Air Mobility Command Museum

Mission Statement

The mission of the Air Mobility Command Museum is twofold:

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

The AMC Museum Hangar Digest is published quarterly and is dedicated to the preservation of our airlift and tanker heritage. All articles, unless otherwise noted, written by the editor. Viewpoints in this publication are those of the contributing authors and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of The AMC Museum Foundation or of the Museum’s staff.

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Contributions, Reader comments, articles and ideas are solicited for future issues. Mail to The Hangar Digest, AMCM Foundation, PO Box 2024, Dover AFB DE 19902-9998 or send an email to hdeditor@amcmf.com.

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Photos are by Jeff Brown, unless otherwise noted.

Chief Master Sgt. of the Air Force JoAnne S. Bass speaks with Senior Airman Anthony Ashcroft, an aircraft structural maintenance journeyman assigned to the 166th Airlift Wing, Delaware Air National Guard, during a Jan. 7, 2021, visit to the AMC Museum. This was Bass’ first official visit to Dover AFB since assuming the position as the service’s 19th top noncommissioned officer in August 2020. U.S. Air Force photo by Airman 1st Class Stephani Barge.
Confessions of a high-flying Air Force chaplain

Chaplain (Lt. Col.) John W. Groth
US Air Force (Ret.)

The letters were postmarked Da Nang, Vietnam, and the year was 1968. To a nine-year-old, it was the coolest thing in the world to be receiving letters from a soldier. His name and Army Post Office address had been given to me, and we wrote five or six times to each other. I sent him a picture of my brother and me at Christmas, wearing “flight caps” we had bought at the local Army/Navy store. I thought he would be duly awestruck, and his next letter indicated he was. He told me he was putting a box together for me that would include a book about Vietnam and a map of the country. I waited for the box with his name in the upper left corner to appear, but it never did. The next time I saw his name, it was on the Killed in Action/Missing in Action list that I read religiously in the Trenton Times. Men like these -- the stories of D-Day, the Tuskegee Airmen, the Marines in the Pacific -- these were my heroes, and I promised them I would serve like they did.

One conversion experience later, I gave up my boyhood dreams of serving in the military and committed to pastoral ministry. Then I met my college. When I saw him in uniform heading to a weekend drill, a light went off, and my dream was rekindled. My Methodist denomination interviewed me in what was a three-day process. On the last day, each interviewer told me why I would make an excellent Army National Guard chaplain -- until we got to the Air Force chaplain, a colonel, who was the chairperson. He began by disagreeing with the others and stated he believed I would make a terrible Army chaplain. His opening line left me a little crestfallen and surprised the other committee members. Looking directly at me, he said, “And the reason you’ll make a terrible chaplain in the National Guard is because you need to be in the Air Force!”

About six months later, I walked into the active-duty chapel at McGuire Air Force Base as their newest Individual Mobilization Augmentee Air Force chaplain.

I loved it so much I immediately jumped on the opportunity to join the chapel staff of the 514th Airlift Wing – the Reserve Wing at McGuire. I was introduced to Mission Essential Ground Personnel Orders and began to fly with aircrews in the C-141 that fall of 1990. My wing commander asked me to fly on a mission during Desert Shield. He wanted a 514th chaplain to disembark in Saudi Arabia to be present with one of our medical squadrons when they would learn their orders were being extended from three months to a year. I was given a video camera and enough 15-minute blank videotapes to film each person saying hello to their families. Each member addressed a special envelope to their families, and my return C-141 crew guarded those three duffel bags of VHS tapes like they were gold. They were gold to the moms and dads who later wrote of their tremendous gratitude for receiving the video of their loved one right before the holidays. I’m not kidding when I said those loadmasters and the rest of the crew felt it was a particularly precious cargo and really a sacred mission to bring those tapes back. Years later, I would have that feeling again, only multiplied, when we brought home the heroes in American flag-draped transfer cases during the second Gulf War.

There were other missions while at McGuire, once into Mogadishu, Somalia. We landed, and I deplaned to stay while the crew did a quick turnaround and left me there -- as my orders allowed. Although I only stayed about 18 hours, I accomplished what I liked to do whenever I landed at any military installation. I went and found the chapel staff and asked, “Who chaplains the chapel?” This 6-foot, 7-inch chaplain would! I was someone outside their chain of command who wasn’t the one to write their performance reports. They could, and would, talk with me about their homes and wives and children and worries and fears -- and take advantage of my “privileged communication.” Other chaplains returned the favor to me years later in my next assignment that included Dover’s mortuary, but that’s another story.

Another memorable mission took me 700 miles or so north of the Arctic circle to Thule, Greenland. A week before we took off, I used the Defense Switched Network system and called the chapel stationed at Thule. As we talked, we realized that we had gone to chaplain school together at Maxwell AFB, Ala. I asked if there was anything that he wanted me to bring up there -- communion supplies, Bibles, or anything else for the chapel. He replied, “John, we’ve got everything we need for the chapel, but I tell you what I need, the little BX store here only sells Nabisco graham crackers, and I really need some Keebler ones. That’s what I really love!” I laughed, bought out two grocery stores near the base, and put them in bags marked “Wafers for the Chapel Staff.” I dropped all my cargo off to the loadmasters before the flight, and they later briefed me, “Chaplain, we put the communion supplies under this seat over here.” I just thanked them with a smile.

John Groth is chaplain for the AMC Museum Foundation.
Inside the Hangar: Our volunteers carry on!

Seven of the Air Mobility Command Museum’s volunteer cadre were honored during a March 25 award ceremony, receiving a total of 12 awards. One of those volunteers is under consideration for two additional awards by the 436th Airlift Wing.

The ceremony was hosted by Museum Director John Taylor, with 436th AW Director of Staff Craig Lindstrom also in attendance.

Taylor noted the recent hire of Les Polley as the Museum’s chief of restoration. Polley had served in the same capacity for the AMC Museum Foundation but moved over after the 436th Airlift Wing established a civil service position.

“Les has provided a diverse skill set and a ‘roll up the sleeve’ attitude for many years, and we are proud to have him as a full-time member of our team and ultimately see him receive the pay and benefits he deserves,” Taylor noted in prior written remarks.

Although the Museum hangar has been closed to visitors due to the continuing COVID pandemic, Taylor said the staff had continued work on new exhibits and new programs.

A new exhibit has been created around the B-17F, Sleepy Time Gal, Taylor said. A stage has been built around part of the aircraft, and several new mannequins, dressed in replica World War II uniforms, are being placed near the plane’s nose. The display eventually will show crew preparation as they head off to another mission over Europe.

The Museum recently was featured on “The 302,” a community-interest talk show featured on WDPN-TV.

Taylor noted the Museum’s Heritage Team has continued its work to bring the Air Force legacy story to active duty members of Dover AFB.

Restoration work is continuing on the KB-50J and the C-119B, with a painting contractor set to start work on the latter aircraft in April, he said.

Likewise, work to rehabilitate the main hallway floors and to construct a new welcome/reception area will start in April, Taylor added.

