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., Wednesday through Sunday. It is closed on Mondays, Tuesdays, and all federal holidays except Veterans Day. For more information, call 302-677-5938 or 302-677-5991.

We like to say we are a window to your Air Force. Let us know how we can continue to improve our outreach and family-friendly experience.

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Aerospace education
AMCM Quonset huts become learning centers

The Quonset hut, the corrugated steel building seen on almost every military base during World War II, has made a comeback at the Air Mobility Command Museum.

Two huts have been built at the facility’s southern parking lot; one houses the Museum’s aircraft engine collection, the other contains two classrooms used for its teaching programs.

“Over the years, we’ve had educational outreach programs that have included summer camps which are extremely popular,” AMCM Deputy Director Eric Czerwinski said. “We were trying to use our conference room and adapt our existing space, but [the available space we had] wasn’t fair to the kids or the visitors, so we decided to convert one of our Quonset huts into a classroom.”

The classrooms allow the Museum to offer educational programs while observing COVID restrictions. One room can be configured for up to 12 students and the other for adult learning and other programs. Each are separate, climate-controlled structures built within the Quonset hut, which keeps conditions comfortable during Delaware’s steaming-hot summers and chilly winters.

“The team worked very hard to get the classrooms ready for this year’s camp,” volunteer educator Patricia Papineau, Ed.D, said. “The classrooms can also be used for homeschooled students who come to the Museum that will meet the needs of the homeschooling parents in history, science, and math using the artifacts of the museum as instructional tools.”

Summer camp contributions

This year, the Museum used the Quonset hut classroom to bring back its popular Aviation Summer Camp after being unable to hold the program in 2020.

“Education is important for any field,” Papineau said. “[Students] have the opportunity to learn everything they can and decide on what they love because when they do what they love, they’ll never work a day in their life. It’s an experience not every kid gets.”

This year’s program, which ended in August, explored the history of aviation, of Dover Air Force Base and of the Air Force itself, as well as various careers available in aeronautics, she said. Using the STEAM practices of science, technology, engineering, art, and math, the camps served 90 students over eight courses, Papineau added.

Students learned about the four forces of flight, the importance of the weight and balance of cargo, and load and flight planning. During visits with the 436th Logistics Readiness, Aerial Port, and the 9th Airlift squadrons, they spoke with loadmasters, flight engineers, fleet personnel, pallet loaders and experienced the capabilities of the Air Mobility Command’s 60k aircraft cargo loader/transporter.

Campers learned the development of aircraft propulsion and explored various aircraft and their engine capabilities. They developed a flight plan, conducted a pre-flight check, tested their skills as a pilot on simulators, and flew in a Cessna 172 with the Dover AFB Aero Club.

The students also learned and practiced interviewing skills. Using video equipment purchased through a grant from the Roy Klein Foundation, campers conducted video interviews with active duty and retired military personnel and first responders. These interviews provided the young campers with insight into various careers and how to achieve their goals.

“The 2021 Aviation Summer Camp was made possible by the dedication of more than 30 AMC Museum volunteers and staff members,” Papineau said.

The entire museum team reflected the selfless dedication and contributions of the late Richard Caldwell, originator of the AMC Museum Summer Camp program, which now is in its 18th year, she added.

From cockpit to pulpit
Ex-Dover flier trades wings for a priest’s collar

It’s not at all unusual to see a Roman Catholic priest in uniform – there are dozens throughout the Air Force. It is, however, much harder to find someone who, after serving his country for 20 years, decides to enter the priesthood. Father Joseph P. La Mar, M.M., might be the only man who fits that description.

La Mar was both an Air Force navigator and pilot during a two-decade career that took him to trouble spots all over the world. After leaving the service, he became a missionary, sharing the Church’s teachings to the indigenous peoples of Guatemala.

Now 87 years old, La Mar is a Maryknoll priest living in a religious community in Westchester County, New York. He recently visited Dover Air Force Base, where he had served two separate tours, and, accompanied by two fellow Maryknoll brothers, stopped in to reminisce at the Air Mobility Command Museum.

‘What a gift!’
La Mar’s path to the priesthood was not preordained, but the seeds of his future were planted early.

Born in 1934 to an unmarried mother, La Mar never met his biological father. Early in life, however, he was taken in and eventually adopted by a foster family who showed him what true love and compassion could be.

“They were Irish Catholics and pretty religious,” La Mar said. “I was very much involved in the faith of the family. I never gave that a second thought. You’d go to Mass every Sunday, and attend Catholic grammar school during the week, and the nuns were always there teaching good morals and manners.

