induction into the U.S. Army, and a couple of near misses while serving as a radio operator aboard the B-17 in the closing months of the war.

The celebration was attended by members of Creekmore’s extended family, including his son, who gave his rendition of Oliver, and a cousin left almost immediately, he said.

Officers were told to report to their Washington offices -- construction on the Pentagon had begun only three months earlier -- in uniform. This caused a problem because, in the isolationist era before the war, many military personnel often worked in civilian clothing, he said. Some didn’t even have a full set of uniforms.

Creekmore, who had married and was working for a civilian airline, received his draft notice in 1943 and was assigned to the Third Armored Division. Eventually, he ended up in Louisiana, training for tank battles. The idea did not appeal to him, so after seeing a recruiting sign for the Army Air Forces, he applied for a transfer.

Shortly afterward, he was training to be a B-17 radio operator.

Creekmore celebrated his 21st birthday in 1944 in the form of a close encounter over Washington, D.C. His crew had been assigned to fly a factory-fresh B-17 to New York airfield as part of third-anniversary observances of the Pearl Harbor attack. The weather was so bad on the return trip to Florida air traffic controllers ordered the plane to land at the nation’s capital.

Flying at about 500 feet, low enough to try to spot some familiar landmarks, spying out his tiny radio compartment window, he suddenly spotted the Washington Monument off one wing.

Knowing the monument is 555 feet tall, Creekmore realized they were in a potentially bad situation. “We weren’t supposed to be anywhere near that area,” he said. “That’s a whole restricted area from flying. And we probably flew right over the Capitol Building, right down the Mall.”

The pilot bailed out and landed at Washington National Airport, but was quickly ordered to move the B-17 to nearby Bolling Field. They made the jump without even raising the Fortress’ landing gear, he said.

“I’m enjoying life”

There were some close calls on some of his bombing missions, Creekmore related, including once when an anti-aircraft shell went through the plane, destroying his radio room, and another when his aircraft almost collided with another.

One of his responsibilities on each mission included making a visual inspection of the B-17’s bomb bay after the plane had dropped its bombs. On one mission, a 500-pound bomb failed to release, and was just hanging in the bay; efforts to salvo the shell failed, so they brought it back to their base in England. Creekmore recalls his pilot made the softest landing possible, but once the plane was on the ground, the bomb unexpectedly slipped loose. It dropped through the closed bomb bay doors and thumped onto the concrete.

“All of a sudden I heard a crash and bang and looked out my window. People were running away from the aircraft,” he said. Fortunately, the bomb had not been armed, so there was no explosion.

“The chances of something happening were slim to nil,” he said, “but the guys running across that field didn’t care about that.”

After the German surrender, Creekmore and part of his crew were ordered into Soviet-occupied territory as part of Operation Revival, the effort to evacuate airmen who had been made prisoners of war. Each B-17’s bomb bay was covered over with plywood, allowing the planes to hold 30 POWs each. With continuous flying, the crews were able to repatriate more than 6,000 airmen, he said.

Following the war, Creekmore went back to his job as a civilian airline manager and now lives in Millsboro, Del., where he enjoys doing historical re-enactments.

“My goal always was to work for 40 years and then be retired for 40 years,” he said. “I’m enjoying life.”
Sweat and elbow grease are just two ingredients needed when it comes to successfully restoring old aircraft. Grit and determination are two more, along with a desire to bring a historic artifact back to life for another generation to enjoy.

And while that job usually falls to volunteers who have spent years flying and maintaining what are now the AMCM’s static display aircraft, nowadays some of these old-timers are getting help from their younger cohorts.

Active duty airmen Senior Airman Tim Anderson and Airman 1st Class Justice Tuttle are no strangers to Hangar 1304, aka, the AMCM’s restoration shop: they’ve spent months working alongside members of the Museum’s restoration crew, learning about aircraft, the Air Force and even picking up a few of life’s lessons along the way.

Both in their 20s, they are assigned to Dover Air Force Base’s 436th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron, working on the C-5M SuperGalaxy. Anderson is a crew chief specializing in personal protection and survival equipment while Tuttle repairs any balky electronic equipment aboard the airplane.

While both have many other interests—Tuttle, for example, is a DeLorean fan—they also enjoy spending their off-hours shaping metal, scraping off corrosion and old paint and even recreating missing parts and panels for the Museum’s collection of period aircraft.

Restoration shop chief Les Stiller is impressed with both airmen.

“Tim started out as this very quiet young man who seemed to be enjoying what we do,” he said. “He’s grown since then to be really a part of our operation.”

“Justice is very gung-ho and wants to learn,” he added. “He’s really into it.”

The road to the AMCM

When they enlisted, neither man figured they’d be restoring airplanes that had been dropped from the Air Force inventory years, even decades, before they were born.

Anderson grew up on the family farm in Madelia, Minn., where he worked with his father growing and harvesting corn and soybeans, as well as raising a few cows.

Schooled at home, he continued working on the farm for another year after graduation.

“My dad wanted me around for another season,” he explained.

It was his desire to try something different that led him to the Air Force, he added.

Tuttle grew up in Portsmouth, Va., and enrolled in college after graduating high school.

But the expenses associated with higher education were a turn-off, he said.

“I saw what my peers were doing, and I didn’t want that lifestyle,” he added.

Thoroughly immersed in working on the C-5M, Tuttle also wanted to learn more about earlier versions of the aircraft.

“I found myself coming here quite often, learning about the airframes, learning about the stories attached to each one,” Tuttle said.

“Really, for me, it was the history and as I was working on C-5s I got obsessed with the older models. I work on an M model, and earlier there were the B models and the A models and I was curious about how they worked.”

After one of his many trips to the Museum, one of the volunteers approached him about joining the crew.

“He basically said, if you like coming out here so much, why don’t you volunteer? And since I already work on the aircraft as my job, I figured that I would be able to transition into restoration pretty well.”

He was particularly taken with the story behind the Museum’s C-5A, the only cargo airplane ever to drop and launch an intercontinental ballistic missile. The plane is easily visible from the nearby highway.

