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Contact Editor Master Sgt. Jeff Brown, USAF (Ret.) via email at hangardigest@gmail.com.

Photos are by Jeff Brown, unless otherwise noted.

Cover: This isn’t the first time we’ve featured an aerial view of the AMCM, but if you compare this photo to those from the Oct-Dec 2016 and Apr-June 2014 issues of the Hangar Digest, you’ll see some major changes. We now have a covered pavilion which protects two of our smaller aircraft from the weather. The recently-acquired KB-50J is in front of the pavilion while the “Chosin Frozen” C-119 is third from the bottom on the right. Both are undergoing restoration. Don Sloan took the photo.

Air Mobility Command Museum
Mission Statement

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

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What is the Air Mobility Command Museum?

Located in Hangar 1301 on Dover Air Force Base, Kent County, Delaware, the AMC Museum is part of the National Museum of the United States Air Force’s field museum system.

One of the reasons your AMC Museum continues to provide a great educational experience is that we stick very closely to our reason for being.

So exactly what is our mission? Broken down by numbers our mission is 70 percent airlift and air-refueling, 20 percent Dover AFB history and 10 percent Air Force general history. Our aircraft and artifact collection sticks very closely to that breakdown. But we work hard to be much more than numbers. We tell the stories of the people who have served in our nation’s Air Force, and we offer the only opportunity for many visitors to see the actual aircraft and meet the people who have served our country.

Hangar 1301 was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1994. Although located on Dover AFB property, entrance to the Museum must be made from Delaware Route 9, south of the base. Admission to and parking at the Museum is free and military identification is not required. The Air Mobility Command Museum is open from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., Tuesday through Sunday. It is closed on Mondays and all federal holidays except Veterans Day. For more information, call 302-677-5938 or 302-677-5991.

We like to say we are a window to your Air Force. Let us know how we can continue to improve our outreach and family-friendly experience.
Fond memories buoy this high-flying AF dentist

It’s not often one is able to visit an old friend, but when Dr. Alfred B. Lauder got the chance – quite by accident – he jumped on it.

Lauder, 69, has a dental practice in Dover, Del., and is a retired lieutenant colonel in the US Air Force Dental Corps.

But Lauder wasn’t always a dentist. At one time he flew as a navigator on one of the nation’s hottest fighters, the F-101 Voodoo – specifically, the same aircraft now on display at the Air Mobility Command Museum.

In September, he had the chance to reunite with F-101 tail no. 59-428, the plane he flew on 22 missions as a member of the New York National Guard.

Lauder started thinking about the Museum’s F-101 when a patient brought in a copy of the April-June 2019 issue of the AMC Museum Foundation’s Hangar Digest, which had featured several stories about the Voodoo.

“That article said it had flown in the northeast and that’s what made me go and check.”

“I’ve been at Dover since 1995, and I’ve been to the Museum several times. But I don’t know if I ever really paid attention to the tail number,” he said. “Recently I looked at it again and thought it looked familiar, so I checked my navigator’s logs and sure enough, it was the same plane.”

A future in the air

Lauder admits a military career wasn’t necessarily in the cards as he came of age in his hometown of Binghamton, New York.

But the ongoing Vietnam War led to the realization he would have to join the military, one way or another.

“I knew I was going to be drafted, and so I went to all of the service recruiters,” he said. “I found the Air Force would give me the opportunity to fly, so I took them up on it.

“I guess I’d never considered flying until I decided I had to enter the service,” he added.

“I had been interested in aviation, though. I built a lot of models as a kid and I remember reading an article about the B-58 Hustler.

“That sparked my imagination,” Lauder said. “The irony is that while I was in nav school they took it out of the inventory so I never got the chance to fly it.”

Lauder graduated from college in June 1971 and was at Officer Training School a few weeks later. Commissioned in September, he went on to navigator’s training and KC-135 school.

Lauder flew on the KC-135 for three years out of Fairchild AFB, Spokane, Wash. He loved the job and saw it as a chance to see the world.

“I volunteered for as many TDYs as I could get. I went to Thailand, Spain, Alaska and just about every state in the country at some point,” he said.

But with the Air Force divesting itself of navigators at the end of the Vietnam War, Lauder decided to leave active duty and go back to school.

“I found an Air Guard unit at Niagara Falls, N.Y., which was near a dental school. They were flying F-101s, so I called and asked if they needed any navigators,” he said.

The reaction to his request was encouraging, to say the least.

“I could tell the guy I was talking to covered the phone with his hand and said, ‘There’s a guy asking if we need any navs,”’ Lauder said.

“I heard someone yell, ‘Yippee!’ and I knew I had a job there.”

The Guy in Back

Arriving at the 136th Fighter Interceptor Squadron at Niagara Falls International Airport, N.Y., Lauder set about learning the characteristics and peculiarities of riding in a Voodoo. He quickly learned it was quite different from a KC-135.

“I’d had only about 20 hours in the airplane and we’d gone to an open house in New Jersey,” he recalled. “When we left, the pilot, who we called The Gray Baron, vectored around and made a low pass in front of the crowd. You could hear the wind against the canopy as we were picking up speed.

“I could almost see the expressions on the spectators’ faces when suddenly he did an aileron roll at 500 feet,” Lauder said with a chuckle. “He didn’t tell me he was going to do it. I’m lucky I didn’t fall against the canopy.”

In retrospect, however, he knew and there he was exactly where he needed to be.

“I could have gone to a C-130 unit, but that would have involved a lot of trips overseas,” he said. “I was a student and I knew as a fighter navigator I wouldn’t be tied up for days on end.

“It was a very flexible schedule and it suited me to a T.”

Lauder flew as a GIB – Guy in Back -- with the 136th for three years, while at the same time taking courses he needed to get into dental school.

Lauder flew his final Air Guard missions in July 1979 -- including two of his last three in the AMCM’s plane. Starting dental school in August, he graduated in June 1983 and immediately returned to the Air Force.

