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 proper, entrance to the Museum is 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 experiences.
What’s news?
Here’s what’s happening at your AMC Museum

Over the winter months Museum crews have continued restoration work on the KB-50J Superfortress aircraft. Our experts found that due to exposure to salt air in Florida, where the plane was on display for more than 20 years, a much more extensive job of restoration was needed. Nonetheless, they’re close to finishing the job. Members of the TAC Tanker Association, former aircrew and maintenance personnel who flew and repaired KB-50J aircraft during its service with the Air Force had been planning a May 2020 reunion in Wilmington, Del. (see page 13). Many of these veterans plan to tour the AMCM and visit our KB-50J during that event. The Association graciously provided $25,000 in funding to restore the vintage aircraft. Many members also have donated to have their names or the names of colleagues inscribed on the bench shown in front of the KB-50J. For more information about the AMCM’s bench program, turn to Page 19.

The AMCM has requested funds and a contract to paint the new Chosin Reservoir C-119B Flying Boxcar once restoration work is completed. A ceremony to mark the plane’s official addition to the Museum’s inventory is tentatively planned for November/December 2020, the 50th anniversary of the Chosin Reservoir action. This aircraft is one of eight that dropped M2 Treadway portable bridge sections into an area south of the artificial North Korean lake, allowing U.S. Army and Marine Corps units to escape certain annihilation by North Korean and Chinese forces.

In recognition of the exemplary work performed by the Air Force Mortuary Affairs Office and the Joint Personal Effects Depot, both of which are at Dover AFB, the AMCM is preparing a display of artifacts recovered from a C-124 crash in Alaska. The plane went down Nov. 22, 1952, with the loss of all 52 crew and passengers. For decades, the extremely hostile terrain frustrated attempts to reach the site and recover the remains of the victims. Over the past few years, however, several expeditions to the site have resulted in recovery of almost all of the missing men as well as aircraft parts and personal effects.

Access to our C-141B aircraft has been temporarily suspended pending repair of the aircraft’s landing gear. High winds in February rocked the Starlifter, causing hydraulic seals on the main struts to fail. As a result, the aircraft now sits much closer to the ground, too low to allow access from the handicap ramp. Your AMCM staff is working on repairs so visitors again may go aboard the storied aircraft.

New construction work at the Museum has been approved by Col. Matthew Jones, commander of the 436th Airlift Wing. Among other projects, this will result in major improvements to the Museum’s hallways and construction of an expanded reception area at the Museum entrance.

Virus concerns bring temporary closure to AMCM

The global pandemic caused by the coronavirus has affected many aspects of daily life, including operations at the Air Mobility Command Museum.
When Delaware Gov. John Carney on March 13 declared a State of Emergency for Delaware, AMCM Director John Taylor ordered the Museum closed in an effort to protect both visitors and Museum staff and volunteers.
Many members of the AMCM’s volunteer force are senior citizens and thus particularly vulnerable to the virus, Taylor said. Protecting those individuals was his highest priority, he added.
Taylor, as well as Deputy Director Eric Czerwinski and Operations Manager Mike Hurlburt, would continue their administrative duties from home.
The Museum will not reopen until Carney lifts the State of Emergency. In the meantime, you can visit the Museum online at www.amcmuseum.org.
DAFB’s historic roots

Archaeology: digging up Dover Air Force Base

Long before today’s giant cargo aircraft flew above Kent County, people lived and worked on the land that makes up Dover Air Force Base and its environs. While aircraft hangars, runways, and modern buildings have supplanted prehistoric campsites, hunting grounds, and early-American farmsteads, traces of the past remain.

Much work has been done in the past five decades to locate and uncover these sites. These efforts usually stem from historic preservation regulations that require federal agencies to take into account the potential effects to significant cultural resources, such as archaeological sites, from proposed actions like construction. If a resource is found to be historically significant, it may be listed on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP), the federal government’s compilation of buildings and places that should be preserved from demolition or significant alterations.

The AMC Museum’s Hangar 1301 is on the National Register because of its role as a rocket test center during World War II.

Many other sites, both prehistoric and historic, have been documented on and around Dover AFB in a Department of Defense book, “To Slip the Bonds of Earth: The History of Dover Air Force Base and Its Surroundings.” Compiled from historical narratives and archaeological data, the book was a response to a Memorandum of Agreement signed as the result of the demolition of a 1950s-era on-base school and construction of a new building adjacent to the site of the former school.

Native Americans and Europeans

The earliest evidence of human habitation around Dover AFB dates from between 12,000 and 8,000 years ago when the area was used for seasonal food-gathering efforts. Large projectile points, primarily from knives and spears, have been found in sites across Kent County.

Rising sea levels marking the end of the Ice Ages increased the availability of seafood, leading these humans to establish large base camps surrounded by smaller hunting camps. Archaeological research has shown these tribes were part of an extensive trade network stretching into Pennsylvania and Ohio.

Between about AD 1000 and AD 1600, however, these groups became even more sedentary, developing agricultural villages and largely ceasing long-distance trading.