“You can pass it on the interstate and you don’t realize how significant that chapter in history is because it’s the only jet in the world to do that,” he said.

Anderson’s interest was sparked by his maintenance training instructor.

“I was in follow-on technical training and during one of the last weeks our instructor took us out here and showed us all the aircraft,” he said. “I was just blown away.”

What was particularly fascinating was that the AMCM didn’t just have jet aircraft on static display, Anderson said. Those propeller-driven and turbo-prop planes on the ramp also caught his eye.

“I saw someone painting one of the props and it dawned on me that people still have to work on these,” he said. “I wondered if that would be fun.

“I was like Justice,” Anderson continued. “I was coming about here a lot and I thought I could do restoration. That should be a fun thing to do.”

Past connected to today

Both airmen have been at work in the restoration hangar for about a year and usually come in at least once a week.

Their volunteer work not only has helped them in their day-to-day jobs but also given them a greater appreciation for the Air Force’s past and the men they work alongside, many of who could be their grandfathers.
These old airplanes are different from their modern versions, but their mission was the same as today, Tuttle said.

“All of these airframes have seen countless people and countless hours dedicated to doing what our job is, and that’s to keep the world free,” he said.

He’s much impressed by the KB-50J, that’s been reassembled after being brought from a base in Florida.

“It was a bomber turned refueler,” he said. “You look inside and the bomb bays are still in there. It amazed me.

“Yes, there are a lot of major differences between these and the modern airframes, but you still see the similarities.”

It’s easy to trace how today’s aircraft evolved from those of World War II and the Cold War, he said.

“We took a lot from those aircraft that we still use today,” Tuttle said. “You can see the ideas from back then that still are here today.”

The two airmen’s interest in the Museum’s old aircraft was a pleasant surprise for Still.

“One day I was showing something on the KB-50 and I heard these two voices coming from inside,” he said “I duck underneath the tarp and the two of them are up in the cockpit, going over every instrument.

“That’s what makes them so special.”

A big part of their job has been learning sheet metal work, Anderson said.

That’s the first thing I did when I got here, was join a bunch of guys working on the C-119.”

All of the flaps and flight control surfaces needed repair, which included cutting and shaping new aluminum and riveting the replacements onto the aircraft, he said.

Anderson likes the camaraderie, and how well everyone in the restoration shop works together, from forming new panels from sheet aluminum to tossing ideas around in the hangar break room.

“Everyone kind of knows everything, but they all have very different areas of knowledge,” he said. “You have navigators and engineers, so you have a great spectrum of knowledge.”

Working with different groups on different parts of a project gives him the chance to learn even more.

“You can jump back and forth,” Anderson said. “Some work in groups, so you can jump back and forth between the groups and just learn everything.”

Tuttle agrees.

“I definitely learn things,” he said. “We work with a lot of people who have a significant amount of experience in so many different fields, and, granted I do a lot of electrical work and here it’s more static display, but absolutely, there’s tons to learn.”

Learning from experience

Tuttle, who is planning a career in aviation, said working around men whose life experience totals in the hundreds of years has been enlightening.

“There’s a lot to learn from them and not just necessarily maintenance but life things, too,” he said. “I’ve talked to them about

Bundled up against the November chill Anderson and Tuttle fit the newly-tooled aluminum into the C-130’s cargo deck. Since the aircraft no longer has onboard power, light and heat are provided by an exterior generator.

One of the first things Justice Tuttle learned was how to work with sheet metal. His task here was to flatten a corroded piece of C-130 decking so screw holes could be properly drilled into its replacement.
FOUNDATION NOTES

By Don Sloan

I was able to get long-time AMC Museum Foundation board member Phil White a replica of his bronze plaque last month. Phil is one of only three individuals for whom the board has honored with such a plaque. Notably, he is the only person for whom the board bought a plaque with board-member-only funds, an acknowledgment of his friendship and our respect for his hard work and dedication to the AMC Museum and Foundation.

Due to medical issues, the last year and a half has been extremely challenging for Phil and his wife, Anne. Indeed, those issues precipitated his departure from the Foundation Board last year. Yet, despite those obstacles, he and Anne have continued to maintain a remarkable attitude and persist in facing this ordeal in an incredible manner.

We on the Foundation Board very much miss Phil White. Please keep him and Anne in your prayers.

Our newest member of the AMC Museum Foundation Board is Kevin J. Taha. Kevin's military career began in the Army National Guard in a test program for new recruits. After his junior year of high school, he attended basic military training at Fort McClellan Army post in Anniston, Ala. After graduating from high school he returned to Fort McClellan and completed Advanced Infantry Training as a military police officer. Three years later he enlisted in the Air Force and was assigned as a mail clerk at Strategic Air Command's headquarters at Offutt AFB, Neb. Initially assigned to deliver mail to the directorates of flag officers, he was then asked to perform administrative assistant position within the executive officer's directorate.

Kevin's big break came two years later when he got the fortunate opportunity to leave the admin field for the world of aviation as a boom operator for Strategic Air Command, the Tactical Air Command during its changeover to the Air Combat Command, and the Air Mobility Command. During his career as a boom operator, he performed in-flight refueling with almost every aircraft in the US Air Force, US Navy, US Marines, and NATO forces. He became an instructor boom and flew various worldwide missions, including many major operations such as operations Desert Storm, Desert Shield and Provide Comfort.

While in the Air Force he graduated from Southern Illinois University, University of North Dakota, and the Community College of the Air Force. Upon leaving the Air Force he worked as an engineer for various companies in Delaware, including DuPont and Polymer Technologies. In the late '90s, Kevin entered the information technology realm where he was able to combine his engineering skills with advanced technical applications. Companies that he has worked for include ARC, Aetna, Kraft Foods, Juniper, Barclay Card US, Starboard Group and currently, Broadcast Sports International. He's written software applications and set up complex networks both wireless and wired. He's done data center builds, call-center builds and continues to instruct students on the latest technologies and trends.

As an instrument-rated private pilot with over 800 hours, Kevin has owned a Cessna 172, Piper Cherokee and a Mooney J. He currently flies his Beechcraft Bonanza S35. He and his wife of 32 years live in Felton, Delaware. They have two children, Robert and Tori, and two grandchildren, Brandon and Avery.

