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.

The AMC Museum Hangar Digest is published quarterly and is dedicated to the preservation of our airlift and tanker heritage. All articles, unless otherwise noted, are written by the editor. Viewpoints in this publication are those of the contributing authors and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of The AMC Museum Foundation or of the Museum’s staff. Subscriptions are free and are mailed via nonprofit standard mail to paid-up members of The AMC Museum Foundation Inc.

Contributions. Reader comments, articles and ideas are solicited for future issues. Mail to The Hangar Digest, AMCM Foundation, PO Box 2024, Dover AFB DE 19902-9998; fax 302-677-5940; or email piffbrown1898@gmail.com.

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Photos are by Jeff Brown, unless otherwise noted.

Cover: Looking like he just stepped out of a time warp, Blake Hermance of Dover, Del., was one of a dozen World War II re-enactors on site during the May 4, 2019, D-Day observance at the AMC Museum.

Cover photo and centerfold photo courtesy of Chris Hermance, and used with permission.
Commemoration

AMCM’s D-Day observance a major success

Nothing done in the military is a one-man effort; it takes teamwork to accomplish a mission, be it small or large.

And while the AMC Museum’s D-Day anniversary observances may not have been as complex as the operation it commemorated, it nonetheless was a massive operation for the Museum’s staff.

436th Airlift Wing commander Col. Joel W. Safranek called the two-day event, held May 3 and May 4 on the Museum grounds, a “world-class, knock them out of the park event,” Museum Director John Taylor said.

Bringing them together

Marking the 75th anniversary of the June 4, 1944, Operation Overlord, which eventually freed Europe from Nazi control was crucial, Taylor said.

The idea stemmed from contacts Taylor had with members of the Commemorative Air Force about flame dampeners. The CAF is a Texas-based nonprofit group that flies and displays historic aircraft.

The CAF owns and operates the C-47 dubbed That’s All Brother, TAB, the aircraft that led the air armada into France that morning; one of the other aircraft was the AMCM’s own Turf and Sport Special.

The CAF needed flame dampeners for TAB, and the Turf and Sport Special’s restoration crew, led by retired Col. Bob Leicht, had plans to fabricate a set for the Museum’s C-47, Taylor said.

The devices help shroud the blue flame emitted by radial engines used on the C-47, making the aircraft harder to see from the ground at night.

The CAF inquired if Leicht and his staff could engineer a set of replica flame dampeners for That’s All Brother to use when the plane was on static display, Taylor said.

“Long story made short, that developed into a relationship and talks to try to get this most historic aircraft here at Dover on its trip over to Normandy to do a commemoration of D-Day here at the AMC Museum in Dover,” he said.

“What better way to bring TAB and Turf and Sport together after 75 years?”

That’s All Brother was one of several dozen surviving C-47 and DC-3 aircraft that eventually took part in a formation flight over Normandy during the weeklong anniversary celebrations in France.

Small window

The idea of a more involved observance of D-Day itself grew as the idea of a Dover stopover by TAB morphed from possibility into reality.

Taylor began coordinating the idea with the staff at the 436th Airlift Wing, which expressed a desire to turn the observance into a grander event.

That led to plans for having other aircraft do a flyover during the Museum event as well as the opportunity for a demonstration parachute jump by members of the 82nd Airborne Division, the same unit whose soldiers jumped from C-47’s on D-Day.

Real-life events at Dover AFB as well as the scheduling of TAB’s flight across the Atlantic meant the D-Day observance would be held a month earlier than the actual 75th anniversary.

“We had a small window of dates that we could pick from,” Taylor said, adding there would be competition from NASCAR races held in Dover as well as the city’s own annual founding festivities.

Unfortunately, those events eventually meant the planned jumps by the 82nd couldn’t take place because there wasn’t

World War II veteran Joe Morettini listens in and fellow vet George Shenkle shares a laugh during a briefing on Operation Overlord, presented by Museum volunteer Bob Leicht. Moretti and Shenkle were aboard the AMCM’s C-47, Turf and Sport Special, when they parachuted into Normandy on June 6, 1944.

Christina Collins tries her hand on the Museum’s flight simulator as Brian Kiser watches her attempted landing. The couple had come to Dover from Roanoke, Va., to watch the May 4 NASCAR race, but came to the AMCM when the contest was rained out.

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D-Day

(Continued from Page 3)

enough emergency medical support available, Taylor said.
That disappointment, however, was only a small bump in the planning, he said. The show would go on, and naturally, that involved a lot of meetings between Taylor, Deputy Director Eric Czerwinski and Operations Director Mike Hurlburt.

Overwhelming support
The D-Day anniversary event was heavily publicized in the local press and through Kent County’s tourist agency, meaning many of those in town for the May 3 – May 5 series of NASCAR races knew what was going on at the AMCM. Since those contests were late in the day, race fans also flocked to the Museum to take part in the anniversary observances.

Another highlight was having four groups of World War II re-enactors who bivouacked on the Museum grounds and who walked through the crowds wearing period-specific uniforms and equipment, Hurlburt said.

Because of limitations in how much financial support the Air Force could provide, Taylor also received monetary backing from the AMCM Foundation.

“It was TAB’s operational expenses and lodging for the crew, which helped to solidify TAB’s being here,” Taylor said.

A Dover AFB group, Airmen Committed to Excellence, volunteered to help with parking and trash removal and overall logistical support. Taylor said he’d sent out 80 letters of appreciation in thanks for their aid.