By the time European colonization of the Delmarva Peninsula began in the 1600s, however, much of what now is central Kent County was mostly devoid of humanity, native tribes having moved more to the north and south.

Although the Swedish and later Dutch colonists established a meager foothold on the Delmarva Peninsula, English interests prevailed, beginning an influx of pioneers into Kent County. Many established homesteads that consisted of hundreds of acres along the St. Jones River, which flows along what was to become the west and southwest portion of Dover AFB. In 1682 the three counties making up the Delaware colony were transferred to William Penn, who set about encouraging Virginia and Maryland landowners to establish tobacco plantations in Kent County.

These early settlers built basic log-style homes, but no evidence of these 17th-century buildings has been discovered in the area of Dover AFB.

Increasing agricultural prosperity brought the construction of more permanent homes, including Poplar Hill, the home of John Dickinson, a representative to the Continental Congress.

Although wealthy families built up large amounts of farm acreage, their lands were worked mostly by tenant farmers and, up until the end of the Civil War, slaves. All of these people left their mark on Kent County.

Farmland gives way to an airfield

Dover Air Force Base had its beginnings when the War Department, worried about the growing conflicts in Europe and Asia, contacted county governments to set up civilian airfields that could be converted into military bases. Kent County’s Levy Court declined, passing the opportunity to Dover itself. Meeting on Nov. 8, 1940, the city council agreed to buy three farms, totaling 587 acres, just southeast of the city.

The price: $35,000, equivalent to $646,695 in 2020. The deal has been hailed more than once as “the best investment the city ever made.”

Archaeologists work to uncover a Native American site on base property near the St. Jones River. Prehistoric Delawareans often use the area as base camp for hunting food.

No runway here: a 1937 aerial map shows farmlands that three years later were purchased by Dover’s city council and used in 1941 to establish what became Dover Air Force Base. Many of today’s roadways can be seen here; the current Del. Route 1/US Route 13 runs from the upper left to the bottom center. The site of the future AMC Museum is marked with a red X.
One of the earliest clues to early Native American habitation at what now is Dover AFB came in 1960 during excavation of a gravel pit. Stone tools and prehistoric ceramics indicated the inhabitants had the ability to trade with other tribes from as far away as Ohio. It showed the area may have been used as early as 3,000 BC.

Construction began on three 4,000-foot-long runways and a hangar, but the work intensified just days after the Pearl Harbor attack of Dec. 7, 1941. Within two years, more than 100 buildings, mostly cinderblock and wood, had been built. The Dover Army Air Field first served as an anti-submarine patrol base, but quickly expanded to a training facility for P-47 pilots.

Although the base was inactivated after the war, it was resurrected in 1951. Since then it has served the United States primarily as a station for sending vital airborne cargo to Europe and the Middle East.

Over the years, the base has seen a continual expansion and today encompasses about 3,900 acres, more than six times its initial size. Many of the prehistoric sites and historic farmsteads disappeared before the base was built, but some traces remain.

One farmstead was located near what now is the base North Gate. Although the home had long been demolished, a row of trees that once led up to the house remained for years afterward. They finally were removed in the early 2000s during renovations at the gate.

Up until the latter part of the 20th century, little thought was given to examining and recording information about historic sites when they were threatened by new construction. This changed with passage of the National Historic Preservation Act in 1966.

Today, however, Dover AFB operates under an Integrated Cultural Resource Management Plan, said Varna Boyd, archaeologist and senior project manager for the Dovetail Cultural Resource Group.

“The base is proactively working to identify these sites, to see if they’re historically significant and if they’re eligible for the National Register,” she said at a January 2020 public briefing.

Boyd was joined by Steve Cox, president of the Kent County chapter of the Archaeological Society of Delaware.

The base’s cultural resource plan requires due consideration be given to possible prehistoric and historic sites on base before any construction can take place.

As such more than several historic and prehistoric archaeological sites have been identified on the base. Five could be eligible for listing on the National Register, she said.

Although these sites are known to state and base authorities, their exact locations have not been made public to prevent their being disturbed.

Documenting the past

One of the first sites documented is in the area of Dover AFB base housing near the St. Jones River, Boyd said. Its presence first was revealed in the 1960s while excavations for a gravel pit were underway. The site showed various groups had occupied the place from between 3000 BC to about AD 1600.

An adjacent site on the base itself contained a burial ground dating to about 380 BC that contained about 50 interments. Some of these were evidence of trade with other groups from as far away as the Ohio Valley. The site was further examined in 2016, which identified a total of 32 prehistoric and historic features, but no further burials. This site was considered eligible for listing on the NRHP.

A historic site with a nearby farmstead building also had some prehistoric elements where archaeologists collected more than 1,000 items. The prehistoric site showed it had been used to turn river stones into tools. This site also is eligible for the NRHP.

Archaeologists conducted several investigations of a site along the St. Jones River in the 1990s and 2000s, learning the parcel contained several historic and prehistoric components that also showed use as a Native American base camp.