We're looking forward to Kevin advancing the Foundation hardware/software procedures and processes into this century. Welcome aboard.

We've also added a familiar name to the Board, retired USAF Master Sgt. Jeff Brown. Jeff's family is steeped in military service, from two ancestors serving during the Revolutionary War up to his mother serving in the U.S. Army, a brother serving with the Marine Corps and two sisters serving with the U.S. Navy and Air Force. His dad, the late MSGt. Walter E. Brown Jr., was an engine mechanic on aircraft ranging from the B-50 to the C-5. He retired at Dover AFB in 1977 as non-commissioned officer in charge of the TF-39 test cell.

The Brown family arrived at Dover AFB in 1967 and Jeff enlisted in 1972 shortly after graduating high school. Over 22 years of Air Force service, he worked his way up the personnel career field from records clerk to personnel superintendent.

Jeff's fond of noting that because of his admitted lack of mechanical aptitude, his father recommended he take any Air Force job that would keep him away from a flight line.

His wanderlust has taken him to many locations in the US and across the world: Ramstein AB, Germany, Tyndall AFB, Fla., Hill AFB, Utah, Rhein-Main AB, Germany, Sheppard AFB, Tex., Kunsan AB, Korea, McChord AFB, Wash., a second
tour at Ramstein, and finally Plattsburgh AFB, N.Y. His love of travel and desire to learn more about other countries and cultures has taken him across most of Europe.

While at McChord, Jeff was in charge of the base Personnel Support for Contingency Operations team, trained in administering personnel actions for deployed troops. He would put that training to use during his second assignment at Ramstein when he was deployed to northern Turkey/southern Iraq as boss of the Ramstein PERSCO team, serving outside Zakhu, Iraq as part of Operation Provide Comfort following Operation Desert Storm.

While at Plattsburgh he learned the base was to be closed under BRAC and decided to retire when the Air Force could not find a position for him at Dover. While working at the Delaware State Historic Preservation Office, he attended Dover’s Wesley College full time, earning a BA degree, summa cum laude, in Media Arts and a minor degree in History.

In August 2001, Jeff joined the staff of the Dover Post newspaper, eventually rising to the position of news editor. During this time he was recognized by the Maryland-Delaware-DC Press Association for his features, stories on military subjects and investigative journalism work. In April 2006, when a Dover AFB C-5 crashed just outside the base, he was the first reporter on hand, his work garnering him one of those MDDC awards.

He left the Dover Post after nine years to work as a photographer for the Joint Personal Effects Depot at Aberdeen Proving Grounds and Dover AFB, but was recruited back to the paper after two years. He has been there since March 2013.

While at the Dover Post, Jeff became familiar with the AMC Museum, providing several stories on events at the Museum and new aircraft being added to the collection. Because of that, the Board approached him about taking over as editor of the Hangar Digest newsletter. He produced his first issue in January 2011.

Jeff’s hobbies include historical research, genealogy, building models and handyman projects around his home. Happily married to his wife, Renate, for more than 43 years, they have a son, Mike, and daughter, Sharla, and three grandchildren. They live a quiet life outside Hartly, Del., with their two cats. We’re happy to have him aboard!

Finally, I’m sure you’ve heard about the two happiest days in a boat owner’s life: the day he buys it -- and the day he sells it. Having had a couple of boats, I must confess I completely agree with that adage.

However, I’ve also been fortunate enough to have bought and sold some airplanes; and I know several fellow pilots who have done so as well. And frankly, it’s just not the same. The AMC Museum ramp soon will be saying goodbye to our Antonov AN-2.

Why get an AN-2? The vision of the previous director, Mike Leister, said that it was part of a plan to compare significant airlift aircraft from three major military powers from the 1940s that were produced in large numbers. They were the America’s C-47 (more than 10,000 built), the AN-2 from the Soviet Union (more than 18,000), and the German Ju-52 (around 5,000). There could not have been more different approaches to the same challenge. One had one engine, one had two and one had three. One was a biplane, two were monoplanes. One had corrugated skin, two did not. One was capable of short takeoffs and landings, two were not. The comparisons were endless.

To help fulfill that vision, the National Museum of the United States Air Force had a Ju-52 which they were willing to transfer to the AMCM if we could put it under cover. But we had little luck in finding any kind of Soviet airlifter that would not cost a huge amount of money. Then in early 2013 Dave Cannavo of Aero Enterprises in Townsend, Del., offered to give the AMC Museum two reasonably complete AN-2s as a donation. We just had to haul them to the Museum, which was accomplished by our volunteer restoration crews and some help from the base transportation squadron in the form of a low bed tractor trailer.

We selected the best plane to restore and used the other for spare parts. The original flight control surfaces were fabric-covered but because this plane was going to sit outside it was decided to recover those controls with thin sheet metal, a process which is sometimes done on older aircraft that still fly. Only a couple of instruments were missing and we were able to find replacements on eBay. Our restoration team even managed to get replacement stencils for the interior markings in Cyrillic lettering. The straightforward preservation process took less than one year and resulted in an excellent display aircraft.

Since that time however priorities have changed. The Ju-52 request has been canceled and the AN-2 will soon leave. While a new director is certainly obliged to follow his own path, that doesn’t make us any less sad that a significant aircraft is on its way to yet another home. We’re happy to have had a piece of history well-represented on the Air Mobility Command Museum ramp.
You Can’t Keep it All Dept.

Come and gone: the AMCM’s ‘lost’ aircraft

Over the years the AMC Museum has stayed very close to its mission when adding to its collection of airlift and aerial refueling aircraft.

Along the way, however, some aircraft have come along -- and later left -- because they either were intended to be temporary additions to the collection or because they no longer fit into the Museum’s evolving mission.

Former Museum Director Mike Leister took a few minutes recently to reminisce about what’s come and gone.

O-2A Skymaster

The first of these short-term aircraft was a Cessna O-2 Skymaster, an observation plane that came with a with a significant Vietnam service record.