Lauder continued to serve an additional 16 years, including assignments at Plattsburgh AFB, N.Y., and finally retiring at Dover.

He admits he was a bit of a rarity, being one of the few to wear both the dental corps specialty badge along with navigators’ wings on his uniform.

‘It was beautiful’

Today, Lauder continues his thriving dental practice in downtown Dover but admits he sometimes misses the thrill of flying.

“Seeing the [F-101] at the Museum really made me nostalgic,” he said. “When I saw its photo in the Hangar Digest, I really wished I was in that picture. It was beautiful.”

Lauder got his wish, thanks to AMCM Operations Manager Mike Hurlburt and Crew Chief Bill Whited. The former navigator spent almost an hour looking over the old aircraft, posing for photos and trading tales with Hurlburt and Whited.

“The F-101 was an exciting plane to fly and I really enjoyed it,” he said afterward. “It was such a neat part of my life, it was a job I could do and one I was pretty good at doing.

“I really like to talk about flying with people who are in the business, including my neighbor, who was a C-5 pilot. I miss the camaraderie and the common history we all had.”
The Air Mobility Command Museum was the place to be over the weekend of Sept. 14 and Sept. 15 as Dover Air Force Base held its Thunder Over Dover open house and air show. Thousands of visitors to the base used the Museum’s grounds for getting a good view of the daily aerial acrobatics and parachute demonstrations held by the country’s best military and civilian aircrews. It truly was a weekend to be remembered!

Janette and Debbie Haar, of Frederica, Del., had just finished their tour of the Museum’s C-141B Starlifter when they got the chance to witness a flyover by a Dover C-5M SuperGalaxy. They were joined by friend Tim Irvin.

Tony King and sons Tony Jr., 12, and Jaxon, 6, hadn’t known about the airshow beforehand. “I wanted to take them somewhere special, somewhere different,” he said.

Devonte Wright of Dover, Del., came to the air show with his wife, Pegasus and kids Ky’Sin, Nyla and Zyra.

Valislav Bozov looks on as Larry Pennington and Air Force retiree David Lasher go over the air show’s schedule.

The B-25J “Panchito” flies above the AMCM’s VC-9 during a demonstration by the World War II bomber.

Big steps for a little guy: Ayden Woods gets help from mom Angel as he makes his way down a C-5M’s cargo ramp.

Carrollyn Peters, left, watches an aerial demonstration with Warinetta Phillips and Tamika Hope.
AROUND AND ABOUT YOUR AMC MUSEUM

Try as she might, 5-year-old Reagan Jones of Annapolis, Md., can’t move the yoke on the Museum’s C-119G Flying Boxcar. Dad Douglas Jones said, “I saw today was Open Cockpit Day and I asked if she wanted to see some of the airplanes Daddy flew in.” It was Reagan’s first trip to the AMCM.

Veterans can get some advice while at the AMCM from Valerie Camarillo, a community outreach specialist for the Department of Veterans Affairs. Camarillo, here with Museum tour guide John Masters, is at the AMCM during Open Cockpit Days, held the third Saturday of each month during the summer.

It’s easy to make friends at the AMCM, as Leo Vimal of Bear, Del., found out while talking with Museum tour guide Ken Smith. Leo was with his parents, as well as his grandparents, who were visiting from India.

With temperatures hovering in the low 90s, Dan and Kathy Gotshall of Mount Joy, Pa., took refuge next to the Museum’s C-133. Both praised the Museum volunteer tour guides: “They’re very respectful and knowledgeable,” Dan said. “They’re really dedicated and have a good sense of humor.”
The 2019 AMC Museum Foundation board member election took place in September. Incumbent members Bob Berglund, Paul Gillis, and Don Sloan were re-elected for three-year terms. The election for the officers of the Board resulted in the incumbent officers remaining in place for another one-year term. You can look for all of our Foundation board member biographical information to be on the website soon.

So just what is this Air Mobility Command Museum Foundation? Established in 1986, the Air Mobility Command Museum Foundation is a private, non-profit organization that operates in accordance with Air Force Instruction 34-223, Private Organizations, AFI 84-103, USAF Heritage Program, and the Internal Revenue Service Regulation Section 501(c)3. It operates on Dover Air Force Base with the consent of the 436th Airlift Wing commander, contingent on compliance with the requirements and conditions of all applicable Air Force Instructions and federal, state, and local laws governing similar civilian activities.

The Foundation’s purpose is to support the Air Mobility Command Museum in its mission as an aviation and aerospace, education, scientific, cultural, historical, and inspirational facility for the general public and the Air Force community.

The AMC Museum Foundation provides financial support to the Air Mobility Command Museum for facility improvements and expansion, educational programs and events, and museum projects for which U.S. Air Force funding is not available. Members of the Foundation board have initiated and maintained innovative programs such as the AMC Museum’s annual Veterans Day event and the Museum’s past annual Summer Camps.

The Foundation accomplishes its goals through fundraising programs within the local civilian community and by continuous interactions with groups, companies, and other organizations within that community. It offers annual and lifetime memberships, supplementing other fundraising programs. Through the use of a quarterly newsletter, the Hangar Digest, the Foundation disseminates information about the Museum, its activities, and the Foundation.

So, there you have it. Look for future Foundation Notes to give you more info on how we spend your money in order to keep our Museum a benchmark, not only in the Air Force Heritage Program but, in the nation.

We’re wrapping up our second Annual Summer Fundraiser, the replacement fundraiser for our annual golf tournament. We’ll be posting the numbers and highlighting our community sponsors who continue to support us so well. And watch your mailbox. Since we ARE in the money-making business, it’s time to start our Annual Fundraising campaign, running October through March. And this year, we’re adding another perk in addition to the chance to win a Stearman flight or an aviation giclée. Stay tuned...
Hangar Digest

Fly safe!

Don Sloan

Longtime AMCM volunteer Gary Burris, 63, passed away Sept. 3, 2019, with his wife of 40 years, Terry, at his side.