Taylor also sent kudos to agencies across Dover AFB, including security forces, medical personnel, and the 436th Civil Engi-
Living history
World War II re-enactors ‘Put a face on history’

Walking around the AMC Museum, it’s no surprise when a visitor murmurs, “Wow, if these planes could talk!”

Unfortunately, the Museum’s planes can’t tell us all the things they’ve experienced, but there are groups of dedicated men and women around the country whose commitment to keeping history alive gives us the next best thing.

They were in abundance during the AMCM’s May 4 D-Day observances, camping out on the Museum grounds, talking with visitors while in period uniforms and explaining the different types of equipment used during World War II.

Retired U.S. Army Col. Bob Leicht, a former paratrooper and the man behind the restoration of the Museum’s C-47, Turf and Sport Special, coordinated the effort.

They included re-enactors from the Airmen’s Preservation Society portraying members of the 436th Troop Carrier Group, the predecessor of Dover’s 436th Airlift Wing, as well as groups depicting troops from the 506th Parachute Infantry/101st Airborne Division and the 508th Parachute Infantry/82nd Airborne Division.

The group included retired USAF Col. Mark Vlahos, portraying Col. Clayton Stiles, commander of the 314th TCG, to which the Turf and Sport Special was assigned.

Leicht said when That’s All Brother, the Commemorative Air Force’s flying C-47 was confirmed for the D-Day observances, it seemed the event would not be complete without someone to explain what it was like to be a soldier during the war.

He immediately thought about finding a group of historic re-enactors to do the job.

“They do their own research and self-study because they want to get it exactly right,” Leicht said of the re-enactors. “They become almost living history and can relay what these men did to Museum visitors, many of who only understand the war through what they’ve seen on TV and the movies.”

Americans today have lost track of their history, Leicht said.

Dan Dillier of Bedford, Pa., whose group represented the 508th PI, concurred. Members of his group have made it a point to talk to as many World War II veterans as possible.

This allows the re-enactors to bring a personal insight into their portrayals of the men, he said.

“You’re helping to keep their history alive as well,” Dillier added.

Joe Muccia of Virginia joined a re-enactor group at the urging of a childhood friend. A retired U.S. Marine, he missed the camaraderie of being in a military unit. In 2004 he contacted the leader of a group portraying members of the 506th PI and now is the unit’s commander.

Hearing about the AMCM’s upcoming D-Day observance, he contacted Leicht and volunteered his group.

The various re-enactors did more than walk around the Museum grounds. They actually pitched their tents and set up their own bivouac area, much like their counterparts would have done 75 years earlier. A highlight was showing off their vintage equipment and talking with visitors about soldiers lives during the war, he said.

“People could come out, interact with us and pick our brains about the war,” Dillier agreed. “It was inspiring to see the number of people who came out to honor the veterans and what they did on D-Day.”

A highlight for all concerned was meeting paratroopers D-Day paratroopers Joe Moretti and George Shenkle, who had jumped together from the Turf and Sport Special on June 6, 1944.

“In a couple of years, we won’t have any World War II veterans left,” Dillier said. “We appreciate getting to share their stories, keeping their sacrifices alive and making things a little bit more real for people.”

“It was a privilege to be at the AMC Museum and to do a presentation there and to have the chance to see George and Joe up close with their aircraft,” Muccia said.

Both groups also praised their interaction with the AMCM staff.

“[Deputy Director Eric Czerwinski] did a great job,” Muccia said. “He escorted us through the Turf and Sport, and I really enjoyed talking with him.

“The staff was really dynamic, they were really welcoming,” he added.

Dillier agreed, saying Leicht helped ensure everything went smoothly for his group.

“Eric also was fantastic to work with,” he said. “He helped keep us on track, showed us where to eat, how to get around. We had a very positive experience with the entire Museum and the staff.”

Leicht feels the re-enactors today can help people understand the life of an American soldier more than two generations ago.

“I’d say they put a face on history,” he said.
Here’s the most recent photo of the Air Mobility Command Museum ramp, taken on a recent bright June afternoon. Besides our “standard fare” you can see our newcomers, the KB-50J (second row, first on the right), and our Korean War veteran C-119B Fairchild Flying Boxcar (front row, third from the left).

You can find several pictures of the KB-50 MacDill-to-Dover move on the TAC Tanker website (https://www.tactankers.com/). We’re extremely grateful to the TAC Tanker Association for their considerable donation to help restore 49-0389 to its previous glory. It’s been a huge help.

But living by the beach at MacDill Air Force Base created some challenges as the KB-50 began its new life at the AMC Museum. Restoration Chief Les Polley says, “The progress is moving slowly. Major corrosion is being discovered at every turn,” which is delaying progress, adding the restoration crews are having to source commercial companies to fabricate or machine parts for the aircraft.

Director John Taylor said the work is much more complicated than originally anticipated. He said all options are being considered, possibly even to the point of looking at private businesses to help with the project. You can see some of our restoration photos at www.amcmuseum.org. We’re confident that when all is said and done, the result will be the same outstanding product that you’ve come to expect from the AMC Museum team.

A short note on the C-119: because of the time and effort required for the KB-50, John Taylor has said work on the C-119 will be done as volunteers are available. The target for completion is October-December 2020, to coincide with the 70th anniversary of the Chosin Reservoir breakout.