While five volunteers were disassembling an F-101 Voodoo at Sheppard Air Force Base to ship back to the new Dover AFB Museum, as the AMCM was known at the time, they went to the base salvage yard to find padding material to protect the plane during shipment.

While rummaging around, they found a complete O-2, one once used for aircraft maintenance school training. Even then, it didn’t fit the Museum’s mission of exploring Dover AFB’s history, but the staff felt it could be used as a centerpiece for a planned Vietnam War exhibit.

The O-2A in 1967 succeeded the O-1 Bird Dog as the standard aircraft for forward air controller duty in Southeast Asia. The plane carried armament it’s two-man crew could use to mark enemy targets and its twin push/pull engines increased the crew’s survivability over that of the O-1.

The Museum’s counterparts at the United States Air Force Museum, as the NMUSAF was known then, agreed to transfer the Skymaster to Dover, and the volunteers later arranged for a passing C-5 to stop and pick up the plane.

On arriving at Sheppard, the C-5’s crew dropped off the Dover Museum volunteers and went to file their flight plans and have lunch. The plan had been to give the volunteers two days to disassemble the O-2 while the C-5 completed its mission of a flyover and static display at the Air Force Academy. They’d then pack up the Skymaster and bring it home.

That flight crew did not count on the skill, and quite frankly, the eagerness of the Dover volunteers.

“We hit the ground running and with the help of an old maintenance stand the five of us took both wings and the tail off the O-2,” Leister recalled. Members of the group still were maintenance qualified at the time, so they knelt the C-5 and shoved the O-2’s fuselage aboard by hand. A forklift driver helped with the other items, he said.

“We unknelt the plane and went into the terminal for lunch, where the flight crew met us and told us we’d better get to work because they weren’t going to wait for us if we weren’t ready when they came back in two days,” Leister said.

Looking of shock and disbelief greeted the volunteers when the flight crew learned the O-2 already was disassembled, locked down and ready for transport, he said.

“We enjoyed the flyover of the academy from the flight deck of the C-5 and when the flight crew was invited to the Air Force/Navy football game we rented a car and toured Pike’s Peak,” Leister said.

Later, while researching the O-2’s history, they learned that aircraft had been flown by Col. (later Gen.) William J. Begert, then commander of the 436th Military Airlift Wing, while serving in Vietnam as a forward air controller.

Begert was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for his work during the Bat-21 rescue operation and later was promoted to general, retiring as commander of Pacific Air Forces.

The O-2 stayed at Dover for years but as the Museum’s mission focused more on AMC’s core missions and Dover AFB history the plane was returned to the National Museum of the USAF, where it remains on display today.

D-21 Drone

Perhaps the most unique aircraft to find a temporary home at the AMC Museum is a genuine rarity.

In 1993 the Air Force was asked to move a D-21 drone from the boneyard at Davis-Monthan AFB, Arizona, and store it until some future date when it would be taken to a large civilian museum for exhibit. Since a Dover C-5 made the move the DAFB Museum was only too happy to oblige.

The story of the D-21 is not well known. Guided by an onboard inertial navigation system, the unmanned aircraft was a Mach 3-plus drone designed for launch from a modified SR-71 reconnaissance plane (designated an M-21 when carrying the drone). With a range of 3,000 miles and a service ceiling of 95,000 feet, the D-21 could overfly and photograph sites in hostile countries as its speed and pioneering stealth technology made it difficult to find and take down.

There were 38 D-21s built, but several were lost during the program. In July 1966 a D-21 collided with its M-21 carrier air-
The AMCM’s P-51 now graces the lobby of the headquarters building for the 4th Mission Support Group at Seymour Johnson AFB, North Carolina.

A check showed no D-21 ever had been put on public display, so a big unveiling was planned for the drone’s debut at the Museum. 436th Military Airlift Wing commander Col. William Welser III, who later was promoted to lieutenant general and served as commander of 18th Air Force, did the honors, pulling aside a huge red drape on May 15, 1993, to unveil the drone.

P-51 Mustang

The Museum had a banner year in 1994 when it received no less than three temporary aircraft. All quickly became crowd favorites.

The first was a World War II vintage P-51 Mustang the Air Force had acquired in a trade. Dover AAF had a few Mustangs during World War II for rocket testing so it fit the museum’s mission statement.

The aircraft was destined to go to a new ceremonial hall to be built in Washington D.C., but until the facility at Bolling AFB could be built, the Museum offered to store the aircraft. In the meantime, volunteers would put the plane back together and get it ready during the two-years it would take to construct Bolling’s ceremonial hall.

“When the plane arrived on a tractor-trailer, we realized the Air Force had been snookered,” Leister recalled.

The Mustang, which was supposed to be display-ready was anything but. Other than the strings and formers, nothing remained in the cockpit, including the floor. That was not a violation of the contract, but the engine mounts were so corroded one could push a finger through what was supposed to be the strongest part of the frame. Numerous parts were simply fiberglass replicas and parts of the wing were covered in crude layers of fiberglass.

Clearly, the volunteers had their work cut out for them.

The Museum contacted CMSgt. Brian Wasko, head of the base Structural Repair Branch, aka, the sheet metal shop, who thought working on the P-51 would be a perfect training project for reservists on weekends duty and active duty troops when there were few pressing flight line jobs.

That started a two-year effort that resulted in a wonderfully restored P-51 painted in the colors of the Tuskegee Airmen. The cockpit was complete down to the gunsight, control stick and seat and the instrument panel had been fabricated and filled with proper instruments.

While this project was going on, the planned ceremonial center at Bolling was canceled and the Mustang was added to the Museum’s collection.

A 1996 dedication ceremony marked the completion of the restoration work, bringing several of the Tuskegee Airmen to Dover. The plane was given the markings of that flown by Capt. Roscoe Brown, commander of the 100th Fighter Squadron, 332nd Fighter Group.

On March 24, 1945, Brown shot down a Luftwaffe Me262 jet fighter over Berlin and later destroyed an FW-190, earning the Distinguished Flying Cross. He later served as president of the Bronx Community College of the City University of New York.