“I picked up the faith through the family, and I hung on to it,” he said. “Only looking back on it now do I realize how much love there was in that family. There were problems, of course, but a lot of love for one another.”

“I look at it now and think, what a gift!”
Growing up in such a faith filled environment, La Mar seemed headed for a secular life.

“When I was 11, I felt a strong calling to become a priest working in Latin America,” he said. Yet he dismissed the idea as a call from his mother and not from God, and so, following the lead of an older brother, he opted for a more traditional career.

“My sense was to go to college and become an engineer, but I didn’t really know what all that meant,” La Mar said. “I was an immature 17-year-old and way over my head in understanding life.”

Then an ugly world situation redirected La Mar’s life.

“I was going to school part-time as I could not afford full-time tuition, and with the Korean War going on, the draft board was after me. As a part-time student, I was not eligible for a draft deferment.

“I was smart enough to realize that I didn’t want to be cannon fodder for the Army, so I decided to go into the Air Force,” he said.

The young man went to a military processing center in New York City and by the end of the day had taken his enlistment oath.

“That was on a rainy Friday in January and by Monday I was on a bus to Sampson AFB, New York for basic training.” La Mar said. “I was just a few weeks away from turning 19.”

After completing basic, he was assigned to Keesler AFB, Biloxi, Miss., to study electronics.

“My flight from Sampson to Keesler on a civilian C-47 was a first for me; I fell in love with flying,” he said.

During technical school, La Mar qualified for training as an aviation cadet, and was told he could choose to become either a pilot or a navigator. Although he preferred to become a pilot, he picked the latter.

“I was told it would be at least a year to enter pilot training but that I could go right away if I wanted to be a navigator,” he said. “When I was told it would lead to a commission, I signed up for navigation training.”

Receiving his second lieutenant’s bars in August 1954, La Mar served on a combat crew flying the RB-47 bombers, a photo reconnaissance variant of the B-47 Stratojet.

RB-47 crews routinely flew classified missions on information-gathering missions over and adjacent to the former Soviet Union.

After about five years in the Strategic Air Command, La Mar had the chance to cross train as a pilot. He made it into the program, just squeaking in under the 27-year-old age limit.

After graduation, he was assigned to Dover AFB in 1960, flying the C-124 Globemaster II with the 20th Military Airlift Squadron.
La Mar flew as often as he could, eventually qualifying as an aircraft commander and then instructor pilot.

“I enjoyed Dover,” he said. But he found living in the bachelor officer’s quarters on base a bit boring, so he found a house with some friends in downtown Dover. The group spent their off-hours boating and skiing on Silver Lake the city’s manmade lake.

While at Dover, La Mar flew mostly to Europe, but also responded to crises in the Congo, Dominican Republic and other trouble spots. Additionally, he flew support missions as part of the United States’ response to the 1961 construction of the Berlin Wall and during the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis.

“We were tasked with keeping the airways between the west and Berlin open,” he said. “We had a requirement to fly in each corridor once a week.”

On one of those missions, La Mar’s aircraft carried a fuel truck to be used in the refueling of Air Force One when President John F. Kennedy delivered his “Ich bin ein Berliner” speech in June 1963.

Other plans

La Mar’s initial time at Dover came to an end in 1966 when he was assigned to Norton AFB, San Bernadino, Calif., to aid in that installation’s transfer from the Air Logistics Command to the Military Airlift Command. Norton became one of six MAC strategic airlift bases supporting military airlift requirements into Southeast Asia.

La Mar was one of six aircraft controllers assigned to the base’s airlift command post, which previously had operated out of Illinois and another California installation.

“I was part of the initial cadre to get it moving, and was on duty the night we took over the base,” he said.

But La Mar’s tour in California was to be short-lived. Instead of just sending aircraft to Southeast Asia, he soon was headed there himself.

“I was at Norton six months when an order came in to send one guy to Vietnam,” he recalled. Since all his contemporaries had purchased homes and enrolled their kids in school, as the only unmarried officer in the group, he volunteered to take the slot.

In Vietnam, La Mar was in charge of a small contingent of U-3 Cessna “Blue Canoe” aircraft. The planes were used primarily for courier missions between bases, but also flew the occasional intelligence mission.

“If there was a battle going on and the commander needed reconnaissance photos, we’d airdrop the container carrying the photos over the battle scene,” he said.

“We could fly 100 mph at about 100 feet, which seemed slow as hell, and then drop off the parachute container, hopefully into the hands of the commander.

“It was fun until [the Viet Cong] started shooting back.”

After his tour, La Mar returned to Dover, where he qualified as an aircraft commander on the newly-assigned C-141 Starlifter.