It was an “AMAZING DAY!” is how Museum Director John Taylor described the 4 May AMC Museum-hosted event “that connected people from around the world and today’s airmen with actual paratroopers from D-Day with the same plane they jumped out of 75 years ago.

That airplane, of course, is the Museum’s own C-47 Douglas Skytrain, the Turf and Sport Special, and the paratroopers were Joe Morettini and George Shenkle. Early in May, they were joined by That’s All Brother, the plane that led more than 800 C-47s in dropping more than 13,000 troops at Normandy. For more information on that plane, check out the website https://thatsallbrother.org/. 
The AMC Museum staff and volunteers did an amazing job of setting up such a wonderful event. The AMCM Foundation is proud to have been able to support the event with funding for some of the expenses for That’s All Brother’s Dover stop, including fuel, maintenance expenses and quarters for the aircrew, plus the cost of the swing band. That’s only possible due to the donations provided by YOU, the Friends of the Museum.

The AMC Museum Foundation joins the AMCM team to congratulate Ms. Tricia Upchurch on receiving the Air Mobility Command nomination for the Katharine Wright Memorial Trophy. Competition at the Air Force level follows. The award is presented to individuals who have contributed to the success of others or made a personal contribution to the advancement of the art, sport, and science of aviation and space flight. Ms. Upchurch is shown with Col Matthew Jones, 436 AW Vice Commander, and John Taylor, AMC Museum Director, after receiving the news. She has played an important role in establishing the foundation of our Museum’s aviation education programs, including the summer camps and local school visits. Well done and good luck!

For the past several years, the Foundation has held our Annual Fundraising Campaign, usually over the winter months. The last Hangar Digest recognized our 117 donors who made it possible for our grand total of more than $14,500 collected.

As you all know, the AMC Museum Foundation is recognized by the Internal Revenue Service as a 501(c)3 organization. Contributions are tax-deductible within IRS regulations. Those donations help us to fulfill the mission of the AMC Museum as an aviation and aerospace education, scientific, cultural, historical and inspirational facility for the public and the Air Force community.

Since so many of you are donors, you also know that one of the “perks” for donating at least $50 to the fundraiser is a chance to win either a copy of one of the AMC Museum Foundation’s several aviation art giclées or a flight in a 1941 PT-17 Stearman. This year’s winner, Museum volunteer Charlie Grant, chose the flight in the World War II trainer. It certainly was well deserved, as Charlie has been a longtime donor to the Annual Campaign.

The day was about as beautiful as you could ask for. Being qualified as a private pilot and a glider pilot (just in case), Charlie did all the flying except for the takeoff and the landing, thus allowing for some sightseeing for the other pilot. Blue summer Delmarva skies, green fields of corn and soybeans punctuated by the brown winter wheat fields, sailboats, power boats and water skiers on the rivers, soaring turkey buzzards and ospreys (alas, no eagles) and light winds made for a most memorable flight. It’s Friends of the Museum – and Museum volunteers – like Charlie Grant that helps make the AMC Museum arguably the best in the business. We say “thanks.”

Oh, and next time you see Charlie at the Museum, say HI, and see if he’s still smiling!
Turf and Sport Special

A weapon of war becomes an educational tool

Restoring a vintage aircraft is much like restoring an antique automobile: it’s a seemingly never-ending journey. There’s always another part to find, something else to fabricate or another area that needs to be reconditioned.

The AMC Museum’s C-47, tail number 42-92841, nicknamed the Turf and Sport Special, is no exception. It’s not at all unusual to see someone working on 841 on the AMCM’s hangar floor, continuing an effort that began more than three decades ago.

The saga of 841 began March 5, 1944, when the brand-new aircraft was delivered from the Douglas Aircraft plant in Oklahoma City to the US Army Air Force. Flown to the United Kingdom, it was assigned to the 61st Troop Carrier Squadron in the final weeks before the June 6, 1944, D-Day invasion at Normandy.

Christened by its crew chief in honor of a well-known horse-racing magazine of the time, the Turf and Sport Digest, 841 was one of hundreds of C-47s that dropped paratroopers of the 82nd Airborne Division into occupied France.

In September 1944, it dropped British paratroopers near Arnhem, Holland, during Operation Market Garden and in March 1945 pulled a glider during Operation Varsity, the airborne invasion of Germany. It was the largest single-day airborne operation in history.

After the war, 841 stayed in Europe, helping to reestablish commercial air route and took part in Operation Vittles as part of the 1948/1949 Berlin Airlift. It soldiered on, crisscrossing Europe and Africa and flying in the United States for the next 15 years, finally being dropped from the Air Force inventory in 1964.

Turned over to the Army for static load training, in time it became a heavy lift training aid for CH-54 Sky crane helicopters. Rigged fore and aft of the wings with cargo straps, 841 was slung multiple times below the copters, causing substantial damage to the fuselage. Adding to the crushing of the main fuselage, the aircraft was stripped of instruments, propellers, and other components. By the mid-1980s, the deteriorating hulk was headed to the scrap yard if no museum or other organization was interested in taking it off the Army’s hands.

First of many

After several aviation museums declined to accept 841, some of the founding members, or plank holders at the Dover AFB Historical Center (which eventually would morph into today’s Air Mobility Command Museum) convinced the leadership of Dover’s 436th Military Airlift Wing (now the 436th Airlift Wing) that 841 was salvageable; and in 1986 it became fledgling museum’s first acquisition.