“This is one of the greatest honors of my career,” Brown said when seeing the restored aircraft at Dover, decked out in the familiar “Red Tails” markings.

In 2003, the Mustang was trucked to Rockefeller Center in New York City, where it was part of that year’s Centennial Flight Exhibition.

But the plane only remained at Dover for a few more years; other bases were looking for a P-51 and Dover’s Mustang got caught in what can only be described as a bureaucratic snafu.

“When the ceremonial hall project was canceled we thought we were home free but failed to consider the maneuverings of organizations that wanted a P-51,” Leister recalled. “Since we already had the P-51 in our possession we did not have it on our ‘wish-list’ and when the system decided to put it up for grabs, we were not really considered because we were not on the list.”

Usually, the unit that possesses any Air
Come and gone

(Continued from page 9)

Force aircraft has first chance at keeping it, but this time proved the exception.

On June 17, 2006, Dover’s Mustang was moved to its new home at Seymour-Johnson AFB, N.C., where it remains on static display today inside the base’s Mission Support Group headquarters building.

But Leister is glad for the time the Mustang spent at Dover.

“Instead of the two years we were supposed to have it the plane stayed at Dover for more than 12 years!” he said.

Sopwith Pup

Because the AMCM usually concentrates its efforts on American airlift and aerial refueling aircraft, the second plane that came along in 1994 was somewhat unusual.

That ship was a replica Sopwith Pup that had been on display at the Air Museum at Castle AFB, Calif.

Actually, the name “Pup” was a bit of a misnomer. The British aircraft, a single-seater biplane fighter, was officially named the “Scout,” but that name never really caught on with the fliers and the public.

Many pilots considered the craft to be a smaller version of the Sopwith 1 1/2 Strutter, hence the diminutive “Pup,” a name Royal Air Force brass considered undignified.

The first Pups went into combat in October 1916, with pilots claiming 20 kills over the Somme battlefield in just two months. It easily outclassed anything German air forces had at the time, even earning the admiration of Manfred von Richthofen, the Red Baron, who said, “We instantly noticed the superiority of the new enemy aircraft over our machines.”

So, Leister said, when Castle AFB was set to close, its museum was turned over to a civilian group. However, the Air Force had decided some of that collection was needed elsewhere.

In the Pup’s case, it was slated to be put on display in Washington, D.C.

Leister hopped aboard a C-5 headed to Asia with a stopover at Travis AFB, then rented a car and headed out for a 120-mile trip south to Castle.

“The plan was when the C-5 returned after five days overseas, they would land at Castle and we would load the disassembled Pup on board and head home,” Leister said.

“I examined the plane and decided it would fit sideways in the C-5 cargo compartment if I removed the prop, engine, and horizontal and vertical stabilizers.”

By the end of his second day, Leister had the plane taken apart and its engine mounted on a pallet.

With time on his hands, Leister headed to south to Edwards AFB to visit its Flight Test Museum, which was run by a friend.

“That visit to the site of some of the most historic flights in Air Force history was awesome,” he recalled.

Leister checked in daily with the base operations center at Travis that was tracking the Dover C-5.

“Every day the return date was pushed back while the C-5 moved things around and occasionally broke for a day or two,” he said. “I drove up the Pacific Highway and visited other museums and attractions, always checking in for the return date.”

Finally, after two weeks, he returned to Castle for the upload.

Once the C-5 was back in California, Leister realized he wasn’t exactly sure how they were going to get the fragile, fabric-covered Pup onto the Galaxy’s cargo deck.

The group of loadmasters took a careful look at the Sopwith as he pointed out the fabric-covered areas and safe tie-down points.

If loadmasters are famous for anything, he said, it’s figuring out how to make things fit aboard their aircraft. After one of them simply picked up the tail end of the plane by himself, the rest lifted the entire plane and carried it up the ramp.

Once back at Dover, the Pup was reassembled and hung from the ceiling of the Museum’s original hangar on the main base.

Eventually, however, plans to display it in the nation’s capital were abandoned.

“We told the Air Force Museum we did not need the plane, so it was returned and loaned to another museum,” Leister said.

T-6 Texan

The last of the three planes arriving in 1994 was a T-6 Texan. It arrived from New Jersey on a tractor-trailer and was in fairly good condition, Leister said, needing only some minor repairs, a good cleaning, and a new paint job.

This plane was to represent the planes flown by the Women Airforce Service Pilots in training during World War II. Instead of painting the whole plane, volunteers opted to polish out its natural aluminum surface, with Leister’s daughter spending many hours helping.

“Since we were duplicating the markings on an actual WASP trainer we even included an error in the way the tail number was marked,” Leister said. “Since we knew eagle-eyed visitors would call us out, we included an explanation that we were duplicating the error on the original.”

That aircraft also had been targeted for the ill-fated Washington, D.C. ceremonial hall; once that project was can-
F-16 Fighting Falcon

One thing Leister learned from his many years as Museum Director, it’s that when the top brass of the Pentagon ask for help, you help. If it turns into a win-win for both, that’s all the better, he said.

It turns out that because of prodding from Air Force headquarters, the AMCM was temporary home to not one, but two F-16 Fighting Falcons.

When the Museum moved from its original site on Dover AFB to its current location, a lot more ramp space became available, so Leister was asked to store a Fighting Falcon that had been used for an Armed Forces Day display.

According to an article in a 1996 edition of the Hangar Digest, this Falcon, actually a YF-16A, tail number 75-0745, was the third one built and the first production model of the aircraft. It was one of the first five Falcons to be built and it and the other four test aircraft all were retired after extensive flight testing.

According to Joseph F. Baugher’s research on aircraft serial numbers, considered the gold standard in the field, 0745 was delivered to the USAF in December 1976. It served until June 1992, when it was transferred to the United States Air Force Museum (now the NMUSAF) and, as noted, stored at the AMCM.

When it was selected as a mobile temporary exhibit around May 2003 all unnecessary weight had been stripped out, leaving the cockpit intact, Leister said.

The wings, as well as the horizontal and vertical stabilizers, were removed and modified so they could be installed with quick disconnects, and a special road trailer was constructed (complete with a small crane) so a crew of four could set up the plane in a few hours virtually anywhere.