A few years later, he was assigned to MAC headquarters at Scott AFB, Belleville, Ill., sharing with two other officers the scheduling of MAC’s cargo fleet. Finally, after three years at Scott and nearing his 20-year anniversary of military service, La Mar applied for retirement.

But his boss, Major Gen. Clare T. Ireland, then deputy chief of staff, operations, at HQ MAC, wanted him to stay in uniform.

“He told me he was going to see General [Paul K.] Carlton, the commander of MAC and convince him to make me a full colonel on the next promotion cycle,” La Mar said.

That news came as a complete surprise.

“That a two-star would be asking for me to remain in the Air Force, I was thinking, Wow!” he said. “I was impressed that he came down to talk to me and that he asked me my opinion.”

La Mar said, “Well, I’d had this idea of becoming an ordained missionary. I wanted to do the priestly training and then go to a Latin American country and offer my services to a local bishop.

“Attractive as his offer was and scared as I was in fulfilling my intentions, I’d made that commitment to myself, and so I told the general, ‘Thank you very much, but I have other plans.’”

On to the Petén

Having dismissed the idea of becoming a missionary priest in his pre-teen years the idea had constantly blossomed during La Mar’s military career.

“At the time, I believed that becoming a priest was my mother’s vocation and not mine,” he said. “But while attending my brother’s ordination at Maryknoll in 1966, I got fired up about my repressed call to priesthood.

Even though he already had 13 years in uniform, La Mar gave serious thought to leaving the Air Force.

“I asked about joining the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers and the long and short of it was that at age 32, I was too old,” he said.

That was about the same time La Mar had received his orders for Vietnam. He reasoned he still could answer the call to serve by waiting the necessary seven years for retirement. Then, he thought, he could realize his desire to serve as a missionary.

“Since I was too old to enter missionary priesthood training but enriched by retirement pay, I thought I’d go through all the necessary training and also have the necessary funds to support myself,” he said.

La Mar earned degrees in philosophy and psychology, then went to study theology at Maryknoll. His dedication caught the attention of those in charge and, at age 43, La Mar was accepted for training into the priesthood.

After his ordination at age 49, La Mar volunteered for one of the Church’s most challenging and dangerous assignments: missionary work in Guatemala.

Maryknollers are known for their penchant for taking on tough assignments in parts of the world where their philosophy of working for peace and social justice is often not welcomed by local officials. Like his fellow priests, La Mar was determined to learn Spanish and to live and work among those he served.

In the 1970s, Guatemala was a nation rife with unrest and governmental corruption. Since 1960, a civil war between the U.S.-backed government and leftist rebels had led to genocidal massacres of the indigenous population.

La Mar was assigned to the Petén, a frontier-like department or state that covers about one-third of the country. Most of the native peoples were descendants of the
La Mar
Continued from Page 5

Mayan and lived in extreme violence. The jungle area, which didn’t even have paved roads, was mostly ignored by the government except when the army went on one of its rampages to put down any attempts by the indigenous seeking their freedom from persecution.

Fear was used to control the population and too often parishioners, catechists and the religious would simply disappear, only to be found later beheaded or shot to death.

“It was very dangerous and very threatening,” La Mar recalled. “Our attitude there was if your life wasn’t being threatened, then you weren’t working hard enough.”

Most of his time was spent trying to help the indigenous peoples from the troubles caused by both the army and rich landowners who wanted their land while at the same time keeping the population in Medieval-style serfdom.

“It was quite threatening,” La Mar said. “We lost quite a number of missionaries. Each of us one time or another received threatening letters telling us to leave or we’d be killed.”

At one time, Guatemalan’s minister of defense recommended the Maryknollers and Jesuits leave the country as the Army could no longer “protect” them, he said.

The situation was worse than what he’d seen with the Viet Cong years earlier.

Eventually, La Mar realized his life was being directly threatened after one of his catechists was shot in the head while preaching to his community.

“I was able to read through their attempts to kill me and took action to avoid the situation,” he said.

After that experience and being called back to do Society work, La Mar reluctantly returned to Maryknoll and was assigned as assistant chief financial officer. In that position, La Mar represented Maryknoll in the works of corporate social responsibility. In such a position, he was able to bring the news of oppression perpetrated against a people in the name of profits.

His presence at corporate meetings provided an “I was there” response to those who would challenge the truth about the reported oppression, he said.

“So many of those people live their lives without knowing a peaceful moment,” he said. “They’re constantly harassed, challenged and put down. It was my job to tell them they deserved to live, deserved to have a better life.”

The indigenous were so used to their condition, few saw it as anything but the norm.

“They’d ask me, padre, what can we do? They felt they were not strong enough to resist what was going on,” La Mar said.