In 2006, archaeologists investigated the site of a 19th- to 20th-century tenant house on base property across Route 9, uncovering a cellar, post holes, and coal deposits. Coincidentally, the team had been working there less than two weeks before a C-5 crashed on the field site. The crash, however, did not affect the site’s eligibility for the National Register.

Immediately adjacent to this site is Byfield, the childhood home of Caesar Rodney, one of Delaware’s signers of the Declaration of Independence. Excavations there have revealed an unmarked family cemetery containing 14 burials and one brick vault. Rodney himself is thought to be interred in one of those unmarked graves.

A historically documented barn on an 18th- to 20th-century farmstead, once occupied by planter Andrew Lackey was investigated. Archaeologists determined the general location of Lackey’s barn but did not find the house site.

Investigators have discovered the remains of a building, shown on the 1859 Byles Map of Kent County, as Schoolhouse No. 14. Constructed in 1836 and known as Comegys Schoolhouse, the only remaining evidence of the building is a set of concrete steps in a patch of woods. Archaeologists also found the foundations of a later school, dating to 1893, above the earlier building.

Excavations revealed a cellar hole containing several school-related items, including marbles, pencils fragments, tablets, teacups, and bottles. The school operated until the 1930s when it closed during the consolidation of school districts in the county.

In the 1950s, contractors noted evidence of a possible pair of historic cemeteries on base property, but shovel testing and ground-penetrating radar found nothing. It’s possible the sites had been misidentified or inadvertently moved during runway construction.

A 2005 survey for a potential new base AeroClub found scattered materials near the old Christmas Tree apron that may have been associated with buildings mapped in 1899 and 1936. Because there were no cultural features discovered and the area appeared to have been disturbed by plowing and fill, it was not considered eligible for the NRHP.

Another site was that of the former John Wesley ME Church and cemetery dating from about 1867 to 1940. The property fell into disrepair with the building having been razed in the 1950s, and many of the headstones vandalized. The cemetery was restored by Dover AFB and rededicated in 2009.

(Continued on Page 16)
Reaching out

AMCM lends a hand to NJ’s Millville Museum

Museum staffers always have been generous with their time, and those at the AMCM Museum are no exception.

So, when volunteers at the Millville, N.J., Army Air Field Museum (MAAM) needed some pointers on restoring a classic aircraft, staff members at the AMCM were only happy to lend their expertise.

“Back in 2018, Paul Blackstock, a board member of the MAAM introduced an Army veteran with a keen interest in military history named Bob Dalessandro to museum Executive Director Lisa Jest-er,” former AMCM volunteer Bob Leicht said.

“An intriguing intersection emerged when Bob told Lisa that his father, former US Army Air Forces 2nd Lt. Anze ‘Andy’ Dalessandro, was a World War II C-47 pilot,” Leicht added. “Lisa told him she was interested in restoration of the MAAM’s R4D – the US Navy’s designation of a C-47 – nose section.

“Given Lt. Dalessandro’s history, an idea came to mind, one that would satisfy both the MAAM’s restoration desire and to honor his history as a local man who became part of the Greatest Generation,” Leicht said.

That idea: renovate the R4D to look like a C-47 Dalessandro, a long time New Jersey resident, would have flown in combat.

Retired Lt. Col. Doug Lloyd, one of the founders of the Dover AFB Historical Center – the forerunner to the AMCM – helped introduce the Millville staff to the AMCM’s C-47 restoration crew. Coincidentally, Lloyd also was one of the younger Dalessandro’s childhood friends and neighbors.

“What followed was a visit to the AMCM by Lisa and the MAAM leadership and discussions on how the two museums might be of unofficial assistance to each other,” Leicht said.

Leicht, a retired U.S. Army airborne officer had been instrumental in restoring the AMCM’s C-47, Turf and Sport Special. He then visited the MAAM with fellow volunteer, Bill Lee to survey the nose section and make recommendations on how it might be restored.

A detailed restoration plan

Leicht said he and Lee realized any restoration work would be a major undertaking.

The aircraft was built in 1943 for the USAAF, but later transferred to the U.S. Navy. It never flew in combat instead serving as an embassy support aircraft in the 1960s; somewhere along the line it underwent major modifications, including installation of two VIP windows in the fuselage. The navigator’s station and that of the radio operator, were torn out as well. There are no records why, out of the entire aircraft, only the nose section remains, Leicht said.

The aircraft came to the MAAM in 1993 in the form of a long-term loan from the National Museum of the U.S. Marine Corps with the provision that it be maintained. The MAAM sends an annual report to the NMUSMC, keeping its staff apprised of the plane’s condition and any restoration or preservation efforts.

Following Leicht and Lee’s visit, the Millville restoration team developed a plan to ensure both the partial plane’s preservation and its renovation. Phase I would focus on exterior repairs and repainting: there were numerous holes in the upper fuselage, part of the upper windscreen frames had been eaten away and there was standing water that had deteriorated the plywood and particle board decking. The two VIP windows would be covered over with sheet metal.