Part of the reason this was done is that when the Army sets up its exhibits on the Mall in Washington, they’re able to bring in tanks, artillery, and helicopters, but it’s not possible for the Air Force to fly a C-5 or F-16 into downtown D.C., he said.

Instead, the Pentagon brass created this mobile exhibit of an historic F-16.

Documentation on the plane’s current status is difficult to come by, but as of November 2009 it had been repainted as an aircraft used by the USAF Thunderbirds and still was in use as a traveling exhibit.

Later, a second F-16 was kept in storage at the AMCM for the 11th Wing at Bolling AFB, and in 2003, it too, like the P-51, made an appearance at the Centennial of Flight Exhibition in New York.

This aircraft, tail number 78-0025, was painted as an example of an aircraft from the 8th Tactical Fighter Wing at Kunsan AB, Korea, complete with its famous Wolfs Head insignia, when at the New York centennial.

By August 2006 it was on display at an Air National Guard base in Burlington, Vt. In December 2013, the NMUSAF loaned the aircraft to the Valiant Air Command Museum in Titusville, Fla., where it remains today.

Although the Air Mobility Command and Dover Air Force Base never had a mission requirement for the Fighting Falcon, these two examples of the F-16 stayed at the AMCM, albeit at different times, for several years.

Whenever they were not being displayed for some high-level event they sat on the ramp looking like they were ready for their next missions.

Antonov AN-2 Colt

Perhaps one of the Museum’s most unusual and colorful aircraft was the Soviet Antonov AN-2 Colt, which arrived at the restoration hangar on Dec. 4, 2013.

The plane, along with the remains of a second Antonov, had been sitting at an airfield near Townsend, Del., for at least 10 years. Museum volunteers found the aircraft had become home to a number of birds and other small animals.

Volunteers created the Museum’s AN-2 by combining parts from the two hulks, with missing pieces fabricated in the restoration hangar’s machine shop.

It was the only Warsaw Pact aircraft in the Museum’s collection.

Painted a light Soviet-military green, the AN-2 was admired for several years on the AMCM’s ramp.

Eventually, however, it was decided the Colt didn’t fit in with the Museum’s mission, and efforts began to find the plane a new home.

As of this writing, those efforts are continuing.
Chat with A Hero
Col. Murphy Jones: more than six years a POW

Capt. Murphy “Neal” Jones knew he was in trouble when the anti-aircraft round smashed into his F-105D aircraft over Hanoi, North Vietnam. The blast ripped the floor from the heavily-built Thunderchief, giving the 28-year-old Air Force officer a fleeting view of the ground rushing by only 300 feet below.

Years of training and practice kicked in. As the aircraft started to roll onto its side, Jones yanked the yellow handles that would jettison its canopy and kick him away from the disintegrating aircraft.

Nothing happened.

Calmly Jones again pulled the handles, squeezing its trigger grips. This time the system worked, although unexpectedly punching him through the still-attached canopy and shooting his body and seat into the air while traveling more than 620 mph.

The high-velocity ejection and rough landing -- he estimates he bounced at least 15 feet into the air -- broke his left arm, dislocated his shoulder, cracked six vertebrae and severely damaged his knees. He landed with his right leg full of shrapnel from the anti-aircraft shell.

Jones immediately was surrounded by dozens of rifle-toting Vietnamese soldiers, seemingly eager to execute him on the spot.

It was June 29, 1966, and Jones, who was on his 55th mission over Vietnam, was about to spend the next 2,421 days as a prisoner of war.

At the ‘Hanoi Hilton’

Now 80 years old and a retired U.S. Air Force colonel, Jones recently spoke at the Air Mobility Command Museum about his time in North Vietnamese POW camps, including the infamous Hanoi Hilton. It was more than six-and-a-half years of torture, humiliation, utter boredom and sudden terror.

A Louisiana native who attended Tulane University on a football scholarship, Jones and his family were stationed in Japan when he was ordered to fly the first bombing mission directly over Hanoi.

His was one of 24 aircraft assigned to attack a huge petroleum storage area near the city, a mission personally approved by President Lyndon Johnson.

Before the flight, Jones said he’d had a disquieting feeling about the mission. The night before, he wrote a letter to his wife, Glenda, saying he would not be coming back. His roommate dismissed his worries.

Another omen appeared when a chaplain blessed the two dozen departing aircraft. The priest, he noticed, paid particular attention to his Thunderchief.

“I wondered, why is that guy giving me the sign of the cross. He didn’t do it to the other airplanes,” Jones said. “Well, I found out shortly afterward.”

Upon landing, with his left arm dangling uselessly at his side, Jones used his right arm to draw and cock his .45 caliber pistol, aiming it at the advancing soldiers.

The men dropped to the ground and leveled their AK-47 rifles at him.

“I decided I was no John Wayne,” he admitted and surrendered the weapon.

Another soldier grabbed his broken left arm and put it in a hammerlock.

“That was the first time I really felt any pain,” Jones said. “I guess the adrenaline was pumping.”

Jones’ reaction was instantaneous.

“I spun around and I hit this guy harder than I’ve ever hit anybody,” he said. “I hit him square in the nose. I think I killed him.”

He expected to be shot, but instead, the soldiers put a rope around his neck and cut away his clothing, leaving him only in his underwear and powder-blue socks.

But the worst was to come.

Jones was interrogated, tied up and beaten for more than two hours. One soldier put a rifle to the back of his head and pulled the trigger.

The hammer fell on an empty chamber.

“What do you think when you think you’re going to die?” Jones said. “I really didn’t care at that time. I would have welcomed the bullet.”

Dressed in a nondescript flying suit, Jones was given a piece of gauze for use as a sling and driven through the streets of Hanoi in the back of an army truck, surrounded by jeering North Vietnamese. Put in front of an international corps of reporters, Jones was shown off as a war trophy.

“I kept thinking, don’t do anything stupid, don’t cower, don’t show any indication of defeat. I hope I did that,” he said.

Walking into the room, Jones stood as tall as he could and snapped off a sharp salute.