The recognition ceremony awarded 100 volunteer hours shirts to Bill Landmesser, Tom Galish, Ron Bauer, Bill Whited, Patrick O’Neill, and Frieda Herman. Sweatshirts recognizing 1,500 hours of volunteer service were presented to Tim Maurer and Bob Rossey.

Bill Lee
Volunteer of the Year – 2020
Volunteer of the Year – 436th AW/Staff Agency, 2020

A member of the Museum’s volunteer service for more than 10 years, Bill has been an integral part of restoration teams and a sought-after tour guide. He has accumulated more than 10,000 hours of service.

He is the restoration crew chief for five aircraft in the Museum Hangar, the PT-17, BT-13, L-2, TG-4A, and the CG-4A.

Bill has provided hundreds of educational tours and has been featured on local television programs highlighting the Museum.

Bill Whited
Volunteer of the Month – November 2020
Volunteer of the Quarter – January – March 2021
Nominee, Volunteer of the Quarter, 436th AW/Staff Agency
Nominee, Volunteer of the Quarter, 436th Airlift Wing

A volunteer since December 2015, Bill has accumulated more than 1,500 hours in that time. In addition to his role as a tour guide, he recently was selected as the AMC Museum’s official photo archivist.

Since his appointment, Bill has meticulously relabeled and categorized dozens of boxed historical photographs and documents. He’s also begun work to sort thousands of already-scanned images stored in the Museum’s hard drive to allow easier access to these rare documents, as well as scanning copies of the Dover AFB newspaper dating to the early 1960s.

Bob Rossey
Volunteer of the Month – December 2020 (No photo available)

Bob began volunteering at the AMCM in November 2017 and has garnered more than 1,600 hours in that time.

A dependable and dedicated tour guide, he has been a mainstay of the volunteer force, particularly during the ongoing pandemic. He continues to garner rave reviews from Museum visitors.

Ed Delawski
Volunteer of the Month – January 2021 (No photo available)

Ed began his volunteer work in June 2020 and already has more than 160 hours on the books. Considered a dependable member of the restoration team, he was instrumental in rebuilding the BC-248 radio for the C-119B Flying Boxcar.

Richard Johnson
Volunteer of the Month – February 2021

Rich has donated more than 300 hours to the Museum since beginning in October 2019.

He has worked tirelessly on fixing corrosion issues on the Museum’s two fighter aircraft and has rebuilt three corroded panels on the F-101.

Rich recently started similar work on the F-106.
Brian Roth
Volunteer of the Quarter, Fourth Quarter, October-December 2020
Volunteer of the Quarter, Fourth Quarter, 436th AW/Staff Agency
Volunteer of the Quarter, Fourth Quarter, 436th Airlift Wing

In almost five years of service, Brian has accumulated more than 2,000 hours of service to the Museum. He worked as part of the restoration team and is crew chief for the C-60 Lodestar. His Internet search skills have helped locate many rare instruments and gauges needed for restoration work on the KB-50J and the C-119B. His assistance in rehabilitating damaged air refueling panels and circuit breaker panels for the KB-50J helped restore those items to pristine condition.

Gary Kutsch
Volunteer of the Month – March 2021

Gary has donated more than 3,000 hours to the Museum since becoming a volunteer in 2010. As crew chief for the C-141A, “First of the Fleet” Starlifter, he conducted a significant cleaning effort as well as extensive corrosion repair work on the interior of that aircraft. He also is crew chief for the C-141B.

Gary was key to developing the Safety and Opening/Closing procedure books for the AMCM restoration team.

A Smile can help your AMC Museum Foundation

Every day, Americans all over are donating to their favorite causes.

Now, everyone can help support the Air Mobility Command Museum Foundation whenever they shop online through Amazon.com.

Under the Amazon Smile program, buyers who make any purchases through the online retailer can automatically donate to the Foundation.

There are no additional fees or charges involved, and the donation does not affect the price of anything ordered.

In just the last quarter of 2020, the AMC Museum Foundation received an additional $50.49 through AmazonSmile, on top of the $1,033.89 already donated by the organization.

The AMC Museum Foundation is the private, nonprofit organization that supports the Museum by providing funds for projects not generally paid for by the Federal government. The AMCMF operates on Dover Air Force Base with the permission of the commander, 436th Airlift Wing, and following Air Force instructions and local, state, and federal laws.

The AMC Museum is a part of the Air Force Heritage System, a sub-unit of the National Museum of the United States Air Force and is an official Air Force entity.

Strict standards

“AmazonSmile is an easy way for customers to support a favorite charitable organization every time they shop at smile.amazon.com,” an Amazon spokesperson told the Hangar Digest.

Under the program, launched in October 2013, AmazonSmile contributes 0.5 percent of eligible purchases to charities selected by its shoppers, including the AMCM Foundation.

Clients ordering through AmazonSmile receive the same product selection and pricing as when ordering via Amazon.com, and Amazon Prime members are still able to take advantage of all Prime member benefits as well.

As of November 2020, Amazon has donated more than $266 million to charities through AmazonSmile.

To ensure each selected group meets its standards, Amazon uses the GuideStar charity information reporting service as the authoritative source for publicly available charitable organization data.

“Any nonprofit that is listed by GuideStar and meets the eligibility criteria outlined in our participation agreement is available for customers to select as their AmazonSmile charity of choice,” the spokesperson said.

GuideStar data comes from validated sources, including Internal Revenue Service data on nonprofits and data reported directly from each organization. This information is verified and updated daily.

The Foundation’s financial documentation underwent a thorough review by GuideStar and was fully registered with AmazonSmile in 2015.

“There actually IS such a thing as ‘free money’ when you use AmazonSmile,” Don Sloan, president of the AMC Museum Foundation, said. “It’s easy and too often overlooked as a way to donate to the AMC Museum Foundation, helping to keep the AMC Museum Delaware’s number one free attraction.”

To start the donation process, simply visit smile.amazon.com, and type in “AMC Museum Foundation” when asked to provide the name of a nonprofit group.
Behind the scenes, Part I
Bill Lee — the AMCM’s answer to Mr. Clean

Well, he really doesn’t look anything like Mr. Clean of the television commercials.

However, when it comes to keeping airplanes looking spic-and-span, Bill Lee can teach the smooth-pated icon of American household cleaners a thing or two.

Lee, 73, of Smyrna, Del., has been volunteering at the Air Mobility Command Museum for more than a decade. For a good chunk of that time, he’s been the Museum’s semi-official airplane scrubber.

Lee has additional tasks to be sure, but making certain the airplanes inside the hangar look presentable is his raison d’etre at the Museum.

“When I think of the Museum, I think about the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. It’s spotless, absolutely gorgeous,” Lee said. “When I think of the thousands of hours spent restoring these planes, I want them to look as good as the day they were put on display.”

Lee’s work supplements a recently hired company contracted to wash down the aircraft on the outside ramp. But while that firm uses professional cleaning equipment, for the planes inside the AMCM hangar, Lee makes do with a vacuum, a rag, and a bucket of plain water.