So the restoration began, but a scheduled event added urgency to the effort when veterans of the World War II 61st Troop Carrier Squadron planned a 1988 reunion in Dover with the hope of once again being able to board one of their combat aircraft.

The event reunited 841’s aircrew with two of the 82nd’s paratroopers who jumped from the aircraft over Normandy on D-Day.

Damage was substantial

In 1988, Master Sgt. Jim Leech learned his unit commander and the wing commander were sending him on a one-year leave of absence from flight line duties with the 436th Organizational Maintenance Squadron to help formulate plans for the DAFB Historical Center.

Since there was an ongoing moratorium on new museums in the Air Force, the option was to continue without Air Force funding and not refer to the operation as a museum. Several businessmen in Dover formed a Foundation that provided much-needed funds for the restoration. The wing commander supported the effort with a supply account.

Leech’s first sighting of 841 took place Oct. 13, 1986, as the battered hulk was flown to the base under a CH-54 Sky crane helicopter.

“It was unceremoniously deposited on the ramp and initial inspection revealed, to say the least, job security,” Leech said. “The damage over the years was substantial and there wasn’t much to hope that we could bring it back from the abyss,” he added. “But it was a start and that’s all the wing commander desired.”

Since the Historical Center didn’t even have a building to call home, they moved into a corner of a hangar belonging to the base Aerial Port Squadron. The C-47’s wings were removed and sent to the base sheet metal shop as a training project. The fuselage was squeezed into the tiny hangar space and Leech, the only person actually assigned to the Historical Center, went to work.

Leech eventually received permission to use equipment from the central tool facility.
and the sheet metal and machine shops. He soon was joined by Al Shank, a volunteer who had worked on the very successful Shoo Shoo Shoo Baby restoration project.

“I’d already given the plane a thorough examination and listed all the repairs needed, as well as a wish list of the necessary parts and equipment,” he said.

The fuselage required substantial work as the chains and straps used to sling the plane had either crushed or torn through the skin and bent or broke some of the numerous ribs holding the plane together. The engines were removed and since they were in poor condition, were added to the continuously growing list of items needed to complete the job.

“In the main it was Al and me, spending hours under a plastic tent surrounded around the plane sandblasting the fuselage with a small blaster and wrenching on the components,” Leech recalled.

“As time went on, however, many other volunteers from the Shoo Shoo Shoo Baby project pitched in, and the sheet metal shop sent airmen as its workload allowed, all of which was instrumental in meeting our timelines,” he said.

Parts were located and installed on the plane. Because of the extensive damage caused by 20 years of use as a training aid, the initial restoration was centered on the exterior of the plane; as that was reaching its end, work began on the interior. The cockpit had been stripped, but over time the crew was able to find all the parts needed to bring the cockpit back to its original configuration.

During rehabilitation of the wings, several signatures were discovered inside the leading edge of the left wing along with a date of March 1944, which was when 841 came off the production line. Although pictures were taken of those “Rosie” signatures, unfortunately, they can’t be found now, Leech said.

Since 1988 was a self-imposed date for completion of the major part of the restoration to coincide with the rollout of the finished Shoo Shoo Shoo Baby, as well as the reunion of the 61st Troop Carrier Squadron, the push was on to complete as much of the plane as possible.

A fortuitous find

“There is an old saying that ‘One thing leads to another,’ former Museum Director Mike Leister said. “We had gotten a lead on two C-133 fuselages in storage at the Atlantic City Federal Aviation Administration testing facility and we were invited to come to look at what was there,” he said.

Leister and Leech headed north, taking a camera but no toolbox. They were shown both of the giant fuselages whose wings and empennages had been cut off and salvaged.

One was being used as a warehouse for storing airline seats and equipment awaiting testing and the other for fire testing. That fuselage had been used so often large sections of the aluminum skin had melted and were replaced by stainless steel sheets riveted in place. Cameras were mounted inside the fuselage to evaluate how fast the fire would spread on various types of seats. The pair decided neither aircraft would be of much use, although they desperately wanted to add a Cargomaster to the Historical Center’s roster of aircraft.

Eventually, they were taken to the aircraft storage area that neither Leech nor Leister had known about before making their trip.

Among a number of light aircraft that had crashed or been used in crash testing and a few seized drug running aircraft were two rather shocking aircraft. One was a stainless steel fuselage of a proposed supersonic passenger plane. It was far from complete but the thought then was that it could eventually replace the C-133 fuselage for fire testing.

But Leech and Leister got a real shock when looking at the other aircraft: it was a complete C-47/DC-3 that had been retired from service as an Airways test aircraft.

“We were beyond excited,” Leister said.

The whole cargo compartment had been filled with instrumentation to measure airport approach systems and other avionics.

“We did not need any of that but we asked if we might be able to remove some airframe and cockpit parts for the restoration of our C-47,” he said. “Our guide told us sure, no problem.”

The pair arranged a return trip, bringing a truck and plenty of tools. At first, they took small instruments and cockpit panels because 841 had been stripped down to the frame, Leister said.

“When it became apparent the FAA staff were happy to see the parts going to a museum restoration we got bolder and the truck filled up, to the include wingtips,” he said. “Without real hope of getting a yes answer, I asked if we could have the C-47 tow bar was parked beside the aircraft.”