“People have asked me, who were you saluting, and I say, ‘My country.’” His captors were not pleased with his gesture and tortured him again.

Retired Col. Murphy “Neal” Jones kept a standing-room-only crowd riveted relating his experiences being shot down over North Vietnam and subsequent imprisonment for six-and-one-half years. Jones was at the AMCM as part of Museum Director John Taylor’s “Chat with A Hero” series.

After bailing out of his crippled F-105D only hours before, Capt. Neal Jones was paraded through the streets of Hanoi as a war prize.
He didn’t know it at the time, but the truck ride and news conference were filmed by a Japanese crew. Glenda saw the footage on television the next day and her mother in Louisiana spotted it on the nightly news; it was their first indication he was alive. He discovered the film years after his release and showed it during his talk at the Museum.

'I signed the confession’

Jones grew reflective as he recounted attempts by his captors at forcing him to sign a war crimes confession during his first months of captivity. Driven by honor, duty, and the commissioning oath he took to defend his country, he thought he never could do such a thing.

“I thought I was one tough individual,” he said.

He looked out across the seated crowd and added, “But you’re not as tough as you think you are. I could break any and all of you, and I could do it in a very short period of time.”

Despite his determination to resist, the North Vietnamese finally wore him down.

“At the tenth day, Neal Jones finally broke,” he said, “I signed the confession.”

The paper acknowledged America’s hostility against North Vietnam and that he was part of that aggression, Jones said. He was forced to declare himself a war criminal while, ironically, saying was being treated well while a prisoner.

“I signed that,” he said, pausing, “and I’ve regretted it every day since that time.”

When returned to his stark, bare cell, Jones broke down.

Neal Jones cried then, he admitted, “because I had failed.”

Medical treatment, especially in the first months of captivity, was abysmal. His damaged, maggot-infested leg was treated only by a container of hot tea being poured over it. Vietnamese doctors told him the leg would be amputated.

“I said, no you’re not going to cut my leg off. I’d rather die,” he said. Jones received a shot of penicillin, the last medical attention he would be given for weeks.

“I gave up physically, mentally, spiritually, emotionally, and I really and truly wanted to die,” he said.

That night, another prisoner was brought in and housed in the cell next to his. Suddenly a voice called out, “Where is Neal Jones?”

That voice belonged to fellow Air Force pilot and good friend Capt. David Hatcher, who had been captured the month before.

“I’ll tell you what, just hearing my name, I just have jumped a foot off that concrete bunk,” Jones said. Hatcher told him he had learned of Jones’ capture while in another prison camp.

Still despondent, Jones told Hatcher he thought he was going to die while in that prison cell.

“He came right back at me and said there was only one thing to do, and that is to pray a lot and to pray all the time,” Jones said.

Those words hit him like a bucket of ice cold water.

“I prayed that night,” he said. “When I woke up the next day, I knew I was going to make it out of there.”

Hatcher’s counsel, Jones said, saved his life.

As the months of captivity morphed into years, Vietnamese medics would occasionally try to treat Jones’ injuries. At one point they operated on his shrapnel-damaged leg, cutting away dead tissue without using an anesthetic. Jones was forced to walk back to his cell, leaving a trail of bloody footprints.

During an operation on his left arm, rendered almost useless when he ejected from his aircraft, doctors used only Novocain to dull the pain and left that limb three inches shorter than his right.

Horrifying torture sessions would alternate with periods of mind-numbing boredom. Jones and the others kept in touch using a numeric code to tap out clandestine messages to each other. Guards would mete out severe beatings if anyone was caught, he said.

Chained to his bed, sometimes for days on end, Jones said he maintained his sanity by relearning his college Spanish lessons. He kept track of his days in captivity -- eventually totaling 2,421 -- in his head.

It was faith in God, his country, his wife and his fellow countrymen that kept him going, Jones said.

“We trusted each other with our lives, and I think those things that were the things that taught me there is nothing I cannot do,” he said.

Return to Vietnam

After his release on Feb. 12, 1973, Jones returned to active duty. He received the Distinguished Flying Cross for his actions and later the Silver Star and Legion of Merit for his resistance to the North Vietnamese torture tactics.

In October 1998, Jones returned to Vietnam for two weeks with Glenda, making a sojourn to former prisons. In the infamous Hanoi Hilton, formerly a colonial French jail, they stopped at their former cells, which measured less than 60 square feet each and whose cement beds included embedded leg irons.

“That’s where we would eat, and that’s where we would go to the bathroom,” he said.

The sight of their old cells and the smells still lingering inside the prisons brought back many memories and Jones’ two former POWs shared with their wives.

“I wanted her to see where we had been,” he said. “It was eerie, sitting around a Hanoi bar 30 years later relating those stories, Jones said.

“We would laugh at the things that had happened to us because you had to keep your humor,” he said.

He also wanted to find the pistol he had surrendered the day he was captured. Although prepared to pay $2,000 for the weapon, it never turned up.

Jones has hesitantly forgiven the guards at the camps where he was held with the exception of two or three, as well as some Cuban officials who seemed to delight in the prisoners’ torture sessions.

Perhaps one of the most ironic points of his return trip was a photograph of a smiling, white-haired Jones holding a cold drink.

“That’s me, having a gin and tonic, being driven through the streets of Hanoi,” he said.

During Jones’ time as a POW, Glenda was mother and father to the couple’s two children. She moved them from Japan back to Louisiana, bought a home and earned a degree in elementary education from Louisiana State University.

“I had two kids, you don’t stop living when you have two kids,” she said.

“I guess as a parent, you take one day at a time and you do the best you can do,” she said. She had a lot of support from her nearby family and neighbors that helped her through difficult times, Glenda said.

Several years after his Air Force retirement, Jones was named the director of development for athletics at his alma mater, Tulane. He retired in 2000 and has been inducted into the school’s Athletic Hall of Fame.

The couple recently left their home in Louisiana and now live in Magnolia, Del., not far from Dover AFB.
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Command CMSgt. Williams retires at AMCM

When the Air Mobility Command’s senior non-commissioned officer decided it was time to retire, there seemed only one appropriate place to do it.