Gary worked at the George & Lynch construction company, retiring in 2007.

His biggest passion was a love of flying and vintage airplanes. He spent endless hours volunteering at the AMCM as part of the restoration crew, who he considered as his brothers.

In addition to his wife, Gary is survived by two brothers and their wives, Russell and Nancy Burris of Harrington, Del., and Robin and Donna Ignasz Burris of Smyrna, Del. He also leaves behind a sister, Sandy Burris-Sutton of Colorado Springs, Colo.

Donations in Gary’s name may be made to the AMC Museum Foundation, PO Box 2024, Dover AFB, DE, 19902-9998.

Jeff Brown and I recently presented William and Betty Willis with their Gold Eagle Donor plaque and personalized AMC Museum shirt as a small token of appreciation from the Foundation for their recent $15,000 donation to support the Museum. As you can see from the inset in the photo, Mr. Willis’ Lifetime Members shirt has a bit of extra information, including the “8th AF POW” line. As you read in the last Hangar Digest, he was shot down and captured in February 1945 and was a prisoner of war until late April 1945. It was a real pleasure talking with him and his wife, Betty, both Dover natives, during our visit.

Finally, there are just some things that make what we do so very special. In this case, it’s connecting a Korean War veteran, Art Tatoian, with a plane that, quite possibly, helped to save his life.

His son, Mike, can give you some first-hand info on their recent visit:

So we made it down on Saturday and had a great day at the museum. My dad was just amazed that almost 70 years later, he is sitting in front of the C-119 that ostensibly was the key to saving so many lives.

He was thrilled. Didn’t say much at the beginning and softly just said that he lost a lot of friends in the fight . . . and then didn’t stop talking about (what he could remember) about the conflict. He kept saying, “We would shoot one of them, and 1,000 more would appear, they would shoot one of us, and we felt it!” He also remembered just how cold it was and how today his frostbite from 1950 is still bothering him.

He was thankful to everyone that is restoring the plane so that battle will never be forgotten. He was beyond happy to see it. I think he was a bit emotional for him but also so thankful. It was simply very cool to have him see it.

My dad was so thankful for everyone’s work and effort. Please . . . let them all know that one Korean War veteran was very appreciative and emotional, having had the opportunity.

He kept saying, “I can’t believe this . . . I just can’t believe it.” It was cool for he and I to share that moment.

Good stuff, indeed!

“Good stuff, indeed,” is right!
Featured aircraft

A-26 Invader: three wars — many missions

When it comes to wartime longevity, few, if any, aircraft can match the record of the Douglas A-26 Invader. From World War II to Vietnam, this versatile aircraft compiled an enviable, if sometimes unsung, combat record.

The Air Mobility Command Museum is home to one of the world’s few surviving A-26 aircraft, tail no. 44-35523, built in 1945.

Although the AMCM’s Invader never saw combat, it served at various Air Force bases, mostly in the southern United States, for 13 years. After the Air Force dropped 44-35523 in July 1958, it was used by civilian companies, mostly for agricultural pest control and firefighting purposes in California, Oregon, Montana, and Washington state.

In June 1982, while being ferried to its home base in Montana, the aircraft’s left landing gear collapsed while landing at DuBois, Pa., causing considerable damage. Repaired, the Invader flew for about three more years until placed in outside storage. It remained exposed to the elements until 2001 when it was reacquired by the Air Force and loaned to the Bonanzaville USA History Museum in Fargo, North Dakota. It was displayed there in a hangar until the AMC Museum acquired it in 2008.

“The Air Force had changed policy and insisted civilian museums carry insurance on any Air Force-loaned aircraft,” recalled former Museum Director Mike Leister. “Since they declined to provide insurance coverage, the Bonanzaville Museum offered it to the AMCM, Leister said.

Disassembled by the experts at Worldwide Aircraft Recovery, it was trucked to the company’s headquarters in Bellevue, Neb. From there it was picked up by crews from Dover’s US Air Force Reserve’s 512th Airlift Wing and flown to Delaware, Leister said.

The AMCM’s restoration crews had the aircraft ready for display by July 2009.

First flight

Developed as a twin-engine light bomber and attack aircraft by the Douglas Aircraft Company, the A-26 was the firm’s successor to its highly effective A-20 Havoc. The Invader was longer, had a greater wingspan, was heavier than the Havoc, and featured remotely controlled gun turrets. The cruise speed for both aircraft was about the same, but the Invader was almost 50 mph faster at maximum speed and had a range almost 400 miles greater than the Havoc. In another improvement, the Invader featured double-slotted flaps that moved backward and down, creating greater lift during landings and takeoffs.

The first of three prototype XA-26s made its first flight in July 1942.

Although designed as a single-pilot aircraft, later models made room for a second crew member who served as a bombardier and gun-loader and even later included a third crewman who operated the plane’s radar and other electronic warfare equipment.

The Invader was a highly adaptable aircraft by virtue of its interchangeable nose configurations, which could be swapped out in only a few hours.

The solid-nose version could be equipped with any number of fixed forward-firing machine guns or cannons, while a glass version could be fitted to house the bombardier on precision bombing missions.

Later versions included six wing-mounted machine guns.

In combat

The Invader airframe first was deployed to the Pacific in July 1944, and initial evaluations were less than encouraging. Four aircraft were tested, with the pilots complaining of restricted visibility particularly for low-flying formation missions. Fifth AF commander Gen. George Kenney lambasted the A-26, saying he didn’t want it “under any circumstances as a replacement for anything.” Kenney withdrew his opposition by the summer of 1945 after Douglas redesigned the cockpit canopy, raising it enough to improve pilot visibility. But by that time, however, the war was near its end with the A-26 having flown only several dozen missions.

The Invader had a much warmer reception in the European theater, with pilots and crews praising the new aircraft. A-26 units went into action beginning in September 1944, where it undertook bombing and strafing missions as well as night interdiction and tactical reconnaissance assignments in the European theater.