The answer was yes and that tow bar has been used to move Turf & Sport ever since.

For years after the initial restoration there were 1970s vintage placards on the instrument panels in red plastic engraved with warning information, left over from the FAA days, Leister said. The staff knew these weren’t period-correct for World War II, but it took a second major push to improve the level of restoration before the cockpit really became a world-class example of a wartime C-47.

Traveling back in time

Since 1988, the restored 841 has served as the centerpiece of the Museum’s mission of educating visitors on the history of the Mu-seum’s aircraft and their mobility and aerial refueling roles.

Several years ago, a new phase of the restoration began when, as museum director, Leister charged the restoration crew to bring the aircraft back to its D-Day appearance.

This was no small task given the 70-year gap between mission and restoration.

Beginning with an original set of red and green jump lights, the team leveraged the internet in its search for communication, navigation, aerial delivery, and other gear.

The most significant find were ‘pararacks,’ 1927-designed B-3 bomb release devices that were modified to drop bundles or containers of weapons, ammo, demolition and other gear to the lightly equipped airborne forces. With the exception of selected radar-equipped C-47s, every American aircraft that dropped paratroopers on D-Day had up to six pararacks installed under the fuselage. The racks had a forward facing which streamlined the rig and provided a space for the load’s cargo parachute.

After re-conditioning, the first rack was installed under 841’s fuselage, and a corrugated steel ‘paracrate’ was uploaded, that device is designed to carry disassembled parts of a 75mm ‘pack’ howitzer. Since Leicht’s research told him 841 dropped four bundles of weapons, ammunition, and demolitions on D-Day, three more racks were acquired, and they now carry replica A-5 aerial delivery containers, actually, canvas bundles that contained the bulk of the material dropped to the paratroopers.

(See Turf and Sport on Page 12)
‘That’s All
Turf and Sport — (Continued from Page 5)

841 is now unique among surviving wartime C-47s for having pararacks installed on the aircraft. The other significant adds to the exterior were below-fuselage recognition lights, wing- and fuselage-top formation lights, ‘Rebecca’ antennae below the cockpit windows, and the tow rope release mechanism in the tail. The remaining element to complete the exterior will be the Royal Air Force-style engine flame dampeners – aka hedgehogs - which broke up engine exhaust flames and reduced the visual signature during night missions.

In the cargo compartment, the anchor line cable to which paratroopers hooked up was already installed overhead. However, there was little else to permit tour guides to describe the aerial and cargo delivery and medical evacuation capabilities of the Skytrain.

Thanks to a lot of detective work, a set of original red and green jump lights were donated and installed. In addition, personnel and equipment release controls, such as the jumpmaster control console and switches that allowed the electrical release of the equipment bundles, were installed.

Over the years, as they’ve been found or fabricated, additional pieces of equipment have been added to 841. Other additions to the interior were a replica bulkhead, troop seats salvaged from a C-47 at Kirtland Air Force Base, New Mexico, litter straps and hardware, gunport windows, first aid kits, and numerous other small items.

Forward of the cargo box, both the radio and navigator compartments were rebuilt and period-correct electronics and communications equipment were found and installed. The insulation was replaced, along with authentic heating system hardware. Lastly, the sliding mount for the astro compass was fabricated, and there are plans to soon install that World War II instrument in the astrodome.

To understand and flesh out the myriad tasks C-47s performed in every theater of war, Leech and former Collections Manager Debbie Sellars created a “mission area” surrounding the aircraft, to include an airborne howitzer in the middle of a fire mission, and a bulldozer and tractor in the process of creating an expeditionary airfield, complete with the Marsden steel planking to serve as the airfield runway.

Those dioramas permit tour guides to explain the beginnings of the Air Force’s aerial delivery and air-lend-lease missions when the USAAF repurposed existing equipment to satisfy urgent wartime requirements.

All told, the decades-long effort to restore the Turf and Sport Special has succeeded in reversing most of the damage to the aircraft.

In May 2019, the Museum was fortunate to have the family of 841’s aerial engineer Technical Sgt. Winfield “Bing” Wood, as well as the two remaining D-Day paratroopers, George Shenkle and Joseph Morettini visit.

They were able to see the Turf and Sport Special’s restoration back to when it flew unarmed and unarmored into combat – an effort and journey done in their memory, and in their honor.

In memoriam

Chief Master Sgt. Donald A. ‘Doc’ Adams


Doc was born June 15, 1933, in Northfield, N.J. On June 28, 1950, he enlisted in the U.S. Air Force and following technical school at Keesler AFB, Miss., where he was trained as a radar mechanic, served until his retirement as a chief master sergeant on June 30, 1980.

During his first, four-year enlistment, Doc served in Germany, Morocco and Florida. He left the service for a little more than two months, when he worked making teacups for the Lenox china company.

Finding military life more appealing, he reenlisted in September 1954, and was assigned to McGuire AFB, N.J. It was there he met and married Dorothy M. MacFarland. Their marriage produced three children, and lasted until his death.

Doc’s other assignments included stints in Bermuda, Vietnam, California and Alaska. He also had two tours at Dover AFB, including his final assignment.

He joined the staff of the AMC Museum in July 1998, working on the restoration of the C-124 Globemaster II and the C-133 Cargomaster. He served as a member of the AMCM Foundation board of directors from October 2005 through September 2011, and often filled in as a tour guide.