Looking for volunteers

Unlike many of the Museum’s more than 140 volunteers, Lee never has served in the military.

“I went to Northeastern University in Boston, where I was in ROTC for three years,” he recalled. “I had planned on going into the military, but when I withdrew from the school in the early 1970s, the Vietnam War was winding down. So, I decided not to go in.”

Instead, Lee, who was born in Brooklyn, New York, and raised on Long Island, took a job with Westinghouse in its lighting division. Starting in the company’s customer service department in 1971, he went into sales and then marketing at its New Jersey headquarters.

“Most people think of lightbulbs in their homes or offices, but we made everything from miniature bulbs to those high-pressure sodium lamps used in streetlights and highways,” he said.

Lee spent his entire working career with Westinghouse and its successor, Philips Lighting, finally retiring in 2010. Looking for something new, he decided to move to Smyrna, Del.

“When I bought my place in Smyrna, my home in New Jersey was still on the market, so I traveled back and forth between there and here every week,” he said.

Being restless and finding himself more than a little bit bored, Lee sought out some way to channel his energy.

“I had been going over to Dover AFB and volunteering with the USO, where I saw stuff about the AMC Museum. I was told they always were looking for volunteers.”

A couple then-Volunteer Coordinator Jan Caldwell and decided to sign up as a tour guide. Along the way, though, he fell in with several other volunteers who were doing aircraft restoration.

“They told me they were working on a World War II CG-4A glider that was made out of fabric and wood,” he said. “When they asked, I said I like working with wood.

“Then they wanted to know when I could start, and I said, ‘When do you need me?’”

Lee was at the Museum’s restoration hangar the following day, and his efforts were quickly noticed.

“Bill’s mechanical expertise has contributed to several restoration projects, such as the design and build of unique engine inlet covers for the C-141A, C-141B, and C-54 aircraft,” Museum Director John Taylor said.

“The innovative and durable design has provided a low-cost engine inlet cover that prevents bird nesting and damage to historical Museum aircraft.”

His volunteer work saw Lee serving as a tour guide on Sundays while teaming up with renovation crews on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

On one slow Sunday afternoon, fate stepped in.

“A couple in their mid-30s came in,” Lee said. “They were in the Air Force Reserves and liked to do volunteer work. They were looking at the airplanes in the hangar when the woman said she wanted to get some of the dust off our C-47.”

“We worked on it a while, and it didn’t seem like we were doing much,” he said. “We were just pushing the dust around, and it didn’t look like it was coming off the plane.”

The following week, Lee cranked up a shop vac.

“We didn’t have any brush attachments for it,” he said. “I thought I shouldn’t use that on this plane because it would scratch and ruin the paint.”

Shortly afterward, Lee bought some attachments for the shop vac and tried his invention the following week.

“That really took a lot of dust off the plane,” he recalled.

For Lee, however, that wasn’t good enough.

“One day, I got a five-gallon bucket of water and some terry cloths,” he said. “I went over and wiped down about a 3-by-4-foot section of the fuselage on the right-hand side.

“I didn’t use any detergent because I didn’t know what it might do to the paint. By the time I’d finished with that small section, the water in the bucket was brown.”

Lee remembers former Director Mike Leister was astonished when he saw the clean section.

“He said, ‘The plane is green, not grayish!’”

“That’s when I realized I have to wash the entire plane.”

An inside job

Lee certainly couldn’t unspool a garden hose and clean the plane while inside the hangar, and moving it outside also was a non-starter. The only thing to do was to wash the entire aircraft by hand.

“I think it took me, between using the shop vac and hand washing, about 40 hours,” he recalled.

Lee now scrubs down the C-47 which has a wing area of 987 square feet -- at least once a year, as well as the much larger B-17F “Sleepy Time Gal.” In all, he’s responsible for sprucing up all seven aircraft exhibited within the hangar.

At first, Lee simply used a ladder and stretched as far as possible but then realized it was safe to walk on the aircraft wings.
Bill Whited loves taking photos and learning about the past, so it’s only natural he was asked to take over as the AMC Museum’s photography archivist back in October 2020.

“When [Museum Director John Taylor] asked if I was interested in taking over the job, I had to say yes,” Whited said.

“I have a Canon T3i digital camera that I carry in the console of my truck, and I’m constantly looking for opportunities to take interesting photos,” Whited said, estimating he’s probably shot more than 25,000 photos with that camera.

“John knew I enjoyed photography and history, so I jumped at the opportunity.”

Taylor said it was evident Whited was a perfect fit for the job.

“A special talent, apparent to all, was his photographic abilities,” Taylor said. “Each time you saw him, it was with a camera in his hand, producing quality results.”

Whited, 74, makes the 120-mile round trip between his North East, Md., home and the AMC Museum at least twice a week to tackle the job of scanning, digitizing, and indexing thousands of photographs and slides. The oldest date back to the beginnings of Dover Air Force Base in the early 1940s.

‘What’s a crew chief?’

Whited served a little less than four years in the Air Force, beginning in January 1966.

“I was scheduled to train as a heating and air conditioning specialist but was told they weren’t really needed,” he said.

With the Vietnam war in full swing, the Air Force was in dire need of aircraft mechanics, so Whited instead was offered a job as a crew chief.

“I said, ‘What’s a crew chief?’”

After jet mechanic tech school and an initial assignment in California, White found himself at Tuy Hoa Airbase, South Vietnam.

Home to the 31st Tactical Fighter Wing, the sprawling air base bordered the South China Sea and primarily was home to squadrons of F-100 Super Sabre aircraft.

“It wasn’t a bad place. Most people think of Vietnam as jungle, but they built Tuy Hoa on 35,000 acres of sand,” Whited recalled.

“Our barracks sat about 70 yards off the beach, but we weren’t even allowed to put our feet in the water because of the dangerous rip tides.”

One of Whited’s most vivid memories involved an F-100 trying to land while flying with an out-of-control engine.

“The pilot was coming in at 90 percent at 400 mph and couldn’t shut the engine off,” he said. “All of a sudden, he punched out, and that bird went straight into the ocean.”

Whited worked with aircraft ranging from helicopters to C-141 Starlifters, and once had an encounter with Nguyễn Văn Thiệu, then president of South Vietnam.

“He got off the airplane and came down the stairs,” Whited said. “I was standing at the front of the airplane.

“He looked like he was ticked off. When I saw him, I came to attention and popped a salute. He just glared at me, but he did salute me back.”

Tuy Hoa wasn’t a hotbed of enemy activity during Whited’s tour, although there was some occasional excitement. In one case, it wasn’t even the Viet Cong that set off alarms.

“Once a month, we had to go out and sit on the base perimeter in a foxhole,” Whited said, recalling another time. “We were given 90 rounds of live ammunition. One night I was sitting there and heard gunshots — bam, bam, bam.

“It turned out a guy in another foxhole had a snake climb across his shoulder. He jumped out and fired into the foxhole, trying to kill that snake.”

Whited had other duties that included helping wounded soldiers and carrying the deceased in body bags.