Phase II included a limited interior restoration, dependent on the resources the MAAM could provide. Leicht noted much of the infrastructure had been torn out, some control panels were missing and the cockpit seats were falling apart.

Work gets underway

To get a handle on what was needed to complete the restoration, a MAAM crew, including Bob Dalessandro, visited the AMCM to photograph the Turf and Sport Special.

Leicht and others were responsible over the years for restoring the Skytrain as closely as possible to its wartime configuration, so being able to explore a fully restored aircraft was a rare opportunity for the MAAM crew.

“They wanted to come over and take photos of our aircraft because it’s complete,” Deputy Museum Director Eric Czerwinski said. “We allowed them to take detailed photos of the radio operator and navigation stations, the cockpit bulkhead, the webbing, and other things we had installed in the nose of the aircraft.”

The AMCM also provided drawings for parts missing from the MAAM’s plane so their crews can fabricate replacements, Czerwinski said.

After the NMUSMC approved the restoration plans, work on the MAAM’s C-47 started in earnest during spring 2019. Because Dalessandro couldn’t find any information on the individual aircraft flown by his father, the C-47’s nose art will be that of group commander, Col. Adriel Williams’s aircraft, the “Daly Express,” which he named after his wife.

“Its spectacular,” Dalessandro said approvingly.
A display for today’s visitors

The photographs from the Turf and Sport Special will serve as a template to partially restore the Millville aircraft’s cockpit. The original control panel will be reinstalled but with photographic reproductions replacing several of the gauges and other instruments.

The MAAM still has the original gauges but cannot install them because they were detailed with World War II-era glow-in-the-dark radium paint.

Large photographs of the missing navigator and radio operator’s stations also will give visitors the feeling for what those areas looked like, he said.

A ladder and a baggage door replica will help complete the look, Dalessandro said.

Other plans include building a booth around the exterior of the nose section that will allow an auto detailer to paint the exterior and then allow the MAAM’s mural artist to reproduce the Daly Express artwork.

Eventually the MAAM hopes to place the C-47 nose section under a protective cover along with some of its other vehicles. This will protect it and allow easier visitor access.

Even before the renovations began, the nose section proved to be a big draw at the Millville airport and museum. Kids looking at the nose section would be fascinated by all the instruments, switches and gauges, Dalessandro said.

“They’d want to know if they could flip a switch and if it would start the airplane,” he said.

But in many ways, they couldn’t relate to the aircraft. Even telling today’s generation about something as recent as Desert Storm has proved a challenge, Dalessandro said. It’s even more so when talking about World War II, a conflict that ended more than seven decades ago.

But there is promise for the future, and that’s Millville’s purpose, Jester said.

“So many of our students and interns that have just come in here and touched upon the whole aviation field have gone on to become Air Force pilots,” Jester said.

The director said she and her staff are grateful for the assistance provided by the AMCM.

“We got great ideas, and the partnership and the communication between the two museums has been priceless,” Jester said. “It’s just been awesome.”

“We were thrilled to help,” Czerwinski reciprocated. “As a museum there’s nothing more rewarding than helping another museum. Anything we can do within our power, we’ll do it.”

“We’re here to serve the community and they’re there to do the same. We all have the same mission, and that’s to teach the history of airift.”

A New Jersey hero: Lt. Anze “Andy” Dalessandro

Although he had known of his father’s participation in World War II as part of the 436th Troop Carrier Group, the forerunner to Dover’s 436th Airlift Wing, Bob Dalessandro admits he didn’t know much else.

But one day he was on the AMCM’s Facebook page and spotted a poster for sale in the Museum’s store. The poster showed the 436th TCG’s aircraft, one of which was from the 80th Troop Carrier Squadron, his father’s unit.

Because the MAAM’s mission is to both display memorabilia and also associate those moments with real people, an idea incorporating the museum’s C-47 nose quickly took shape.

“[MAAM Executive Director Lisa Jester] told us they wanted to restore the plane and then dedicate it to my father,” Dalessandro said.

As such, the restored C-47 also will display some of the lieutenant’s personal items, including the duffel bag he carried throughout the war.

Anze Dalessandro was a second-generation American, born in 1916, the son of Italian immigrants. The family initially settled on a Pennsylvania farm, but later moved to Pennsauken, N.J.

Dalessandro first was drafted into the Army to serve as a medic, but afterward answered the call for badly-needed pilots. He received his wings in June 1944, and flew his first mission Sept. 17, 1944, as part of Operation Market Garden carrying elements of the 506th Parachute Regiment. On Dalessandro’s second mission, he towed a CG-4A glider into combat.

Dalessandro ended his tour with more than 20 missions under his belt, including relief cargo drops at Bastogne and flights during Operation Varsity. Some of those missions saw the aircraft returning to base peppered with bullet and shrapnel holes. When the war formally ended, he piloted missions returning liberated prisoners of war to Allied control.

He ended his military service as the recipient of the Air Medal with two oak leaf clusters.