At the time of his passing, Doc was assistant librarian in the Museum’s library and had accumulated 4,722 volunteer hours.

Doc’s military decorations include the Bronze Star Medal, the Meritorious Service Medal and the Air Force Commendation Medal with one bronze oak leaf cluster.

In addition to his wife, children, and grandchildren, Doc leaves behind three brothers and their families.

Memorial contributions in Doc’s name may be made to the Air Mobility Command Museum, 1301 Heritage Rd., Dover, DE 19902-5302 or the Delaware Hospice, 911 S. Dupont Hwy., Dover, DE 19901.
The 20th AC-119 Gunship Reunion will be held from Sept. 3 through Sept. 10 in Salt Lake City, Utah.

Retired U.S. Air Force Lt. Col. James L. Dunn said air and ground crews who served with the gunships are welcome, as well as “friends and families as well as anyone whose bacon we saved.”

The reunion features several key activities:
- A tour of the Hill AFB, Utah, museum
- The opportunity to attend a rehearsal of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir
- A Saturday night banquet and Sunday morning golf
- A Sunday night farewell barbecue.

Visit www.ac119gunships.com to learn more and to register for the reunion.
World War II POW
William H. ‘Bill’ Willis: Dover’s hometown hero

Headed to Europe during World War II, Bill Willis realized the odds were stacked against ever seeing his hometown of Dover, Delaware, again.

Assigned to fly as a gunner aboard a B-24 Liberator bomber, Willis knew that on the average, 19 percent of the airmen serving in the 8th Air Force could expect to die in combat. If he were shot down, a flier had a 17 percent chance of becoming a prisoner of war.

Before 1944, men aboard the B-17 Flying Fortress or the B-24 had to complete 25 missions before they could return to the United States; on the average, there was a one-in-four chance of successfully completing only half that number.

As the war dragged on, however, the US Army Air Force extended the number of missions needed for a complete combat tour, first to 30, then to 35. Ultimately for Willis however, those numbers didn’t mean much: he only made it to three.

Patriotic fervor

Born March 29, 1925, in Clayton, Delaware, Willis was the third child and second son of Joseph H. and Lottie Willis. As required, Willis registered for the draft in April 1943, just after his 18th birthday, while still a student at Dover High School.

The family lived on a quiet street in Dover, less than four miles from where Willis now resides with his wife, Betty. While at Dover High, he was active in a number of extracurricular activities, including the glee club and boy’s chorus.

Life in Dover, like everywhere else, was affected by the war. There was rationing of meat, sugar, gasoline and even automobile tires. Housewives collected fat and grease from their cooking for the war industry, and there were regular efforts to collect unneeded metal, ranging from house keys and tin cans to industrial equipment, to make into bullets and bombers.

Dover’s city hall was the site of one large scrap salvage bin, and arrangements had been made for city trucks to call on households to collect metal too large or too heavy to bring to city hall.

And, several miles to the south, Dover Army Airfield, now Dover Air Force Base, bustled with activity, sending planes out over the Atlantic looking for German submarines. A top-secret facility, built on farmland near the base runway, served as a research and testing complex for airborne rockets designed to shoot down German bombers.

With patriotism at a fever pitch, Willis joined the US Army Air Forces on Aug. 20, 1943, barely three months after graduating from Dover High.

A barn landing

Willis soon found himself with other recruits undergoing military training in Miami Beach, with additional training as an aircrew member and gunner in Denver, Colo., and at the Savannah Army Air Base, Ga.

He quickly grew close to the other members of his crew. Each man knew his life could depend on how well everyone did their jobs, Willis said.

“We got along really well,” he recalled.

“They told us that when you become a crew, you become a family.”

In July 1944, he made his last visit to Dover before heading overseas in November. Willis and his crew, commanded by 2nd Lt. John D. “Moon” Mullican, were assigned to the 467th Bombardment Group at Royal Air Force station Rackheath, about 120 miles northeast of London.

RAF Rackheath was one of many US Army Air Forces stations serving as bases for the air bombardment of German forces in western Europe. The 467th flew the B-24 Liberator bomber and Willis was assigned as a gunner in a turret built into the nose of the aircraft.

The nose turret had been a relatively recent addition to the Liberator and was designed to counteract the plane’s vulnerability to head-on attacks by German fighters.

Once at Rackheath, the underwent a macabre ritual: waiting for another crew to be shot down so a slot in the 467th would open up.

They didn’t have to wait for long.

By February 1945, Hitler’s forces were in retreat, withdrawing under a fierce Allied onslaught of men and machinery. As the front lines moved closer to Berlin, the B-24s were forced to penetrate deeper into Germany itself. Hitler protected his dwindling vital resources by ringing them with anti-aircraft guns that fired shells that exploded into jagged shards of metal dubbed flak.

This shrapnel easily tore through a B-24’s thin metal skin, wreaking havoc on the machinery and men inside.

Willis said he didn’t think much about the dangers of combat.

“We were so young then we didn’t think about dying,” he said. “I just had fleeting thoughts about it. I thought more about home.”

Mullican and his crew flew their first mission on Feb. 14, 1945, striking sites near the town of Magdeburg. The group was ordered back to Magdeburg for another bombing mission the next day.

On Feb. 16, however, the target was a railroad center near Osnabruck, in northwest Germany. Mullican’s aircraft dubbed the Super Wolf, approached the target at about noon, dropped its bombs and headed back to England. On the way home, however, they ran into a patch of sky peppered with flak.