“I remember carrying them on stretchers up into a C-118 medevac. They still had blood oozing out of the bandages,” he said.

“There was one guy whose face looked like he’d been hit by a fragmentation grenade. That really shook me up.”

“One time, we had a C-130 pilot who refused to drop the cargo door, so we had to wrestle this body in through the passenger door,” Whited said. “The pilot said, ‘I don’t have time, just get him in.’

“I thought that was so rude.”

Whited’s time in the Air Force ended shortly after he completed his tour in Vietnam.

“A master sergeant at Tuy Hoa told me I needed to re-up, but I said I wasn’t a lifer,” he said. “I’d made staff sergeant in less than four years, but I married a girl who didn’t want to be a military wife.

“I was offered a $5,000 enlistment bonus, tax-free, but I was too dumb to take it. I could kick myself now.”

Coming to the Museum

It was while serving in Vietnam that Whited took up a serious interest in photography.

“I’d been using Instamatic cameras, but I got my first good camera, a Yashica, at the BX there in Vietnam,” he said.

Whited started a family in California, where his two daughters and grandchildren still live. He worked for Montgomery Wards and as a salesmen in a local home furnishing store but returned to his Maryland hometown in 1990. He continued in sales until retiring in June 2019—a total of 49 years.

“I’d heard about the AMC Museum, so, in the late 1990s, I came down with my Dad. I showed him the planes I worked on, and it blew his mind. We were coming down here four to six times a year, just so I could get my airplane fix.”

During one tour with his church group, Whited met then-Director Mike Leister, who told him the Museum was in dire need of volunteers. During another visit, he started chatting with the late Bill Maroon, who, impressed with Whited’s knowledge, also suggested he should become a volunteer.

“It wasn’t long until Whited signed up to become an AMCM tour guide.

“I love the interaction with the visitors, especially those who are really interested in the Museum,” he said. “You get kids who have a lot of knowledge, and to work with them is great. You can see the excitement, and that’s a neat, neat feeling.”

His job as Museum photo archivist allows Whited to indulge in his love of history and photography passion.

One major project is to save copies of the base Airlifter newspapers dating to 1962. Never intended to survive almost 60 years, the papers have turned brown and brittle, some literally falling apart despite Whited’s care while working with them.

AMCM photo archivist Bill Whited examines one of dozens of reels of 16mm film file in his office. Dating from the mid-1960s, the black-and-white movie includes shots of several historic aircraft at Dover, including the C-141, C-133, C-124, C-119, and T-33.
Like most of the world, the AMC Museum Foundation has been touched by the COVID pandemic. The primary impact has been financial. Museum ramp hours have been limited, and the inside Museum has been closed. Note that the Museum continues to open outside from 10 a.m. through 3 p.m. Thursday through Saturday, although the Open Cockpits Days set for April, May, and June have been canceled. The result has been that both our Museum Store and the in-museum donations, our primary funding avenues, have been extremely limited. The mobile store has more than earned its keep, thanks to Denise Miller, Bettie Campbell, and volunteer Patty Coffman. Due to aircraft restoration being limited, some of our expenses have had a corresponding decline, making it a bit of a bad news, good news situation.

Because of limitations on in-person meetings, the Foundation board members, like so many other Americans, have found Zoom. Talk about teaching old dogs new tricks! Nonetheless, our business is getting done. We’re beginning our Annual Summer Fundraiser this month, and we’ve just wrapped up our “winter” Annual Fundraising Campaign. More on that . . .

Our 2020-2021 Annual Fundraising Campaign has come to an end, raising more than $18,000 for the AMC Museum Foundation. The Campaign means you continue to support your 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 2020-2021 effort is another fundraising record for the Foundation, and it’s especially impressive since we’ve been in this very obvious COVID pandemic.

The campaign, our annual “winter” drive (October thru March), received donations from 140 supporters of the Museum. Seventy-five supporters donated at least $100, with 17 giving between $200 and $500! There were five members who each donated $1,000 to this year’s Campaign! Once again, you’ve shown us that generosity is certainly alive and well.

Among our donors were a Gold Eagle member and two Eagle members. Forty-one donors are Life members. Crew Members, Flight Crew Members, and Group Commander-level members made up most of the remaining donations. However, 12 of our donors are not even members – yet!

While most donations came from local members (Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania), we had some generous Foundation members from California, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Massachusetts, Montana, Michigan, North and South Carolina, North Dakota, Ohio, and Virginia. One of our members living in Scotland also made a generous contribution.

We also wanted to show our appreciation for your generosity. Anyone contributing $50 or more had the opportunity to win their choice of three prizes: an Aviation Art Giclée, a flight in a Schweizer 2-33 glider, or a ride in a PT-17 Stearman biplane. The winners, chosen at random, are Roger Aubrey of Lewes, Del. (*Aviation Art Giclée), Joe McDaniel of Dover, Del. (**Glider flight), and Michael Grady of Manasquan, N.J. (**Stearman flight). An added note -- although we didn’t plan it, we’ve recently welcomed last year’s Stearman-flight winner, Roger Cox, as our newest AMCM Foundation board member.

Anyone who contributed $100 or more to the Campaign will be awarded the AMCMF’s newly-minted challenge coin. The obverse features the AMCM logo, while the reverse is a bas-relief of a C-119B over an outline of the Korean peninsula. The coin honors the Flying Boxcar crews who helped rescue soldiers and Marines during the Battle of the Chosin Reservoir in 1950. The last remaining C-119B from that mission is under restoration at the AMCM and will soon be unveiled. More than 70 of these highly-polished, colorful coins will be shipped out soon.

Once again, Jeff Brown has done his usual outstanding job for this campaign. Jeff’s continued attention to detail and determined efforts have helped make this our most successful fundraiser ever. Thank you, Jeff!
A list of all this year’s Annual Fundraising Campaign donors follows:

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Lt. Col. Robert McKennett, USA, (Ret.)
Mr. Julian P. Metzger
Lt. Col. Richard G. Miller, USAF (Ret.)
Mr. Robert C. Monroe, USAF (Ret.)
Mr. Rodney W. Moore
Mr. Bruce Moran
Chi (Lt. Col.) Robert L. Nissly, USAF (Ret.)
Mr. James T. Noble
CMSgt. Jimmy Nolan, USAF (Ret.)
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Mr. Chuck Nunan
Mr. John M. Ogorzalek
Maj. Sage H. Olson
Mr. Andrew Ostrowski
CMSgt. Clem F. O’Toole, USAF (Ret.)
MSgt. William D. Owens
Mr. Robert J. Penny
Mr. Ralph Pettersen
Lt. Col. William Pfeiffer, USAF (Ret.)
Mr. Tyler Potocki
Mr. Leslie Potter
MSgt. Edwin A. Pratt, USAF (Ret.)
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Mr. Robbie Rankin
Mr. Harold T. Reece
Maj. Hans Reigle, USAF (Ret.)
Maj. Jack W. Reppert, USAF (Ret.)
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Mr. Ronal W. Smith
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Mr. C. Joseph Styles
Mr. Jonathan Suydam
Mr. David Tellers
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MSgt. Harry Van Den Heuvel, USAF (Ret.)
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Col. Gary A. Wagoner, USAFR (Ret.)
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Mr. Edwin T. Wall
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Mr. William Welser Jr.
Lt. Gen. William Welser III, USAF (Ret.)
Mr. David Welton
Ms. Shirley Whitney
Brig. Gen. Kennard R. Wiggins, DE ANG (Ret.)
MSgt. Robert H. Wikso, USAF (Ret.)
MSgt. Gene D. Williams
Ms. Beverly Williams
Mr. William H. Willis
Mr. Larry Wilson
CMSgt. Michael Wysong, USAF (Ret.)
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Fly—and stay—safe! Don Sloan
Lee

(Continued from Page 6)

He must be cautious, particularly while using a harness, he added. And he never steps on the aircraft fuselage, doing most of his work on his hands and knees.