The A-26 also played a role at Dover Army Air Field where, under the 4146th Base Unit, it was one of several aircraft used as testbeds for highly secret air-launched rocket testing. The 4146th used Hangar 1301, now home to the AMC Museum, as its headquarters and engineering facility.

Because of the nature of its mission, there are few public mentions of the A-26’s service at Dover AFB. However, on Oct. 16, 1945, one aircraft, tail No. 41-39245, landed gear-up on the grass at the base. The pilot, identified as John G. Grego, apparently escaped injury.

An A-26C of the 573rd Bombardment Squadron soars over the French countryside late in World War II. The 573rd had flown the B-26 Marauder during the conflict, but were assigned a number of Invaders in April 1945, too late for the aircraft to see combat. The unit was stationed at an airfield northeast of Paris.

A B-26 flies a mission over the rugged Korean terrain during the Korean conflict. The aircraft designation had been changed from A-26 in 1948, a switch that would be reversed in the 1960s.

In 1948, shortly after the Air Force became an independent service, someone
decided to change the plane’s designation to the B-26, most likely not considering the problem historians would have by confusing the Invader with the World War II B-26 Marauder. It would carry that designation until May 1966 when, for political reasons, it again was labeled as the A-26.

Pilots flying the now B-26 were some of the first to take up the fight against North Korean forces in June 1950, flying their first sorties just a day after Communist forces invaded the South. The B-26 also was the first to bomb the North Korean capital of Pyongyang, only days later.

Operating from bases in Japan, B-26 crews completed missions across the entire Korean peninsula, including the final sortie just minutes before the June 27, 1953, armistice went into effect.

A B-26 pilot, Capt. John S. Walmsley Jr., 31, was awarded a posthumous Medal of Honor for his attack on a Chinese supply train during Operation Strangle on 14 Sept. 1951.

Walmsley was the first bomber pilot and fourth member of the Air Force to be awarded the Medal of Honor during the Korean conflict.

Over the next decade, the B-26 continued to serve, although not officially in many respects. The planes were loaned to the French Air Force for use in Indochina, by the Central Intelligence Agency to fight insurgents in Indonesia and during the Bay of Pigs attempted invasion of Cuba in 1961.

Vietnam

During the early 1960s, in what was the beginning of the Vietnam War, the B-26 was used primarily in clandestine operations and nighttime reconnaissance missions from adjoining Laos and Thailand, again with the backing of the CIA.

Under Project Farm Gate, B-26s were operating covert missions into South Vietnam, a venture that came to a sudden end in February 1964. Two Air Force officers, flying an Invader during a demonstration in Florida, were killed after the aircraft’s left wing came off during a strafing run.

A post-crash analysis revealed the primary cause was metal fatigue in the wing spars.

Despite this, the B-26’s counterinsurgency role was not over. About 40 surviving aircraft were returned to the United States or pulled from the Arizona Boneyard and almost completely rebuilt. The planes were given new wings and wingtip fuel tanks, and brakes, upgraded engines and propellers, among other improvements, and assigned to the 609th Commando Squadron (later the 609th Special Operations Squadron), based out of Nakhon Phanom Royal Thai Air Force Base.

The Invader, now officially the B-26K, had a new lease on life. They could carry more armament, they were faster, and they could fly farther than before.

Adopting the call sign “Nimrod,” heralded as one of the mightiest hunters in the Bible, the 609th’s primary mission was to fly nighttime interdiction missions over the Ho Chi Minh Trail, through which the Viet Cong ferried men and supplies into South Vietnam.

Because Thailand would not allow American bombers stationed within its borders, in May 1966 the Invader’s role was designated as an attack aircraft. It again became known as the A-26K.

In this role the A-26 gained its reputation as a deadly truck-killing platform, earning the 609th a Presidential Unit Citation lauding the unit for extraordinary gallantry during its missions in Southeast Asia.

According to a July 2010 article in Air & Space magazine, pilots considered the A-26 to have “just the right combination of firepower, loitering time and ruggedness” needed for the job.

Typical missions would see forward air controllers marking the target with ground flares and the two- or three-man Invader crew diving in for the attack. The darkness and jungle terrain meant success sometimes was hit or miss, but the fliers often would be rewarded with a satisfactory fireball blooming in the gloom as they pulled away.

The crews sometimes would orbit the target looking for additional opportunities, but that often meant exposing themselves to enemy fire. More than one A-26 returned to base with its fuselage full of holes and sometimes an injured – or dead – crewman aboard.

In all, 22 Invaders went down between 1962 and 1969, when the aircraft were retired for good.
Douglas A-26 "Invader"
A sweet sound

Air Mobility Command Museum volunteer Harry Bright was an engine mechanic who worked on the A-26 at Nakhon Phom in 1967 and 1968.

He was assigned to work on the aircraft out on the flight line.

“You just learn so much more out there, doing that,” he recalled. “We’d be out there when the bird was hot. You could go out there, do the troubleshooting and repairing so it could go out on its mission.”

Now 72, at the time Bright was in his early 20s and one of two young two-stripers working under a technical sergeant. It was a stressful life, knowing the pilot and copilot’s lives often depended on their work, he said.

“We were all kids out there, but we were working on airplanes and making them fly,” he said. “The military depended on young people to do jobs like that.”

The conditions were challenging, but the people made it rewarding.

“It was always hot,” Bright said. “You’d go out there in your jungle fatigues, and the first thing you’d do is take your blouse off. Some guys wouldn’t even wear their T-shirts, but I always did because of the oil and grease.

“It was really interesting because I’d get to talk to the crew chiefs and sometimes the pilots would be out there, watching us, and I’d get to talk with them,” he added.

“I enjoyed talking to the people who were in the thick of it all; it made you feel as if you were a part of the team.”

While the maintainers always had their technical orders to follow, field experience often came into play, Bright said.