The noise of bits of shrapnel hitting the B-24’s skin sounded like BBs rattling around in a can, Willis said.

The Super Wolf was pierced three times, severing control cables and disabling two of its four engines.

“I was in the nose turret and the shrapnel shot away my oxygen line. I knew I had to get to an oxygen tank before I passed out,” he said.
Forcibly he way out of the turret, Willis grabbed a nearby portable oxygen tank and headed for the two waist gunners, who were throwing everything imaginable overboard in an attempt to lighten the aircraft.

Deciding the plane was mortally wounded, Mullican ordered the crew to bail out, but on hearing the order, Willis learned he had left his parachute back in his turret at the front of the airplane.

With Super Wolf headed for a crash landing, there wasn’t enough time to go back and get the chute. Fortunately, one of the waist gunners showed him a spare, which Willis quickly donned. He abandoned ship through a camera hatch.

“If it hadn’t been for that waist gunner, I’d have been a dead duck,” he admitted.

All 10 airmen made it out of the crippled B-24, although only six parachutes were seen by other crews flying with the Super Wolf. One witness, using binoculars, followed the B-24 until it crashed in a ball of flame near the Dutch town of Emmen.

Willis reported he had no sensation of falling until he descended through a cloud bank.

“I remember thinking, ‘Boy, if only my mother could see me now,’” he said.

Nine of Willis’ crewmates safely made it to the ground; one died after his parachute failed to fully open.

Willis landed with a thump on a barn roof and was quickly captured. Stripped of his boots and gear, someone kicked him in the backside as he and the others were marched off.

“It was probably the farmer who owned the barn,” Willis said.

‘You will be notified’

Joseph and Lottie Willis received a War Department telegram March 9 at their Dover home, telling them their son, “has been reported missing.” There was no further information on Willis’ fate, just a vague promise more news, good or bad, might be forthcoming.

“If further details are received, you will be notified,” they were told.

Willis recalls relatively good treatment by his captors, but that didn’t mean the prisoners simply accepted their fate. One of his crewmates spent time teaching simple German words and phrases to the other POWs so they’d have a better understanding of what was going on.

Willis speculates many in the German army realized they were losing the war and didn’t want to antagonize their prisoners for fear of later retaliation.

One German lieutenant told him, “You don’t have to be belligerent. In a few months, you’ll be home. Think about what I’m going home to.”

While a captive, Willis and his fellow prisoners were surprised when, opening a Red Cross package, they found boxes of chicken canned back in Dover, in a building only a few blocks from his home.

Apparently, however, the can’s contents had gone bad, and the POWs spent the night suffering the effects.

The Germans moved the POWs around, trying to keep them away from the front lines and the approaching Allied armies, Willis said.

Late in their captivity, Willis and the other POWs were marched toward a camp in southern Germany, where a German NCO told Willis that he and the others eventually would be freed. An American plane once strafed the group, but followup attacks were prevented when the resourceful airmen laid out toilet paper in a field, spelling out “POW.”

Interned at the infamous Stalag VII-A, Willis and the others were liberated on April 29, 1945.

Very proud

Promoted to staff sergeant, but denied an assignment to the Dover Army Air Field, Willis was discharged in December 1945. He married Betty Wessell, his high school sweetheart, in August 1946 and held a number of jobs before being named Dover city clerk. He held the job 12 years, retiring in 1987.

Today the couple lives quietly in a home relatively devoid of the reminders of his wartime service. Except for some fleeting pain in his hip—a reminder of his hard landing on that Dutch rooftop—and a special Delaware POW license plate, Willis rarely thinks about his days in combat.

He did return to Europe in the 1990s, retracing his journey as a POW through Holland and Germany, and stayed in touch with his crewmates throughout their lives.

Today, only he and one other man, gunner Carl Pratt, remain.

It all seems like a dream—sometimes a bad dream—looking back, 75 years later, Willis said.

“It happened to me and no one except a person who has experienced that situation knows what it’s like,” he said. “But when you’re 18 years old, you’re indestructible. You know nothing bad is going to happen to you.

“Now that I’ve gotten older, though, I’m very proud of what I went through for my country.”
AMC Museum Foundation

Former board member Bob Mench loves his TBirds

Former AMC Museum Foundation board of directors member Bob Mench is a guy who collects stuff—lots and lots of stuff.

Unlike most of us, however, he doesn’t keep it all in a spare bedroom at his Smyrna, Delaware home. Mench, who served on the AMCM board for six years, has collected so much he’s had to build a 5,000-square-foot warehouse to house it all.

And, unlike collections seen on reality shows such as “American Pickers,” where everything is piled on top of everything else until it looks as if it will topple over, Mench’s collectibles are neatly arranged, cataloged and many reside inside glass cases.

Although he’s got thousands of items in his collection, his passion is the Ford Thunderbird. The centerpiece of the entire collection is a pristine 1990 TBird plus TBird memorabilia that takes up one end of the warehouse. Mench has been known to grab just about anything having to do with the name Thunderbird.

And that extends to the Air Force’s famed aerial demonstration team as well.

‘I’m just a carpenter’

It was his passion for Thunderbird memorabilia that brought Mench to the board in 2012. A mix up with a print he’d bought at a Museum fundraiser led to board President Don Sloan’s visiting his home—and his massive collection.