When necessary, Lee calls on Museum Operations Manager Mike Hurlburt, who operates a lift to reach the highest points on each aircraft and so he can clean those planes hanging from the rafters.

“I don’t have a fear of heights, never have,” Lee said. “I ask Mike to give me a hand, and he’s always ready, willing, and able to help when we need to get the planes on the ceiling done.”

Lee also uses a self-designed brush system to get rid of the loose dust. Instead of a single brush, he uses two.

“I had a tiny brush head, but you can imagine how long it would take to clean the B-17 or the C-47,” he said. “I thought I could make something using some PVC pipe with two brushes attached.”

He bought the necessary parts at a local home improvement store and cobbled together the tool he needed.

“That really cut the time needed to clean the fuselage,” Lee said.

Lee also spruces up the interiors of both large aircraft.

“I pretty much just need to go inside and clean the Plexiglas on the B-17,” he said. “It doesn’t get as bad inside as the C-47 because we don’t have people going inside.”

No mud, no cobwebs

Although the C-47 and Sleepy Time Gal never will fly again, it’s essential to keep them in top condition, Lee said.

“You want to preserve them as best you can,” he noted. “We get veterans in who have served on every plane in this Museum. When they see them or get on them, you want them to see a really nice airplane. You don’t want mud caked on the floor or cobwebs hanging all over.

“The guys in the restoration shop try to make them as close to the original as possible, and I want them to stay that way. I want our visitors to leave here with good memories.”

Each aircraft in the Museum’s collection has a crew chief charged with keeping their aircraft presentable; Lee is crew chief on every aircraft inside the Museum hangar. Between professional cleanings, for those on the outside ramp, that often means washing windows and cleaning bird droppings.

“They take pride in what they do, and they want their planes to look good,” Lee said of his fellow volunteers. “That’s how we all are. It’s not just me. They take pride in keeping them up, and I do, too.”

When he’s not scrubbing down vintage aircraft and otherwise keeping the Museum neat and tidy, Lee relaxes by reading and zipping around Delaware on his motorcycle.

“When I was younger, I used to read a lot about the air war in Europe during World War II,” he said. “That really interested me, and now here I am in a Museum with a B-17 and a C-47!”

Lee wants someday to ride in one of the still flying B-17s or C-47s that regularly visit airshows.

“I’d love to get up in one of them some time,” he revealed. “I’m hoping someday I can do that.”

And how long will Lee continue to keep the Museum’s hangar aircraft as good-looking as they are?

“With God’s help, a long time!” he said. “My mobility is good, my health is good, and I’m not afraid of heights. I like to think that 10 years from now, I’ll be doing the same thing.

“I consider it a privilege to work here and to work with all the veterans we have over here,” Lee said.

Six-year-old Peter Metz of Washington, D.C., sent Editor Jeff Brown this drawing of a C-5 chasing bad guys while dropping tanks and paratroopers on the way. Peter and his Dad, Eric, visited the AMC Museum in late November 2020. In an accompanying letter, Peter wrote, “We had a great time at the air base.”
Whited

(Continued from Page 7)

“Those may be the only copies of these papers left on the planet,” he said. “It’s just history sitting there to a certain extent.”

Armed with a new scanner large enough to handle a full sheet of newsprint, Whited started work on the newspapers in February. He expects this to be a long-term project.

“I figure well over 70,000 scans will be needed,” he said. “It’s very time-consuming, delicate work.”

He’s noticed how things have changed in the Air Force over time.

“I look at the old Airlifters and the people, and it seems that back in the 1960s, a lot of guys were older when they made their third or fourth stripes. One photo had a caption that said this airman had to reenlist to get his third stripe.”

One issue, dated November 1962, contains an article about newly distributed 3x5-inch cards with data about what to do in case of a nuclear attack. These included information about shelter areas and space to record radiation exposure data.

Whited is saving the scans to a two-terabyte hard drive, but with the volume of high-resolution scans he’s recording, admits he might need more storage space.

“It’s history, and if we don’t get it all digitized, we’re going to lose it. It’s kind of sad,” he said.

“I could work on this 40 hours a week, and it still could take a couple of years.”

Just getting started

Whited already has gone through dozens of archived boxes of photos, placing Post-It notes on each with a description of its contents.

Some already have been digitized, but many more remain.

“I’d say at least anything to do with the aircraft we have at the Museum is in there,” he said.

“There are a lot of photos from early Dover Air Force Base history that [previous photo archivist Larry Koewing] already scanned.

“It’s going to take a long time to figure out what still needs to be scanned.”

Whited’s mission isn’t only to preserve the Museum’s old photos – he’s shooting new ones.

“I’ll be working to update the website,” he said. “Some of the photos we have on the web are probably five to eight years old, and the displays have changed around them.

“I’ve gone and reshoot a lot of those, and they’ll be going up on the web.”

The biggest problem Whited has found so is that in many cases, there’s no way of knowing when a photo was taken or who is in it.

One example was a photo showing members of the 61st Troop Carrier Group, a unit that flew C-47s during World War II.

(Continued from Page 7)

Hangar Digest

TAC Tanker veterans to meet May 15 at AMCM

Members of the TAC Tankers Association will hold their final reunion from May 13 to May 16, with several Delaware events planned. On May 15, the group will visit the AMC Museum and take part in the dedication of a KB-50J aircraft, the type of airplane flown and maintained by many Association members.

This airplane, one of only two remaining in the world, has been under restoration at the AMC Museum for two years. Association members and their guests will tour the Museum grounds, Museum Director John Taylor said. Other visitors to the Museum that day will be admitted on a first-come, first-served basis, and activities will be dependent on the number of persons at the Museum and the number of volunteers available. Participation may need to be limited in the event crowds get too large, Taylor added.

All visitors must remember that COVID protocols are in force, meaning everyone in attendance must wear a protective mask and observe social distancing practices.

For more information about the TAC Tanker Association, visit www.tactankers.com.
Aftermath: Persian Gulf War

Operation Provide Comfort: Winning the peace

By Jeff Brown

The defeat of Saddam Hussein’s forces following the end of Operation Desert Storm brought unbridled relief from the multinational coalition formed against him in late 1990.