“I saw so much cruelty against the Mayans, and I’ve seen the idiocy of war,” he said. “Each of those kept reinforcing my desire to become a missionary and to share with the people the social justice of the Gospel.”

‘I was here to do something about it’

La Mar has spent the past 45 years – more than twice his time in the Air Force – as a Maryknoll priest.

He knows his prior life in the Air Force is unusual for a man in religious orders.

“I probably could have been a chaplain,” he said. “When I was accepted into the seminary, I wrote to all of my military friends, saying, ‘I’m in training to become a priest.’

“Almost everyone of them wrote back and said, ‘You already are!’

“Apparently they were seeing it before I saw it.”

La Mar and fellow Maryknollers John Blazo and Alex Walsh visited the AMC Museum in July. They were shown about by tour guide and former AMC Museum Foundation board of directors member, retired Chief Master Sgt. Paul Roy.

Roy showed them around all the Museum’s aircraft, including the ones La Mar had flown while on active duty.

“I thought I’d just be looking at airplanes,” La Mar said. “But all of those memories came back like gangbusters when we were there. Paul had an awful lot to do with that. He was so very good; we’d be telling stories and I’d add a bit of folklore to his stories.

“I hadn’t realized how much of a part I’d played when I was in the Air Force, and upon listening to Paul, he addressed the moments of our wonderful times, though realized separately, were the glue that binds us all as one in the work that we were pleased to do. Yes, I got very nostalgic.”

La Mar sees his entire life, both military and secular, as a gift from God.

“I enjoyed flying all over the world and being paid to do it,” he said. “Being 20 years old and doing that kind of stuff was incredible.

“But I’ve flown into places where I saw the exigencies of brutality, things going on that were terrible, awful. I just had the sense that I was here to do something about it.”

Even with his background in the armed forces, La Mar hopes for a time when no nation needs a military.

“I pray for a day when we don’t need a military, where one would not be required,” he said. “We could have a world at peace, a world that loves one another, a world that understands one another, and one open to differences in culture.

“What we could learn from a world like that! Wow!”

“I am ever so thankful for the people I’ve met in my military career; they are family to me, again a family of love.”
New York City fireman Russ Deitz and former Chief Charlie Farrell of Islip, N.Y., reflect at the Air Mobility Command Museum’s 9/11 memorial. The five-sided monument includes steel from the World Trade Center, a block from the Pentagon, and rock from the Pennsylvania field where United Flight 93 crashed.

The Striking of the Four Fives, executed by Senior Airman Kyle Spence, a fireman with the 436th Civil Engineering Squadron, signaled the end of the day’s events. Traditionally a fire company transmits a series of five bell strikes, repeated four times, to signify the death of a firefighter or other significant individual.

Airman 1st Class Connor Delepine, Senior Airman Eric Lefave, Senior Airman Luis Constante, and Airman 1st Class Heredia Rodriguez provided honors during the emotional ceremony.

Dover Air Force Base
AND
THE AMC MUSEUM
REMEMBER
SEPTEMBER 11, 2001
Inside the Hangar
436th AW commander lauds AMCM volunteers

The Air Mobility Command Museum held its third volunteer recognition ceremony of the year on Aug. 31, 2021, to honor the more than 10,140 hours of work contributed by its corps of volunteers.

Distinguished visitors at the ceremony included Col. Matt Husemann, commander, 436th Airlift Wing, Chief Master Sgt. Tim Bayes, 436th AW command chief, and Craig Lindstrom, 436th AW director of staff.

Husemann said he recommends all newcomers to Dover AFB visit the Museum as soon as possible.

“Thanks for showcasing Dover to the world,” he told the assembled group of volunteers and guests.

Bayes agreed, saying he was eager to bring his family to see the Museum.

“I just really appreciate what you do, the time you take,” he told the volunteers. “You don’t have to do it, but we know you do because you want to. We really appreciate that.”

From January to August 2021, Museum Director John Taylor said 29 individuals had volunteered 4,537 hours toward restoration work, and 42 tour guides contributed 3,962 hours. He said that another nine persons volunteered in the Museum Store for 757 hours, and 885 hours were put in by persons working in the Museum archives, library, and scheduling office.

Despite COVID restrictions, more than 29,000 persons visited the Museum in the first seven months of 2021.

Twenty-two volunteers were awarded embroidered Museum shirts for providing at least 100 hours of their time: Ron Bauer, Patricia Coffman, Bill Emory, Don Hall, Richard Johnson, Scott Kapes, Michael Keesler, Jeff Kirwin, Judith Kroegman, and Randy Kroegman.