After the war, Dalessandro returned to New Jersey, and, unable to find a flying job, began work for the US Postal Service. He followed that career for more than 27 years. He died in 2010 at the age of 94.

Jester said the museum is honored to recognize Dalessandro’s service by tying his experiences to a rebuilt and preserved C-47.

“It means a lot,” she said. “We’re all about preserving World War II history. To actually have a nose section is incredible. It’s priceless.

“To restore it in memory of someone personally really brings to life what it is we do here and what we’ve done for the past 30-plus years. That’s where we differ from other museums, that we try to make our exhibits personal to the family.”

Although his father never again piloted an aircraft after the war, the younger Dalessandro knew he always loved aviation.

“When I was a kid he used to take me to the Philadelphia International Airport, and we’d go out on the observation deck and watch the airplanes,” Dalessandro said. “I guess he never got over it.”
A very dependable trainer

The PT-17 has a long and storied flight history. It usually was the first aircraft in which Army Air Corps cadets took to the air during initial flight training. Guided by a highly skilled back seat instructor, these fledgling pilots learned the basics of flight, aerobatics, and formation flying while riding in the front seat of the two-person craft.

The plane was instrumental in training the US Army Air Corps and US Army Air Forces pilots who flew in World War II, including the famed Tuskegee Airmen.

The aircraft had humble beginnings. Designed in 1933 by Navy Reserve veteran Lloyd Stearman, and designated as Boeing Model 75, it went into production in 1934. Its military designation depended on the type of engine installed: the PT-17 carried the air-cooled, seven-cylinder, four-cycle radial Continental R-670, which produced between 210 and 240 horsepower. Naval versions of the aircraft were known as the N2S series, while craft given to the Royal Canadian Air Force were designated as PT-27s. The Canadians were responsible for the craft’s best-known nickname, the Kaydet.

The plane featured a fabric-covered welded steel fuselage and upper and lower wings framed in wood and covered in fabric. The craft had a rugged, non-retractable undercarriage and large, fixed tailwheel. An unfueled PT-17 weighed just under one ton; fully fueled it tipped the scales at about 2,600 pounds. With a range of just over 500 miles, the plane cruised at about 96 mph.

More than 10,000 of the sturdy aircraft were built between 1934 and 1947.

Many of those that survived the war were sold to civilian airmen and fitted out as sports planes, acrobatic aircraft and crop dusters. Many still fly in countries across the world.

A bruiser of an airplane

Delaware Aviation Hall of Fame member Alfred F. “Al” Johnson Jr. of Magnolia, Del., donated the PT-17 just as the Air Mobility Command Museum – then known as the Dover AFB Historical Center – was getting underway in March 1993.

Johnson had bought the aircraft in parts from Dick Nixholm, owner of Downtown Aero Crop Service, a crop-spraying service operating out of Vineland, N.J. Even earlier, Nixholm had purchased the plane from another pilot.

“Dick had gotten it from Kirk Young, who ran a big operation out of Cape May, N.J., and did a lot of mosquito spraying work,” Johnson said. “He had about 10 to 12 Stearmans.”

“Dick had bought a lot of the parts and disassembled a lot of the Stearmans and put them in storage,” he said. “He had a ton of parts, I sent my mechanic over there with my truck, they loaded it up and brought it to Delaware.”

Johnson intended to assemble his own plane from all the pieces, but that plan eventually ended up on the proverbial back burner.

“We put it in an attic but never got to it,” he said. “It turned out I never was going to rebuild it so I just donated it to the Museum.”

“It’s no stretch to say that Johnson is a legend in Delaware flying circles. Now 87 years of age, he began agricultural flying in 1958 and still maintains a farm and small airport near Magnolia. Johnson’s love of flying grew from watching Grumman Aircraft pilots test new aircraft over his father’s Long Island potato fields. He started flight school there, using $150 he’d earned while working over the summer. He was such a quick learner he made his first solo flight after only 10 days of instruction. Johnson’s family moved to Delaware in 1952 but he gave up farming to establish his own aerial spraying company, Air Enterprises, in 1959. He has served as president of the Northeast Agricultural Aviation Association and later president of the group’s national body. In addition to his induction into the Delaware Aviation Hall of Fame, he also has received the Career Distinguished Service Award from the Vegetable Growers Association of Delaware.

Johnson has been in the cockpit of more than one PT-17, and considers it a tough, robust aircraft.

“I mastered it pretty quick,” he said. “It is a bruiser of an airplane and can take one hell of a beating. You can drop in on a landing because it’s got real tough landing gear.”

Flying as an agricultural pilot, Johnson admits he’s put the aircraft through some maneuvers Lloyd Stearman probably never considered.

“I could come over a set of trees, dive into the field and pull the nose up. I could

Featured aircraft

AMCM’s PT-17: Hard work restores an early flyer

At the AMCM, to find one of the best loved and most popular training aircraft of the 1930s and 1940s, all you have to do is look up.