Sloan later asked if he’d be interested in bringing his business acumen to the Foundation.

“I said that would be great,” Mench said.

At first, Mench seemed a little intimidated by the former pilots and maintainers surrounding him.

“I used to think, these guys are all retired military and I’m just a carpenter,” he said. “But when they wanted a building to put their copying material in, I said I’d build it for them instead of having a contractor do it.”

Over the years, Mench brought his woodworking skills to the task of constructing displays and making repairs around the Museum. He also proved to be an astute fundraiser and has continued his efforts on behalf of the AMCM even after retiring from the board.

“I don’t mind going out and banging on doors, asking for money,” he said. “I’ve done that many times. You have to do it. Not everyone is willing to contribute, so you have to learn to accept rejection.”

Suddenly, lots of extra room

A Pennsylvania native, Mench learned carpentry in trade school, graduating in 1954.

He then put his woodworking skills to use building cabinets at a Pennsylvania wood mill while also running a small, personal workshop where he created hand-crafted unfinished furniture.

He went into the furniture business full time until selling the firm in the late 1960s and starting a new business buying and selling Thunderbird car parts. With the sale of his woodworking business, Mench suddenly had a lot of extra room, and so his Thunderbird collection began to fill up the empty space.

“Your hobby expands to the space you have available, for whatever reason,” he said. Even today, he’s got one room set aside filled with nothing but John Wayne memorabilia.

“A lot of it just followed me home,” he added. “If I liked it, I’d buy it.”

‘I’ll just see something interesting’

So, what is it that catches his eye? Even Mench can’t quite define it.

“Some guys I’ve met collect things like empty Hershey’s ice cream containers or airline barf bags,” he said. “I’m not that specialized except for collecting Thunderbirds. I’ll collect whatever interests me at the time.”

And boy, does Mench have a lot of interests.

Wandering through his warehouse, one can find neat stacks of magazines from the 1940s, stuffed toys, paintings, pewter cups and trophies, player piano rolls, ballcaps, and coffee mugs, Hot Wheels cars, and capped soda bottles. He admits that finding something that special or just odd means he’ll pick up items he wasn’t even looking for.

“I’ll be at a sale and I’ll just see something interesting,” he said. “Who knows what it might be.”

For example, in Pennsylvania, he met a man who was selling several dozen model airplane kits. He and another seller split the hoard, with Mench keeping half while the other man sold off his stash.

He had those boxes of model kits for years, eventually bringing them to the warehouse when he moved to Delaware. The other seller eventually bought that lot and then sold them after making one phone call.

Once, attending an estate sale, Mench came upon a collection of more than 1,800 railroading books. He purchased...
them all and now they take up an entire aisle in the warehouse.

A favorite piece of the collection is a shoebox filled with letters between a soldier and his girlfriend during World War II.

“You can follow their relationship as they went through the war,” Mench said. “It’s really beautiful; it’s interesting that someone let it go. It’s a real piece of history.”

He bought a collection of GI Joes at a church sale, and once purchased the assets of a T-shirt transfer business just to own the 24-foot trailer in which they were stored.

He also owns a 1938 pinball machine, a working jukebox from the 1960s and a U.S. Army doctor’s medical footlocker from World War I.

“It’s all the toys you couldn’t afford as a kid,” he said. “It’s kind of like that.”

“I never had any intention of building a museum,” Mench added. “I just bought the stuff and took it home and stuffed it somewhere.”

**TBird love**

Despite the gargantuan size and variety of Mench’s collection, his love for anything related to Thunderbirds is its heart and soul.

That passion began years ago during an innocuous late-1960s trip to an automobile dealership while still working at his furniture business.

“I was in a car lot looking for a van,” he said. “In the showroom, they had a 1966 Thunderbird. It wasn’t new, and it wasn’t real valuable, but it was a good-looking car.”

Simply put, the lure of that TBird proved irresistible.

“It was a burgundy color with a black top,” he said. “I could not walk away from it.”

But the car had mechanical issues, and Mench was facing something familiar to everyone was having the same problem I did, that they couldn’t find parts,” he said.

That discovery actually led to a business venture, Bob’s Bird House, which Mench established as a way of helping other owners find parts for their classic TBirds. Mench estimates he bought and parted out at least 400 cars in the 30 years he owned the business.

**Who needs the Pickers?**

Mench’s collection of Thunderbirds – he estimates he’s owned about a dozen of the cars – now is down to a single vehicle, that 1990 35th anniversary special. But he still has hundreds, perhaps thousands of pieces of TBird memorabilia and car parts, including die-cast models, ashtrays, coffee cups and boxes that once contained “genuine Ford Motorcraft” parts.

TBird-related items include bottles of Thunderbird fortified wines, and even a slot machine based on the 1960s-era Thunderbirds TV adventure show.

Memorabilia related to the USAF’s Aerial Demonstration Squadron takes up one aisle in the warehouse. Shelves are loaded down with models, banners, posters, patches, decals, flags, magazines and even postal first-day covers relating famed fliers.

Other shelves contain models of just about every aircraft, military or civilian, ever flown. There are British Spitfires hanging from the walls and large-scale B-17s and C-130s strung from the ceiling.

“I took the parts I needed from that car and fixed mine,”

Caught up in what only can be described as TBird fever, Mench started going to auto shows featuring the iconic car.

“I saw that everyone was having the same problem I did, that they couldn’t find parts,” he said.

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