Case in point: the TOs required a special analyzer be used to tell if an engine cylinder was bad. To save time, the techs would mark each exhaust pipe with chalk and then run the engine. The hot pipes on the good cylinders would dissolve the chalk, so the cylinder that didn’t have melted chalk marks would prove to be the bad one.

There was something special about the sound of two perfectly honed Pratt & Whitney R-2800 radial engines running in unison, Bright said.

“Those 2800s would just sing,” he said. “They were tuned in with each other. They were more like a whisper, not a roar like with a jet engine. You knew from the sound what they were; it was a sweet sound, really nice.

“I always thought that if you were a bad guy and you heard that sound coming at you, you’d know you were in trouble.”

The 609th lost nine aircrews totaling 34 men during Bright’s 12 months in Thailand.

Those losses affected Bright deeply.

“When I got out of the service, I went into denial,” he said. “I didn’t want to talk about it.”

A chance meeting in the early 2000s changed that, he said.

Pilot Capt. Carlos Cruz, navigator Capt. William Potter and Bright’s friend, Sgt. Paul Foster, were shot down Dec. 29, 1967, while on a mission over the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Foster was on the mission as an aerial gunner.

Bright already had joined the Air Commando Association and in October 2009 was attending his first reunion when he met a woman who so young he knew she only could have been the daughter of a Vietnam veteran.

He offered her a ride and learned she was looking for people who had known her father.

When he said he’d been friends with Foster, the woman’s face turned pale.

“He was on the plane my father was piloting,” she said.

The woman was Carla Cruz Craker, daughter of Capt. Carlos Cruz, Bright said. The two since have become friends and remain in contact.

In 1993, a joint American/Lao team excavated the A-26 crash site, located on a mountainside about 25 miles west of the Vietnam/Laos border. They recovered aircraft wreckage as well as bone fragments later identified as belonging to Cruz, Potter and Foster.

The three men were interred in the same grave at the Arlington National Cemetery.

Years later, Bright was given some stones collected at Nakom Phamon; he went to Arlington and buried them at the crew’s gravesite.

Today, Bright feels the A-26 and the men who flew the aircraft, not just in Vietnam but in other conflicts, are not remembered as much as they should be.

“The plane doesn’t get its due, nor do the crews,” he said. “What they did on the Ho Chi Minh trail was phenomenal, above and beyond.”

A restored A-26

Today, there are less than two dozen airworthy A-26 Invaders left. One of them, known as Sweet Eloise II, is flown by Steve Penning, based out of Santa Rosa, Calif.

Penning and business partner Phil Gattuso purchased the aircraft in 2011 and did a seven-year restoration. It took to the air again in 2018.

“It’s a comfortable aircraft to fly, but especially enjoyable once you ramp up the horsepower, he said.

“It doesn’t really fly nicely when it goes slow, but over 200 mph, it’s a whole different airplane,” Penning said. “You put the nose down, and it speeds up in a hurry.”

Penning has flown other World War II aircraft, including many hours in the B-25, but says the A-26, which was designed to replace the Mitchell, is a wholly different type of airplane.

“The technical advances they made during World War II really showed up in the A-26,” he said.

The A-26 does have some interesting characteristics, particularly when landing, Penning said.

“The big thing is slow-speed flight,” he said. “When you put the flaps down it has a lot of drag, so you have to watch on final approach. You have to put in a lot of power.

“Usually, you reduce power when landing, but here you have to increase power. It’s all energy management.”

Although Penning flies his A-26 in a much different environment than for which was designed, he appreciates what the plane’s combat crews must have gone through.

“It scares me to read about it,” he said. “Flying at night a couple of feet off the ground and getting shot at, it’s just unbelievable.”
A work in progress

Putting it together: KB-50J restoration continues

Air Mobility Command Museum restoration crews have been working full throttle on our KB-50J ever since the first parts of the aircraft arrived at Dover in December 2017.

The fuselage was trucked to the base early in 2018 and reassembled by Worldwide Aircraft Recovery of Bellevue, Neb.

The aircraft, originally a B-50, an upgraded version of the World War II B-29 Superfortress, was converted from a bomber to a tanker in the late 1950s.

But time has not favored the old warrior. After its retirement from the Air Force, it went on display outside the National Museum of the United States Air Force, where it endured about 20 years of snowy Ohio winters.

Beginning in 1995, it was the cornerstone of a memorial park at MacDill Air Force Base, Florida. But the Sunshine State’s oppressive humidity and the base’s proximity to the salt air from the Gulf of Mexico accelerated the plane’s deterioration, a process whose extent was not fully understood until recently.

They are planning their 2020 reunion in Wilmington, Del., about 40 miles north of Dover AFB.

Corrosion, corrosion, corrosion

A July 2019 formal structural survey, also funded by the AMCM Foundation, showed extensive corrosion in the lower fuselage, flight deck, wings and other areas of the aircraft. Reversing those problems has been the biggest challenge facing crew chief Tim Maurer’s restoration team ever since they started work on the six decade-old aircraft in 2018.

A 21-year Air Force veteran, Maurer now is senior technical writer and the founder of Eleventh Hour Technical Solutions; the company specializes in providing customized maintenance and technical documentation on a variety of aircraft.

In its simplest form, the KB-50J restoration continues in serious corrosion to vital structural parts of the aircraft, Maurer said. These will be replaced with newly fabricated parts.

More than 40 years of exposure to snow and salt air have resulted in serious corrosion to vital structural parts of the aircraft, Maurer said. These will be replaced with newly fabricated parts.

Some parts of the KB-50J essentially are being held together by its external skin. This part of the aircraft includes external Plexiglas observation blisters; the originals have deteriorated to the point the AMCM Foundation paid for scratch-built new ones, Maurer said.

In the case of the AMCM’s KB-50, the goal is not to restore the aircraft to flightworthy condition, but make it sound enough support its own weight, not to mention withstanding Delaware’s sometimes gale-force winter winds.