Suspended from the ceiling, decked out in bright blue and yellow livery, the Air Mobility Command Museum’s PT-17 Boeing Stearman is difficult to miss. It’s one of the AMCM’s earliest acquisitions.

It’s also a favorite of USAF Reserve Chief Master Sgt. Bryan “Skip” Ford, who helped restore the plane back in the 1980s.

“I was a two-striper who’d started volunteering at what then was called the Dover AFB Historical Center,” Ford recalled.

“I’m really proud of what we were able to do,” he added. “I can walk around today and tell my kids, ‘I helped build that.’”

A silver-painted PT-17 takes to the skies over Wichita, Kans. Designed in 1933 by Lloyd Stearman, it was adopted by the US Army Air Corps in 1936. The Boeing Airplane Company purchased the Stearman Co. two years later and continued to produce different versions of the aircraft. More than 13,000 were ordered for the United States and its allies.
level off and go right across the field,” he said. “If you were watching it would look like I was going to crash.”

Johnson calls the PT-17 a “brute of an airplane.”

“It’ll make a man out of you,” he said. “It takes a lot of effort and a lot of arm power. I don’t think they wanted to make it easy [for the pilot trainees].”

The pilot who taught Johnson how to fly said not to be afraid of the airplane.

“He said you’d have to manhandle it,” Johnson said. “I always remembered that.”

A highlight of Johnson’s career was a 1974 meeting with Lloyd Stearman during the former’s term as president of the National Agricultural Aviation Association.

“Stearman was there and I took him around on a golf cart. They had the first Stearman aircraft on display there and we talked a lot,” Johnson said. “He talked mainly about airplanes and we had conversations about why he designed them.

“Lloyd Stearman was just one of the guys.”

‘We can do that’

Despite the fact it looks like it’s ready to take to the skies, the AMCM’s Stearman never has flown. When Johnson made his donation in 1986 the aircraft was a pile of disassembled parts and wasn’t actually complete.

The Museum’s restoration team faced the task of using original and reconditioned parts to put together a displayable aircraft. What they didn’t have in the mountain of part they’d have to make or buy.

Knowing about Johnson’s agricultural spraying operation, former Museum Director Mike Leister had contacted Johnson about the possibility of finding a PT-17.

“Al had Stearmans and all kind of airplanes,” Leister recalled. “I don’t remember if I called him or met him, but I asked if he had one he was willing to donate.

“He told me he didn’t have a whole airplane but he did have a bunch of parts that we could make into an airplane if we were industrious.”

The restoration group fabricated the missing ribs for the fourth wing from scratch. Knowing it did not have to be airworthy, they were formed out of plywood, he said.

The propeller on the AMCM’s PT-17 also is a substitute, Leister said. While the plane usually flew with a variable pitch propeller, a standard, fixed-blade substitute was allowed under wartime conditions. Because of the cost of finding a variable pitch propeller, the restoration team opted for the Stearman to carry the wartime version.

Leister noted the aircraft’s color scheme was based on how the Army Air Corps’ planes were painted in the 1930s.

“Navy airplanes at the time were yellow with a red stripe,” he said.

“The Air Corps planes were blue and yellow, which were supposed to make them highly-visible so people could see them.

“There would be a dozen in the air at one time, and they usually flew in a local pattern while training,” he said. “None of them had radios.”

The PT-17s original identification plate, required for all aircraft, is long gone, so there’s no way to tell exactly when it was built or what its original serial number might have been. Instead, it carries the number 121741 emblazoned on both sides of the fuselage.

That stands for Dec. 17, 1941 – the date Dover Army Air Field officially was established.

Today, Ford remains proud of his work decades earlier in restoring the colorful Stearman and what it means to the AMCM.

“I think it’s pretty cool,” he said. “It was a lot of hard work with a very small budget to get the aircraft display-worthy. I think it was foundational to the Museum as you see it right now.

“It was indicative of how we did things at the time. We’d be given a pile of junk and asked if we could tell a story with it. A lot of things would have gone in the dumpster if someone hadn’t had a vision about what it could be.”
The 2019-2020 Annual Fundraising Campaign has come to an end with 129 donors contributing a record-setting $15,000-plus to the AMC Museum Foundation. Our winter drive saw 62 supporters who gave at least $100. Of those, 17 gave between $200 and $500! And four of those 62 donated $1,000 or more!

We all owe a huge debt of gratitude to the main character in this fundraising plot, Jeff Brown. Jeff’s great attention to detail and tireless efforts have played no small part in the success of this year’s success. Thank you, Jeff Brown!

Your generosity does not go unnoticed. A list of all this year’s Annual Fundraising Campaign donors follows. While you’re perusing that list, you might notice that congratulations are in order for our randomly chosen winners, Edwin T. Wall (*Aviation Art Giclee), Eileen Owsiany (**Glider flight) and Roger Cox (**Stearman flight).

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M PSGt. Roger C. Yorde, USAF (Ret.)
Richard M. Zuckerman
So, what do we do with those dollars? You already know your donations continue to play an essential role in the ability of the AMC Museum to keep flying high. Here’s a snapshot of that support for the last year.