First came the months-long buildup of troops and equipment, dubbed Desert Shield, followed by five weeks of combat that saw the liberation of occupied Kuwait and the advancement of coalition forces deep into Iraq.

But while American and other forces were eager to return home, and in fact, were quickly withdrawn, the ethnic minority Kurdish population along Iraq’s border with Turkey and Syria faced another problem: the threat of retaliation by Saddam’s remaining forces.

It was a dire humanitarian situation that the United States and its allies acknowledged only reluctantly and after considerable public pressure.

Attacks on the Kurds

The Kurds had good reason to be concerned. Saddam’s forces had continually harassed them through the 1980s and 1990s, including a deadly 1988 chemical attack on the town of Halabjah.

Although Saddam’s forces had been stilled in the southern part of Iraq following a ceasefire at the end of February 1991, they remained murderously active in the north. The Kurds were left with little choice but to try and escape his wrath. But they had nowhere to go. Turkey’s government, which saw the Kurds as a threat and already had hosted almost 20,000 refugees, refused to allow more to enter the country. This forced nearly one million Kurds fleeing the Iraq army into camps along the Turkish/Iraqi frontier, where they faced exposure and starvation due to a lack of food and water.

The United Nations finally acted on April 5, 1991, passing a resolution calling on Saddam to leave the Kurdish population in peace. The resolution was the genesis of Operation Provide Comfort.

President George H.W. Bush was forced to take action after vociferous Congressional criticism about the burgeoning refugee crisis and media reports bringing news of the situation into American homes.

On April 16, 1991, Bush announced some of the withdrawing coalition forces instead would stay in Iraq to gather the scattered Kurds into refugee camps. They would be supported by air and ground forces which Bush promised would retaliate if the Iraqi military attacked refugees.

The United Nations established a no-fly zone over the border area. American, British, and French forces began a massive effort to airdrop relief supplies to groups of Kurds scattered throughout the mountains.

In his announcement, Bush promised the refugees could feel safe under the umbrella provided by the coalition’s military forces.

“I will simply suggest that these people will be protected,” he said. “We are not going to say to them, ‘Come down from the mountains, and you will be protected,’ and then not protect them.”

Action at Incirlik

Relief efforts coalesced around Incirlik Air Base, Turkey, because its well-developed infrastructure could support the mission’s necessary aircraft, personnel, and supplies.

However, other bases were needed along the Turkish border and inside Iraq itself. Turkey agreed to supply airfields at Batman and Diyarbakir, much closer to the border region. Humanitarian Service Support Base-1 was established near Silopi, a small farming village in the Taurus mountains just north of the Iraqi-Turkish border. Another HSSB was set up at Yuksekova, where a highway was turned into an improvised landing strip for coalition aircraft.

Being near the Iraqi border was just about the only factor in Silopi’s favor when it came to choosing a base for the relief operation, now dubbed Combined Task Force Provide Comfort. The arid climate birthed frequent dust storms, and the area’s sporadic rains created a quagmire of mud, which quickly gave way, again, to dirt and choking dust. Most roads were only packed dirt that threw up powdered soil as they were traveled. There were no railways or airfields and only a single highway running through the area.

The highway crossed the only bridge over the Khahur River that served as the border between the two nations and provided access to refugee areas inside Iraq.

The Army’s 10th Special Forces Group coordinated the relief effort, establishing a headquarters at a small, unused Turkish compound on the two-lane highway’s east side. Construction began on a tent city across the road.

Soon after Bush’s announcement, about 200 airmen from Ramstein and Bitburg air bases in Germany arrived at the site, some having first deployed to Incirlik, about 440 miles to the west. Adding to the 1,800-person tent city, the airmen set up a fuel storage system to service Army and Marine helicopters, built security fences and checkpoints, upgraded some of the existing roads, and made improvements to buildings in the compound on the other side of the highway.

The tent city at Incirlik Air Base, Turkey, was home to deployed airmen from many different bases. Some of the tents sported wooden floors, decks, fencing and camo netting. This group was deployed from Dover Air Force Base, Del.
The patch for Operation Provide Comfort included representations of the Turkish and Iraqi flags and the mountainous terrain where some of the refugees were forced to live. Deployed personnel wore the patch above their nametapes on the BDU blouse. Everyone also wore an American flag, sewn facing forward, on their right sleeve.

To keep track of their deployed personnel, each service had a dedicated crew of human resources specialists. For the Air Force, that job fell to Personnel Support for Contingency Operations, or PERSCO, teams. Each major base in Europe had a PERSCO team, usually consisting of a senior non-commissioned officer, at least one staff sergeant, and several airmen. Backed by specialized training at Keesler AFB, Miss., the PERSCO team trained together, and maintained their field equipment, consisting mainly of office supplies and a unique computer system, dubbed the Combat Personnel Control System, or CPCS.

Once qualified, PERSCO team members received a Special Experience Identifier marking them as trained and ready for deployment. While deployed, the PERSCO team acted as a bare-bones Consolidated Base Personnel Office (CBPO, now called the Military Personnel Flight).

The boys from Dover
It wasn’t long after Provide Comfort got underway the 86th Mission Support Squadron’s CBPO at Ramstein was tasked to send a PERSCO team member to Incirlik Air Base. Having been at Incirlik once before – on leave and many years earlier – I volunteered for the job.

This deployment was to be different than what I had trained for, however. I was to go alone, without my team members, and I was to take no specialized equipment. I was, however, issued a large bottle of malaria pills.

I bid a temporary farewell to my family, turned over the reins of my office to my assistant NCOIC and on May 16, 1991, boarded a C-141 to Incirlik.

To say I was disappointed when I arrived in-country would be an understatement. It seemed just like another day at Ramstein. Although many deployed personnel were living in a tent city, the area was right next to Incirlik’s very modern family housing area. We had access to all base facilities, including the Exchange and Commissary, as well as nights at the NCO Club. We even could venture off base, where I eventually bought a gold necklace for my wife.

Seeing as I called Delaware my home, I was more than happy to run into airmen deployed from Dover Air Force Base. They mainly were airlift support personnel and had great connections with the aircrews flying into Turkey from the First State. It wasn’t uncommon for them to dine on hot food from Dover’s chow hall or restaurants near the base.

However, as far as the job was concerned, I wasn’t pleased. It was almost too cushy; I was working in an air-conditioned office at the Incirlik CBPO alongside its permanent party personnel and one or two similarly-deployed personnel such as myself. Although we ensured Air Force personnel downrange were kept up to date, and Headquarters U.S. Air Forces in Europe had all the information it needed, I had a lot of time on my hands.

Except for sleeping on a cot in a tent, the days weren’t much different from a typical day at Ramstein, and the duties not commensurate with my rank as a master sergeant.

I felt like a genuine member of the U.S. Chair Force. So, after a phone call or two back to Ramstein, I got new orders and soon was packing my bags for a trip to Silopi.

Silopi-bound
The flight from Incirlik into Iraq began with a three-hour hop to Diyarbakir aboard a C-130 Hercules. Our stop only was long enough to drop off some cargo, stretch my legs, and pose for a photo on the airfield.