“When this plane was designed by Boeing, they didn’t plan on it being around this long,” Maurer said. “It was supposed to have a certain design life and then they’d move on to the next design.

“The problem is that the alloy they used to build the airplane, while strong in high tensile strength, is highly corrosive. It was a tradeoff. What we’re responding to now is corrosion in all the main structural members.”

The alloy tends to expand like wet plywood and eventually splits apart, weakening any joints or other parts made from the metal, he said.

It also appears other, earlier restoration efforts used different types of metal than the original, resulting in a chemical reaction that accelerated the problem.

‘Very satisfying’

In its simplest form, the job can be seen as one of basic parts replacement, Maurer said, but reality makes it a bit more complicated.

“There are some things that we have to redo, refabricate,” he said. “But the biggest thing we have to do is just go in there and muscle the old pieces out, what’s left of them, and put new pieces in.”

In taking the KB-50 apart, Maurer’s crew has found a number of odd items, including a paperback novel, aspirin bottles, and even can openers, known as “church keys,” from C-rations used in the 1950s.

The worst corrosion is where water leaked in around windows and holes in the aircraft skin.

In the forward cabin, the restoration crew found marks showing how deep the water had pooled on the floor. All of the instrumentation and controls from that section has been removed for renovation and so the windows could be refurbished, he said.

Maurer expects complete restoration work on the KB-50 to take several years, however he’s hoping to have the plane in presentable condition by the time of the TAC Tanker Association reunion in May 2020. Several members of the group have visited the project and seemed happy with what they saw, he added.

“The biggest thing for me is that there are only two KB-50s left, and we’ve got one of them,” Maurer said. “Just the fact that bringing this back to its original glory, I think the airplane deserves that.”

And so do the men who flew it, he added.

“There was an old navigator out here, and just watching him walking around this thing, looking at it, remembering everything that he went through, the stories he could tell, that was very satisfying.”
Korean Conflict remembered

AMCM’s new C-119 saved this Marine vet’s life

Seventy years after serving in the Korean War, U.S. Marine Corps veteran Art Tatoian lives with two reminders of that conflict.

The first is the memory of more than two weeks of an unrelenting struggle to escape capture by Communist soldiers during the Battle of the Chosin Reservoir.

The second is pain, the result of severe frostbite suffered during those desperate days in November and December 1950. The damage was so bad that military physicians once considered amputation.

Today, his father still feels the effects of the bitter cold, noted Tatoian’s son, Mike.

“Ever since I can remember, it bothers him because of conditions over there,” he said. “It was absolutely horrendous.”

The former Marine, who recently celebrated his 89th birthday, is alive today because of a frantic plan to open up the only escape route for the men, a plan that involved eight U.S. Air Force C-119 Flying Boxcar aircraft.

The only surviving member of that small armada, tail No. 80352, now is under restoration at the Air Mobility Command Museum, with plans to be finished by December 2020, the 70th anniversary of the battle.

Early life

Tatoian is a first-generation American whose family had suffered through pogroms and ethnic genocide in their native Armenia.

In 1920, the unrest led Tatoian’s father, Mugerdich, also known as Mike, to emigrate to the United States after his two sons were killed in the conflicts that rocked the region.

Tatoian became the father of two more boys, named after their deceased brothers: Murad, also known as Steve, born in 1923, and Ardash, born in 1930, who was known in their Bettendorf, Iowa, hometown as Arthur.

Life in Bettendorf was somewhat rocky for the young man: his father had remarried following the death of Arthur’s mother, and difficulties with his stepmother led to a life-changing decision right after his 18th birthday.

“It’s really a bit of a long story, but I just felt like getting out of town,” he said. “I told my brother I was joining the Marines.”

Despite the Corps’ reputation for toughness, Tatoian’s early days on active duty weren’t terribly unpleasant. Finishing his training as a warehouse supply man, he was sent overseas and by March 1949 was aboard the USS Midway cruising the Mediterranean.

It was then he started a correspondence with New York native Elsie Vosgerichian.

“That was the best thing that happened to me over there,” Tatoian recalled. “A friend said, ‘She’s your nationality and everything, why don’t you write to her?’”

Any romance, however, would have to wait for events just beginning to play out on the other side of the world.

The Chinese invade

The uneasy peace following World War II fell apart June 25, 1950, when North Korean forces, bolstered with Soviet advisers and equipment, poured over the 38th parallel, the nation’s border with South Korea.

American and South Korean forces were caught totally unaware, and North Korean forces quickly captured the capital of Seoul.

According to Brig. Gen. Edwin H. Simmons’ book, “Frozen Chosin, U.S. Marines at the Changjin Reservoir,” the United Nations responded by forming a 21-member coalition to answer the invasion, but things did not go well. Over the first two months of the conflict South Korean and American forces gradually were pushed down the Korean peninsula, creating a perimeter around the small town of Pusan.

To stave off almost certain defeat, U.N. commander Gen. Douglas MacArthur planned an amphibious invasion at the port of Inchon, west of Seoul. The target was far removed from the Pusan redoubt and was integral to MacArthur’s plan to cut off North Korean personnel and resupply lines.

The plan was not popular with members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The Navy barely could pull together the number of ships needed for such an operation, and the Marines would have problems furnishing the necessary number of men trained for amphibious operations.

The self-assured MacArthur pressed his case at a late August meeting in Tokyo; all but one attendee, Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Forrest Sherman, left convinced the plan at least was “not impossible.”

Sherman acquiesced the next day following a 90-minute meeting with MacArthur, where the general reportedly listened to the admiral’s concerns but refused to change his mind.

“I wish I had that man’s confidence,” Sherman said following the conference.

Tatoian and other members of X Corps – the First Marine Division and the U.S. Army’s 7th Infantry Division – came ashore at Inchon on Sept. 15, 1950. They encountered little in the way of resistance, and the port was captured within two days.