Museum-support vehicle expenses, including registration and insurance, continue to be funded by the Foundation. Covering the AMC Museum website expenses allows for the Museum to have an extremely useful and attractive website. According to AMC Museum surveys, our website continues to be one of the top ways that visitors find out about the Museum. Check it out: www.amcmuseum.org.

One primary mission of the Foundation is taking care of our invaluable volunteer force. Our annual support for the volunteer luncheon and Christmas dinner is supplemented by a “volunteer hour”-based reward program, making our volunteers some of the best-dressed volunteers in the state. Additionally, a 2019 revived volunteer program, thanks to the efforts of Mike Hurlburt, saw an increase of funding for volunteer awards at several different levels. These are all dollars well-spent, as the volunteers are the reason that the number one source of AMCM visitors, is evidenced by “family/friends” being the most frequent answer as to how visitors find out about the Museum. Our friendly, knowledgeable, and enthusiastic volunteers make that happen.

As you are undoubtedly aware, the AMC Museum Foundation’s Hangar Digest is a quarterly publication that highlights historical information on airlift and air-refueling aircraft and personnel for the Museum staff, volunteers, visitors, and the local community. While it is mailed to Foundation members, it is also distributed to various non-members, such as unit commanders, public affairs units, aviation museums, and airlift/air refueling-type organizations! While very effectively advertising the AMC Museum, it also continues to appeal to non-members like the Museum staff, many volunteers, and visitors.

Each quarter, we sent copies to an average of about 370 members. Nearly three dozen copies are mailed to various unit commanders and public affairs offices, airlift and tanker organizations, museums, and a few select individuals, including the Delaware Veterans Home and a U.S. senator. They are on display at the Museum’s entrance, where they greet our visitors and are displayed in the store. The Hangar Digest shows (and names) our visitors and our volunteers experiencing the wonders of the AMC Museum. We strive to send those named visitors a copy of the Hangar Digest so they can see their visit in print.

This past year, two articles from the Hangar Digest, “Cargomaster Down” and “The Crew of 54-0146,” were picked up and re-published in the National Museum of the USAF’s Friends Journal, Vol. 42, No. 1.

The Hangar Digest tells the story of the AMC Museum. It gets the word out to members and non-members alike through commanders, public affairs units, aviation museums and airlift/air refueling-type organizations, and our visitors. It continues to promote the Air Mobility Command Museum very effectively.

Last but certainly not least, in meeting the basic expectation of aircraft restoration, the Foundation spends your dollars on one of our principal missions – that of helping to restore aircraft. The primary aircraft for 2019, and continuing into 2020, were the KB-50 and the C-119B. That’s made much more effective -- and efficient -- because of the Aircraft Restoration Chief position, very ably filled by Les Polley. It is a position that is fully funded by the AMCM Foundation to supplement the Department of Defense-funded positions for keeping the AMC Museum at the top of its game. The Foundation gets a cost-conscious ally to ensure that we’re all getting the most bang for our bucks. The Museum receives a very knowledgeable individual who heads their volunteer restoration team. The TEAM wins.

So that’s how we spend the dollars that you entrust to the AMC Museum Foundation. Our promise to you has been and will continue to be that we will strive to ensure that your money will be put to good use. Again, thanks to each of you for the part you’ve played in making – and keeping – the Air Mobility Command Museum a place we all love!

**Fly—and stay—safe! Don Sloan**

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Just before this issue of the Hangar Digest went to press, the AMC Museum was notified the TAC Tanker reunion, planned for May 2020, has been rescheduled due to the coronavirus pandemic.

In an email to Museum Director John Taylor, Vice President for Membership Lou Chapman said, “With so many venues being closed, group events limited in Delaware and elsewhere, flights being cancelled and confusion on what we can and can't do has led to the decision to hold the reunion the same week in May (13 through 17) next year. We had looked forward to being there to meet the volunteers and Museum staff, but everything that has taken place is out of our control as well as yours.”

More information will be presented in the Hangar Digest as it becomes available.
Our volunteers — they make the difference

Deciding who is the best among our already exemplary field of AMC Museum volunteers is not an easy job, but its one the Museum staff — Director John Taylor, Deputy Director Eric Czerwinski and Operations Manager Mike Hurlburt — tackle with gusto every month.

Here are the selectees for December 2019 through February 2020, as well as for a volunteer who won honors at the 436th Airlift Wing:

Ms. Janet VanHoorik
AMC Museum Volunteer of the Month, December 2019

Janet is a dedicated store clerk who has accumulated more than 2,000 hours of service to the Museum. Her dedication to the Museum and the gift store exceeded expectations during December 2019 when she volunteered extra time to keep the store operating due to the unavailability of clerks. Her actions prevented a significant loss of funds for the AMC Museum Foundation and, ultimately, the AMC Museum. Having the gift store closed would have also adversely affected the visitor experience, especially at a time when many people are shopping for the holidays. Her dedication has been vital to the entire Museum team.