After all, CMSgt. Larry C. Williams Jr. had spent 17 of his 30-year career flying out of just one base.

“It’s just been an awesome career and I couldn’t have thought of a better place to end it than right here at Dover Air Force Base,” he said following the Nov. 30 event, at which he was awarded his second Legion of Merit.

Although Williams doesn’t officially return to civilian status until May 1, 2019, he’ll be spending the intervening months briefing his replacement and taking terminal leave.

It won’t be hard to find a place to live, though: Williams plans to return to the North Carolina family farm he left in 1989. There he’ll be joined by his wife, Lisa, who hails from the nearby city of Harrington, and their two sons.

It can be said Williams had big plans from the beginning: at the age of 8, he knew he wanted to fly.

“When I grow up I will be in the Air Force so I can drive big Army planes,” he wrote. The note, carefully preserved from his days as a third-grade student, adds that his dream was to fly “the biggest plane in the world.”

Williams arrived at Dover in October 1989 as an aircraft maintenance technician, eventually becoming a flight engineer. He stayed at Dover until 2003, but returned again in 2010 and again 2013; he was named AMC’s command chief in February 2018.

Airmen

(Continued from page 5)

their experiences and what it was like, whether it was flying or being a flight engineer.

“Not to mention a lot of them have crazy, awesome stories about what they had to do to get the mission completed or things they ran into.”

One of those men is restoration crew member Don Rynes.

“He can just look up at the stars and tell what hemisphere of the Earth he’s in,” Tuttle said of the former aircraft navigator. With the advent of digital instrumentation and satellite-guided navigation, those are skills no longer used in the Air Force but ones that were highly valued in the past.

It’s something that still can strike awe in younger generations, he added.

“He showed me some star charts and how he was able to calculate his position,” Tuttle said. “It was just awesome.”

Building relationships

Both airmen say working with their more experienced cohorts in Hangar 1304 has given them lessons they can take to heart. And the old-timers feel the same way.

“They’ve really kind of become our grandkids, they’re a part of our family for a lot of different reasons,” Stiller said. “It’s great for us, not just for what they can do but that they bring that new world to us. They bring in new thoughts and they’re not afraid to express that.

“We get as much working with them as maybe they get from working with us,” he added. “They’re two great kids and I wish we could get more.”

Anderson, who plans to leave the Air Force in 2019 and return to Minnesota, has come to realize that someday he’ll be the one providing advice to a younger generation.

That’s a lesson he’ll take back home, he said.

Tuttle plans to continue working toward a college degree and to continue with a career in aviation.

“I recently changed my dream sheet to Dover because I don’t want to leave,” he said. “I like it here and the Museum is a big portion of that.”

“As far as life is concerned, not specifically with the Air Force, you build relationships with these guys,” Tuttle said. “You can tell them, this-and-this is happening, and they have years of experience to deal with it.”

“I can certainly say that they’ve contributed to my overall professionalism and ability to handle certain stressful situations.”

And should other young airmen take up aircraft restoration work?

The more the merrier, they agree.
AROUND AND ABOUT YOUR AMC MUSEUM

Visiting the AMCM from Woodbury, Va., Jayden Green poses with Dad Joseph and grandmother Angela Davis. “This brings back a lot of memories,” Davis said, adding both of her parents served in the Air Force.

Several volunteers from the AMCM took part in the city of Dover’s annual Veterans Day parade Nov. 6. Dover and Dover AFB are known throughout the Air Force has having one of the best community relationships in the military.

Bella Redick, with brother Ryder, mom Emma and brother Gage watch a video on C-5 cargo operations. Ryder was the most excited about the experience, explaining he likes airplanes and considers the Galaxy his favorite.

Lucas Confer of Magnolia, Del., seems a bit surprised to end up in the lap of Santa Claus, aka Museum Director John Taylor, during the Museum’s annual Christmas event.

Three-year-old Ayla Compton of Smyrna, Del., got her photo taken with Santa on Dec. 1. The Museum came as a bit of a surprise to Mom Brandy, who said she hadn’t been aware it was on Dover AFB. “We just came to see Santa,” she said, “but this Museum is awesome.”

Jeff and Cathy Price of Lewes, Del., learn about the Norden bombsight installed aboard the AMCM’s B-17, Sleepy Time Gal, courtesy of tour guide Chuck Hutchings. Cathy, a U.S. Navy veteran, was making her first tour of the Museum.
436th Airlift Wing commander Col. Joel W. Safranek, left, and Museum Director John Taylor, right, congratulate volunteer Paul George during the Christmas dinner. George, who started at the Museum in September 2006, was recognized as the wing’s Volunteer of the Quarter; he has accumulated more than 17,500 hours of service.

Bob Wikso looks up some material in the Museum’s Library. Wikso has arranged the book collection along the lines of the standard Dewey Decimal System but also has indexed the material by type of aircraft, making it easier to find.

The Museum’s annual Christmas dinner brought together the AMCM’s youngest and oldest volunteers: 16-year-old Kaelyn Macedo and World War II navigator 98-year-old George Schofield. Kaelyn learned about the Museum by attending one of the AMCM’s summer camps and decided to stay on. “The Museum is just an awesome place to be,” she said.

A well stocked store and gift shop helps the AMCM’s visitors get the Museum full experience, according to volunteer Art Norton.

Museum graphic artist Hal Sellars, in his office, working on one of the displays that explains items in the Museum to its many visitors.

436th Airlift Wing commander Col. Joel W. Safranek, left, and Museum Director John Taylor, right, congratulate volunteers Les Stiller and Bob Wikso upon their each compiling more than 5,000 volunteer hours at the AMCM.
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Visit store.amcmuseum.org/bench to learn more and order online! A print and mail version is available as well.
The next issue of the Hangar Digest will take a look at the F-101 Voodoo of the 98th Fighter Interceptor Squadron formerly at Dover. And we’ll have a bit of a surprise as well. If you or anyone you know flew or maintained the Voodoo, contact Hangar Digest editor Jeff Brown at piffbrown1898@gmail.com.