“It was a brilliant tactical move,” Tatoian said of MacArthur’s plan. “It sure was.”

Consolidating their forces, X Corps pushed on and by Sept. 28 had liberated Seoul, about 20 miles away. At the same time, the U.S. Eighth Army had broken out of the Pusan perimeter, taking advantage of the North Korean’s disrupted supply chain to move back up the peninsula.

With the capital secure and the badly mauled North Korean People’s Army apparently in retreat back to the 38th parallel, Tatoian and the rest of X Corps were loaded onto amphibious ships and ferried around to Wonsan, on North Korea’s east coast.

They landed there, unopposed, on Oct. 26 and headed north with the goal of fulfilling MacArthur’s goal of reaching the Yalu River,
which separated North Korea from the People’s Republic of China.

Thanksgiving 1950 was celebrated with turkey and all the trimmings, even for the men on the front lines. Things were going so well the troops believed they’d already won the war and would be home by Christmas.

Unknown to MacArthur and his staff, however, Chinese Communist forces already had made clandestine incursions over the Yalu. In late November those forces collided with X Corps at the Chosin Reservoir.

“We had gone to all those places and ended up in North Korea,” Tatoian said of his first taste of battle. “We didn’t know we’d be getting into conditions where it would be 45 degrees below zero.”

‘Retreat, hell’

Ordered to move up a narrow roadway toward the village of Hagaru-ri, just south of the reservoir, the Marines began deploying to its east, with U.S. Army units moving to its western edge.

At the same time, Chinese forces moved in, and on Nov. 26, 1950, launched synchronized attacks, aiming to overwhelm the U.N. forces around the reservoir and Hagaru-ri.

Fierce fighting over several days threatened to engulf the U.N. forces, leading MacArthur to start pulling back his forces toward the port city of Hungnam, where they could be evacuated.

Because the drive to the Yalu had been so successful to that point, the news of X Corps’ plight caught Americans back in the United States by surprise. Newspapers in Tatoian’s native Iowa said MacArthur called the situation both “critical and serious, but not hopeless.”

Another report said there had been discussions at the Pentagon about using an atomic bomb to stop the Chinese, but that it would only be considered a “weapon of last resort.”

Before the withdrawal began, on Nov. 29 Air Force C-119s from the 314th Troop Carrier Group began to resupply Hagaru-ri.

The Marines’ commander, Maj. Gen. O.P. Smith, turned down a suggestion by Combat Cargo Command Gen. William H. Tunner that the C-119s evacuate the First Marines, telling the Berlin Airlift veteran that he’d need an intact fighting force to “get everybody out.”

Smith, however, allowed Tunner to evacuate the more than 4,600 sick and wounded before the rest of X Corps set out for Hungnam, taking a narrow, treacherous and winding path through the rugged Taedong Mountains.

It took the Air Force six days to accomplish the evacuations.

Smith refused to call the pending withdrawal a retreat.

“Retreat, hell,” he famously said. “We’re not retreating, we’re just advancing in a different direction.”

Inhuman conditions

According to Simmons, it was no secret senior officers knew the climate in the part of North Korea where the 1st Marines were operating could be bitterly cold, similar to winters in North Dakota or Minnesota. Some units routinely reported temperatures of 20 to 25 degrees below zero, while others recorded even colder numbers. The winds coming through the mountains often made those temperatures seem even more bitter.

However, Simmons added, the Marines were equipped for these austere conditions, wearing their clothing in layers.

One particular weakness in protecting the Marines, however, was their footgear, a boot with waterproof bottoms but leather uppers. Each man was issued two sets heavy socks and felt inner soles, with the admonishment they should be changed often.

This was easier said than done, however. Sweat caused by constant movement soon would soak the socks and felt supports and the moisture would quickly freeze as soon as the Marine took a break.

Opportunities to swap out the socks and felt supports, however, proved few and far between. Many Marines were forced to go days without the chance to take proper care of their feet.

Continual fighting

As they moved south, X Corps learned moving along the narrow roadway was no easy task. The dirt road often was covered by ice or snow, and the Chinese army continually harassed the soldiers and Marines. Each day and night saw new skirmishes and more wounded. Members of X Corps also had to contend with captured Chinese soldiers as well as throngs of Korean refugees who followed close behind the columns of men and equipment.

Tatoian, working as a fuels supply specialist, had watched most of the convoy head out of Hungnam before he could leave.

Although all Marines were trained as riflemen, Tatoian himself was primarily worried about keeping the convoy on the move.

“My job was to gas up the trucks, and that’s what I did in Korea,” he said. “When everybody left the Chosin Reservoir, we were the last ones.”

“As far as combat was concerned, we weren’t involved all that much.”

X Corps was forced to abandon a lot of equipment and supplies, Tatoian said, equipment that most probably fell into enemy hands.

“We had to throw everything out,” he said.

“They were supposed to throw napalm on it and burn it up, but they didn’t.”

Those who could walk, did so, but the injured were forced to hitch a ride on whatever moving vehicle where they could find sufficient room, he said.

“For two or three days, we just kept walking and walking,” Tatoian said. “All we had to wear was what we had on.”

The convoy was continually harassed by the Communist Chinese, making the journey even more hazardous.

“They’d be shooting at us from the hills up above,” Tatoian said. “We actually were surrounded, but we didn’t really know that until we had gotten out. None of us had the big picture.”

“It sometimes seemed as if we’d shoot one of them and 1,000 more would come at us.”

“We were scared, oh yes,” Tatoian added. “Some of us were only 20 or 21 years old.”

Because of the cold, Tatoian soon felt the effects of frostbite. Unable to stay warm, the skin on his feet started turning red and became numb. It became harder and harder to keep up with the rest of the column.

“After a while, I just couldn’t walk anymore,” he said. “I was told to wait for a truck, and eventually one picked me up.”

Despite continual harassment and nighttime attacks by the Chinese, X Corps eventually made it to the Funchilin Pass. There they were greeted with an unpleasant sight.