Bill Reilly
AMC Museum Volunteer of the Month, January 2020

Bill is a ‘jack of all trades!’ Since starting as an aircraft restoration volunteer in 2017, he has dedicated more than 1,700 hours to the Museum. We have yet to find a skill that Bill does not possess, and he always is getting involved and lending a helping hand with every project the restoration team has tackled. Bill has proven himself to be a valuable asset to the AMC Museum team, and we appreciate everything he does.

Ms. Polly Steenhagen
AMC Museum Volunteer of the Month, February 2020

Polly has been a mainstay for keeping the Museum gift store open on Sundays for years, which has not changed. She has, however, recently stepped up to become the first official AMC Museum seamstress. Polly earned this title by offering her sewing skills to our restoration department, where her husband Don volunteers. Polly assisted with the restoration efforts of the newly acquired KB-50J by mending several of the ‘soft goods’ found throughout the flight deck, including the pilot, co-pilot, and navigator’s seats, as well as the canvas covering around the throttle quadrant. Her efforts have saved the AMC Museum countless dollars and hours of labor trying to find a viable solution to having these items restored. Polly’s dedication to the AMC Museum has not gone unnoticed, and we thank her for all of her accomplishments.

Born May 20, 1920, in New York, N.Y., George was three months shy of his 100th birthday upon his passing and was the Museum’s oldest tour guide.

George was a veteran of the U.S. Air Force and Air Force Reserves. He enlisted during World War II, where he served as an aircraft navigator. Returning from the war, he served in the Reserves, retiring as a lieutenant colonel.

He devoted almost 40 years to the New York Fire Department, receiving the McElligott and Department Medals for bravery. He retired as a captain and later toured eastern Europe by bicycle.

George’s interests were endless, and included travel, history, bowling, astronomy, and photography. He was inducted into the Delaware Aviation Hall of Fame in November 2019.

He was preceded in death by his wife of 67 years, Elizabeth Craven Schofield, and his brother, Eugene. George is survived by his children, Barbara Brady, Edward G., Richard C., Mary Anne, and David and wife Pamela Schofield; his six grandchildren, Leah, Elizabeth, and Owen Adam Brady; Katherine, Margaret, and Rosemary Schofield; and great-grandson Quinn Brady VanDerwater.

A memorial service was held Feb. 22, 2020, in Wyoming. Interment will be with full military honors at the Arlington National Cemetery at a future date.

Memorial donations in George’s name may be made to the Air Mobility Command Museum Foundation, P.O. Box 2024, Dover AFB, DE 19902-9998.
In 1988, archaeologists with the University of Delaware Center for Archeological Research identified an 18th-century site belonging to the Brown and Graham families who owned land later incorporated into Dover AFB. A cemetery containing at least 123 burials was unearthed, with two graves being excavated just enough to verify human remains were buried there. Although a ditch and postholes were discovered, no headstones or identifying markers remained. Archaeologists also uncovered a single brick burial vault, which unfortunately was vandalized before their work was completed.

The past, the future

In 2020, as Dover Air Force Base observes the 80th anniversary of the day Dover city council approved its purchase, additional building projects are planned that will take it well into the 21st century. As these plans move forward, the base also will look back to its past, investigating, documenting, and looking to preserve what has come before.

“The land had a history of the people who lived there, the white and black farmers and watermen of the last few centuries, and of the native peoples who lived there much longer than that,” Cox said.

It’s necessary to study archaeological sites, he said, to ensure the stories of those people are not lost forever.

“We want to know the past, we want to preserve memory of the past and we want to understand it because its more than nostalgia, it’s really necessary to understand ourselves and key to our future,” Cox said.

For more information about the Archaeological Society of Delaware, visit www.delawarearchaeology.org or email Cox at stcrossroads1@gmail.com.

Retired Lt. Col. Jim Dunn of the AC-119 Gunship Association is looking for members associated with the AC-119 gunships used from 1967 to 1972 in Southeast Asia as well as those who flew the AC-47.

“We’d like to find aircrew, ground crew, support personnel, friends, families, and anyone whose bacon we saved,” Dunn says.

Dunn was one of seven navigators from Dover’s 1st Military Airlift Squadron and 39th Military Airlift Squadron, who transitioned to the AC-119K when the C-133 units shut down. Many then returned to Dover to fly C-5s.

Dunn has scheduled the AC-119 Gunship Reunion XXI for Oct. 28 through Nov. 1, 2020, in Fort Walton Beach, Florida.

The AC-119 Gunship Association includes members of the 17th, 18th, and 71st Special Operations Squadrons who maintained, flew, and supported the AC-119G Shadow, AC-119K Stinger, and AC-47 Puff the Magic Dragon gunships during the Vietnam War.

For more information, go to https://www.ac119gunships.com/mail-call/mail-call/ or their Facebook group, https://www.facebook.com/groups/195912423919726/.
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www.VisitDelawareVillages.com
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