Another three-hour ride followed to our destination, an airstrip outside Sirsenk, Iraq. The C-130 flew low, often below some of the desert mountaintops, a step necessary to avoid becoming a target for any overeager Iraqi artillerymen still in the area.

At Sirsenk, it became pretty evident that Saddam had been a great believer in civil construction projects if nothing else. A passenger terminal for the dictator’s exclusive use still was under construction. At least one of Saddam’s opulent palaces – there were several in the area – topped a nearby mountain peak.

The incomplete terminal was a curious mixture of manual and modern construction methods plus an over-the-top display of the dictator’s outsized ego. The roof of what appeared to be the control tower was held up with hand-hewn wooden poles, while one of the rough cement walls was partially finished in gleaming black marble.

Those marble tiles, each roughly a foot square, became popular souvenirs for some passing through the terminal. I’d get a better look at the terminal in weeks to come.

It had been a long day, but since I was transiting through, it made sense to pass the night in the terminal itself. I doffed my combat boots, rolled up my BDU uniform blouse as a pillow, and caught a few hours of sleep on a cot hidden in an unfinished stairwell.

The following day I boarded an Army Black Hawk UH-60 helicopter for the trip to Silopi. This meant I’d be reversing course since we’d headed east from Incirlik to Sirsenk. Silopi was about 80 miles the other way.

The ride was exhilarating, to say the least. I’d never flown in a helicopter, not to men-
tion making my first trip in one of the military’s hottest rotary aircraft. The UH-60 has a top speed of more than 200 mph, and it felt as if we were cruising close to that as we headed west. The pilots deftly guided the craft fast and low through the Iraqi mountains, again to avoid any trigger-happy Iraqi soldiers.

Although the coalition forces had established the no-fly zone over northern Iraq, that didn’t mean Saddam’s military had abandoned the area. We learned of many instances where coalition members encountered Iraqi soldiers and secret police actively working to interfere with the relief effort and harass Kurdish refugees.

The Blackhawk passed over several refugee camps on the way; these were generally laid out with little discernable pattern, although the mixture of civilian and military shelters created an odd patchwork scene below our flight path. However, few residents could be seen either because of the heat already making itself known in the early day or because they associated the sound of helicopters with the violence of Saddam’s regime.

On the ground

As we approached, I could see Camp Silopi laid out in a grid of green general-purpose military tents, one of which soon would become my temporary home. My UH-60 transport landed in a cleared area north of the compound, which included at least five large fuel bladders, set partially into the earth, containing gasoline for the helicopters serving the camp. There was no room for even a rudimentary landing strip for fixed-wing aircraft, meaning all air travel to Silopi was by helicopter.

The two-lane highway separated this area from the administrative compound, with entrances to both through guarded gates. A large assortment of heavy-duty civilian trucks constantly lined the south side of the roadway, headed toward Iraq.

I was introduced to the rest of the PERSCO team, but after 30 years, unfortunately, I do not remember their names. The team chief was an Air Force captain who served on the staff of Army Brig. Gen. Harold E. Burch and a young senior airman who expertly acquainted me with the daily routine.

Our office was half of a 32x16-foot tent we shared with the local Red Cross representative. Like all tents at Silopi, ours had a wooden floor and flaps that could be raised to let in whatever breeze might pass through. There was no air conditioning, but a fan helped keep temperatures tolerable.

The CPCS was the center of our daily activity. It was a large gray box with a primitive hard drive we pulled out each evening and stored in a sealed transport case. I often kept my 35mm camera with the hard drive as it was one of the camp’s few dust-free spots.

The tiny information screen used orange lettering on a back background, and the keyboard was covered with plastic to keep the ever-present dust from fouling its innards.

Our office was just across the dirt street from our quarters. “Home” was another green tent, and each of us had a single cot from our quarters. We slept under mosquito netting, usually in a T-shirt and shorts. We spiked our combat boots on wooden dowels as a guard against various desert critters.

The temperature was a dry heat and not overly uncomfortable. We worked in our T-shirts, only donning uniform blouses on rare excursions outside the compound. There was no saluting inside the wire, but in showing that some things never change, our Boonie hats always were required when outside our tents.

Because Comfort had been so hastily organized, most of us arrived in Iraq wearing only the standard green battle dress uniforms, or BDUs, of the time. Very few were sporting the desert-style camouflage issued when serving during Desert Storm. Despite being in a designated hostile fire area and receiving hostile fire pay, we went about unarmed and without any kind of protective gear even when leaving the compound.

We had no desert-style footwear, only standard-issue black combat boots, which we did not worry about keeping shined. Laundry day meant scrubbing dirty uniforms in a bucket of soap and water; they’d be hung on our tent ropes and dry within 15 minutes.

In an experiment, I borrowed an egg from the mess tent to see if it would cook in the triple-digit heat. Lacking a solar oven, I used my aluminum mess kit; after being exposed to the sun for a while, the egg became a thoroughly unappealing gelatinous mess that soon found its way to a trash can.

Despite there being no Exchange services, we were expected to maintain a military appearance. We used bottled water to shave, and my haircuts were taken while sitting outside in a folding metal chair and given by an Iraqi barber using manual clippers.

Our one major rainstorm turned the dust into mud that clung stubbornly to our boots but which the returning sun quickly dried out. Dust storms meant we had to secure the CPCS inside its sealed container quickly. During one storm, our mess tent — actually several tents tied together — completely upended and tossed on its side. To their credit, the civil engineers and cooks got things back together in a very short amount of time.

Our daily routine was just that — routine. We’d collect information on Air Force personnel coming and going, give that to the captain, who’d pass it on during Burch’s daily staff meetings. We’d also forward this information back to Incirlik and Ramstein.
We had one or two promotions among the deployed airmen, but those individuals already knew they’d been selected for advancement. Our main job was to verify they hadn’t been redlined by their commanders back home and then officially notify their superiors they could don their new stripes.

Luckily, we had no personnel emergencies requiring the Red Cross to get involved or anything to point someone had to be sent home ahead of schedule.

As with everything else, communal showers were inside a large tent. Getting clean meant walking to and from the shower in flip-flops. Usually, your feet were filthy again by the time you got back to your tent.

Just a day or two after arriving, I made the mistake of accidentally ingesting some of the local water while brushing my teeth. It wasn’t long before I was deathly sick and confined to my cot for two full days. Lesson learned; from then on, I used nothing but bottled water.

Everyone at Silopi was constantly reminded to stay well hydrated; there were signs everywhere with remonstrations to drink water regularly. Refrigeration units were scattered around that held hundreds of cases of bottled water; I usually carried a bottle in each leg pocket of my BDU.

There was no alcohol allowed, although we were given two low-alcohol beers to celebrate Independence Day, July 4. As I don’t drink beer, I gave my ration to a British soldier, who was both appreciative and amused by the gesture from a former “colonial.”