A daring plan

X Corps’ escape route included a number of bridges that had to remain intact if Smith were to successfully evacuate his men and the more than 1,500 tanks and trucks in the convoy. That plan was immediately endangered.
Continued from Page 15

when a Marine spotter plane confirmed a concrete gatehouse bridge crossing a 2,000-foot chasm at the Changjin Power Plant had been destroyed by Chinese forces.

After traveling 16 miles in 38 hours, the soldiers and Marines learned they were up against a dead end; Smith knew it again was time to call in the 314th TCG.

Although his men themselves could conceivably cross the 16-foot gap in the bridge, Smith knew this would be impossible for his tanks, trucks and other equipment. The solution was to cross the breach using pre-built Treadway bridge sections.

The fact that bridge sections never had been airdropped before proved only a small obstacle. A Dec. 6 test drop using 24-foot parachutes was a disaster when the chutes failed and the steel bridge drilled six feet into the ground upon impact.

With no time to do additional testing, eight bridge sections simply were fitted with larger, 48-foot chutes and loaded aboard the waiting Flying Boxcars.

Each Treadway weighed almost 3,000 pounds and at 16 feet in length, were too long to fit onto the C-119s cargo deck. To secure each bridge section, crews removed the planes’ clamshell doors, leaving part of the cargo hanging over the deck’s edge.

On Dec. 7, the eight aircraft, including No. 80352, flew to the Funchilin Pass, dropping the planes’ edge.

Fortunately, however, there were no casualties among the crews.

The sections were delivered to a drop zone near the town of Koto-ri, north of the destroyed bridge; the Marines carried the sections to the site of the power plant.

By late the late afternoon of Dec. 9, members of the Army’s 58th Treadway Bridge Company, using lumber found near the bridge site, had assembled four of the sections to complete the repairs.

Men and equipment immediately started across, and because there were few Chinese in the area, made the crossing relatively unprotested.

As the official U.S. Marine Corps history of the battle recounted, “All night long on 9/10 December, an endless stream of troops and vehicles poured across the span that was doubtless the world’s most famous bridge for the moment.”

With all of the men and equipment safely on the other side, the hastily constructed bridge was blasted apart and fell into the chasm.

The men and equipment arrived at Hungnam Dec. 11, where they were evacuated by sea and air, with the 314th TCG again playing a major role in the effort.

The 314th TCG later was presented the Distinguished Unit Citation, the first combat award earned by an Air Force unit during the Korean War.

‘My hands and feet were frozen’

It wasn’t until Friday, Dec. 29, 1950, Tatoian’s family learned of his whereabouts. In a bureaucratic mix-up they first received a Western Union telegram saying he was missing in action. The second confirmed that he actually was OK, but had been wounded.

The latter telegram gave no indication as to the nature of his injuries, however.

Like many other wounded men, Tatoian had been evacuated to a naval hospital ship for treatment of his frostbite.

“My hands and feet were frozen,” Tatoian said. “One of the doctors wanted to cut my feet off.”

Tatoian knew he had to write home, but with his hands heavily bandaged, could not manage the task for himself.

“I had a nurse who wrote letters for me, telling my brother I was OK,” he said.

But upon receiving Tatoian’s letters – written in an unfamiliar script – everyone back home feared the worst.

“My family all thought they’d cut my hands off,” Tatoian said.

Never shared a word

Tatoian remained overseas until November 1951 when he and other First Marine Division veterans returned to San Francisco.

By then Tatoian had been in the Marines three months past his scheduled discharge date, which had been extended one year by President Harry S. Truman. After spending 37 days on leave, he was transferred to Camp Lejeune, N.C., to serve the remainder of his enlistment.

Tatoian received his honorable discharge as a sergeant in August 1952 and married Elsie Vosgerichian on Sept. 20 in Bettendorf. He worked for three years at the nearby Rock Island Arsenal, and then for 33 years for the Alcoa aluminum company, retiring in 1979.

Elsie died after 59 years of marriage in January 2012, and Tatoian now lives with Mike’s sister, Denise.

Tatoian never has returned to Korea.

“No,” he said. “I’ve never wanted to go back. The war was the one and only time.”

But he still thinks of Korea, even when not feeling the lasting effect of frostbite, and remains proud of his service as a Marine.

Like many combat veterans, his father rarely talked afterward about his experiences, Mike Tatoian said.

“As a kid, I remember he had a box full of stuff brought back from Korea, a lot of photos and a few items such as the ribbons he’d earned in the Marines,” he said. “There also was a knife and a few other mementos.

“The only thing I remember him talking about was he’d had a German shepherd somewhere in Korea, but they wouldn’t let him bring it home.

“Otherwise he never shared a word about his experiences and I never asked.”

But Tatoian’s reticence about discussing his military service gradually softened over the years.

“Whenever news comes on about the Marines or if he meets a Marine, he’s very proud of that,” Mike said.

In May 2019, Tatoian had the chance to relive part of his experiences as one of the “Chosin Frozen,” as veterans of that battle have come to be known.

Although he’d never caught sight of the eight C-119s as they delivered the M2 bridge sections on that day in December 1950, he was able to visit No. 80352 as it was undergoing restoration work at the AMCM.

“It started reminiscing about it, in my mind thinking about what had been going on when I was there,” he said. “Tears were rolling down my eyes.”

“We had a great day at the Museum,” noted Mike Tatoian. “My dad was just amazed that almost 70 years later he was sitting in front of one of the C-119s that ostensibly was the key to saving so many lives. He was thrilled.”

Work on restoring No. 80352 is continuing and Tatoian plans to attend dedication celebrations in 2020.

“I’d like to be here to see it again after it’s completed,” he said.

Author’s note: Most historians prefer the name “Chosin,” which was used on old maps inherited from Japanese forces that had occupied Korea during World War II. The South Korean government refers to the site as the Changjin Reservoir.
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