Inside Iraq

Because we kept tabs on Air Force personnel scattered at other forward bases, I made several trips inside Iraq, revisiting Sirsenk and Camp D.W. Sommers in Zakho. These excursions gave me a chance to see and visit the Kurds living in tents in the shadows of Saddam’s many palaces throughout the region. To survive, these proud people had to take advantage of food and supplies from Americans and other coalition nations.

We encountered Kurds scattered at other forward bases, I made frequent use of his four Sirsenk-area palaces, and the noise from his parties could easily be heard in the valley below.

Although some of the food provided to these refugees proved unsuitable to Kurdish palates and religious beliefs, we found packages of peanut M&M candies from our MREs were very popular.

We often passed the gates of Saddam’s palace compounds, heeding orders not to go inside. An agreement with the Iraqi government had assured the buildings off-limits, a point often punctuated by an armed Republican Guard member seated outside each palace gate.

My deployment allowed me to see how other Air Force units did their jobs. Twice I went out with explosive ordnance disposal experts to eliminate the many unexploded munitions left behind by Iraqi troops. One bunker atop a mountain near Sirsenk was littered with Soviet-made rocket-propelled grenades, many still in their shipping tubes. I helped pick up some of the explosives, heeding the EOD troops’ warning about which were safe to move and which had to be left alone.

After rigging a pile of these munitions with C-4 explosive, we moved down the mountain, and I was given the job of blowing them up. Unlike old movies where someone would give a mighty heave on a plunger, I pushed a button, sending a radio signal to a detonator embedded in the C-4. The explosion was quite impressive but had the unintended effect of setting some of the desiccated local fauna afire.

One of the more unusual personnel actions I managed was an open-air re-enlistment ceremony near Sirsenk. The enlisting officer was given all the required paperwork, and the ritual was conducted with the necessary solemnity.

The only difference was that it took place in front of one of Saddam’s ubiquitous palaces. The American flag — required by regulation — was in the form of a Velco-backed shoulder patch removed from the enlistee’s uniform, held up by a friend.

That trip to Sirsenk took place in the middle of July and in conjunction with the end of the coalition’s mission in that region of the country. Since securing the area months earlier, Army engineers had turned the former airport into a bustling mini-city. They’d repaired and expanded the bombed-out runways, set up fuel storage areas, a laundry facility, a small Exchange, and even air-conditioned tents.

I watched from the air terminal as the tents and other temporary buildings making up the sprawling camp were dismantled, stowed,
and trucked away. Soon there was nothing left; even the trash was cleaned up.

As I never had the chance to qualify on the M998 HMMWV, or Humvee, trips to and from Sirsenk meant I needed a driver. He was a staff sergeant, again whose name I have forgotten, who had made the trip many times before and knew the area well. Together, we experienced the first real indicator of just how dangerous it could be to travel unpaved Iraqi roads.

The drive from Sirsenk to Silopi was made over a well-paved highway that wound through the ever-continuous desert terrain. Our last mission trip was uneventful until we rounded a curve about halfway home and encountered an unexpected roadblock. The dozen well-armed men looked as if they’d have no trouble handling a pair of weaponless Americans.

When the staff sergeant brought the Humvee to a stop, it became evident the men were Kurdish fighters, although we never really learned why they were out on that roadway. We were surprised when one of them, who spoke good English, reached into a vehicle and pulled out a Kodak instant camera. Everyone posed, smiling, and we went on our way.

Another indicator of why we were receiving hazardous duty pay took place a few nights later in mid-July when shots rang out near the camp, signaling a skirmish, probably between Turkish soldiers and Kurdish fighters. Before we knew it, bullets were flying over our heads, with tracer rounds marking their paths.

It wasn’t my finest hour. Along with several others, I was standing in the bed of a pickup, watching the action, and oblivious to the fact I could have been the unintended target of one of those rounds.

Brig. Gen. Burch, however, realized what was going on and stormed into the area, mad as hell, ordering us all back into our tents. We complied, of course, even while figuring a wall of tent cloth wasn’t going to be much protection.

The night also saw the destruction of a nearby Turkish electrical station, which blew up in a rather spectacular display of blue fire.

Heading home

A little more than two months after arrival, my tour at Silopi came to an end as its mission wound down and was turned over to United Nations control. Our PERSCO tent was emptied, and the CPCS was packed up and shipped out on one of the last transports. The senior airman left with it, although our captain remained behind for a bit longer.

My exit came on July 21 via a U.S. Army Chinook helicopter. Because the Sirsenk base had been abandoned, it was a direct flight from Silopi back to Incirlik. Again, I had the chance to marvel at the terrain, particularly as we flew along a river channel, again to avoid any trigger-happy militia members.

Along the way, the pilot decided to show off his flying prowess by slowing down and hovering over a wider part of the river. Hanging out one of the troop doors, I watched as he slowly lowered the 12-ton aircraft down to the surface, stopping just as the tires got wet from the churning waters. Then it was back into the air, headed for Incirlik.

I had to wait another day or two before boarding a flight back to Ramstein. After landing, the pilot lowered the cargo ramp as we taxied back to the passenger terminal, giving us all a breath of fresh German air. After a handshake from the commander of the 86th Fighter Wing, it was a quick ride home and a reunion with my family. I luxuriated in my first decent shower in months and a week’s time-off before reporting back to work.

Although my tour was insignificant compared to that of the many thousands of American personnel taking part in Operation Provide Comfort, it highlighted the role of support personnel in such operations. It remains a vivid and cherished memory of my military service. It was the only time in 22 years I was in harm’s way, and it gave me a much greater appreciation for those frontline men and women who risk their lives every day. I proudly kept my Operation Provide Comfort patch on my BDU uniform until the day I retired, and it remains there still.
AROUND AND ABOUT YOUR AMC MUSEUM

The background cloud photograph on this page was taken at Omaha Beach, Normandy, France.

Wilmington, Del.’s Alex Lopez brought kids Ciro, Enzo and Sol to visit their tio (uncle) at Dover Air Force Base and to tour the AMCM. “The kids really, really enjoyed themselves,” Alex said.

Held by his father, Lee, Judah Rogers snaps a quick salute. The two were paying their first visit to the Museum from their home in Mount Holly Springs, Pa. “I really like the Air Force,” Judah said, adding his favorite sights were the C-5A and the nearby Minuteman missile display.

Jack Lefkowitz and Mary Lou Schoff, both of Wilmington, Del., take a quick photo in the shadow of the AMCM’s KC-135E. “We used to come down here at least twice a year,” Jack said. “We’d ride our motorcycles.” The Stratotanker and the C-121 Constellation are his favorite aircraft at the AMCM. Explained Jack, “Your Connie once was used as a restaurant up in Penndel, Pa. I used to drive through that area all the time.”

A bright, sunny – but somewhat windy – Saturday greeted first-time AMCM visitors Juan Santiago, Jennifer Colato, and Juan Santiago Jr. The family toured under the guidance of tour guide Patrick O’Neill. “It’s amazing, seeing all of these planes from all different years,” Juan Jr. said. He was at the AMCM celebrating his 12th birthday.
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