They were joined by Gary Kutsch, Bill Lee, Emily Malone, Tim Maurer, Rodney Moore, Frank Nartowicz, Marty Ogorzalek, Bob Reese, Bill Reilly, Brian Roth, Don Rynes, and Nick Saborio.

Four recent volunteers, Joel Gartner, Lizabeth Hatcher, Lee Morelli, and Bill Rogers, received their first 100-hour shirts

Ten individuals were awarded Museum sweatshirts for their contributions of more than 1,500 hours each of volunteer time: Ron Bauer, Thomas Galish, Bill Lee, Jeff Kirwin, Marty Ogorzalek, Patti Papineau, Brian Roth, Gene Somma, Don Steenhagen, and Bill Whited.

Bill Reilly was honored for his contributing more than 2,500 hours of volunteer time working at the Museum. He received an embroidered Museum jacket.

All awards presented at the ceremony were provided with funding from the Air Mobility Command Museum Foundation.

Rodney Moore
Volunteer of the Month – April 2021

A restoration crew volunteer and crew chief for our C-5A (the same plane on which he served while on active duty), Rodney logged more than 37 hours in April 2021, totaling more than 6,000 hours overall. During April,

Rodney applied more than 40 pounds of Nixalite bird-proofing to “his” C-5 and repaired one of the Galaxy’s 28 tires, preventing the need for a costly replacement. He also keeps the C-5’s stair truck in good working order, ensuring its reliability and allowing access to the aircraft’s upper deck.

John Taylor noted Rodney’s proud dedication to keeping the C-5 spotless, both inside and out, no mean feat for an aircraft that is more than 50 years old and visited by thousands of people per year.

Michael Keesler
Volunteer of the Month – May 2021

A tour guide with an encyclopedic knowledge of the AMCM’s aircraft collection, Mike logged more than 60 hours in May 2021 and has racked up more than 650 hours since joining the Museum.

One of the Museum’s most dependable docents, he always is available when needed, Taylor said. In addition, he serves as the C-5 tour guide on Saturday mornings and assists with the Museum’s Outreach Team.

Mike has received numerous compliments from our visitors for his work as a tour guide.
Don Rynes
Volunteer of the Month – June 2021

A committed member of the Museum’s aircraft restoration team, Don volunteered 62 hours during May 2021, bringing his overall total to more than 11,000 hours.

Don has demonstrated a particular aptitude for removing years of paint from our display aircraft, among his other talents. He’s recently focused on the Museum’s UH-1 helicopter, removing layers of paint from its rotor assembly, which helped identify unseen corrosion and other defects. He sanded down and stripped the ‘copter’s entire fuselage – down to the bare metal – in preparation for repainting.

He also stripped old paint from the Museum’s C-54 to identify rivets that had to be removed to repair corrosion from water buildup inside a wing.

Nick Saborio
Volunteer of the Quarter – April – June 2021

Nick does triple duty – and more – for the AMC Museum. He serves as a tour guide, crew chief for the C-133 Cargomaster and is part of the Museum’s Living History Team.

He logged more than 220 hours in April, May, and June 2021 and has accumulated more than 1,400 hours while working for the Museum.

As a member of the Living History Team, on Saturdays, he conducts tours while dressed as a World War II soldier. In addition, working with the Outreach Team, Nick has undertaken several VIP tours and virtual presentations for groups including the Organization of Black Aviation Professionals, the Museum of Aviation, Bayhealth hospital resident doctors, and the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute.

Volunteer of the Quarter – Jan – March 2021
436th Airlift Wing Staff Agency Volunteer of the Quarter -- Jan – March 2021
436th Airlift Wing Volunteer of the Quarter – Jan – March 2021

The AMCM’s Volunteer of the Quarter for January through March 2021, Bill later was nominated – and won – the awards for both the 436th AW Staff Agency and the 436th AW.

A volunteer since 2015, Bill is both a tour guide and serves as the AMCM’s official photo archivist.

In that role, he has relabeled and categorized dozens of boxed historical photographs, slides, film, videotape and negatives. His major project has been sorting through boxes of archived copies of Dover AFB’s official newspaper, The Airlifter, and then scanning the deteriorating pages, thus preserving them for the future. These newspapers date back to the early 1960s and in some cases are the only known copies still in existence.

From the Director’s desk:

Dover Air Force Base continues to observe COVID protocols set forth by the state of Delaware and the 436th Airlift Wing. The Museum remains open, and tours are being conducted, although with masking and social distance protocols in place. This is necessary to protect both the public and Museum employees and volunteers.

Plans continue to brighten up four of our display aircraft parked on the outside ramp. We are expecting new contracts to paint these airplanes to be awarded by the end of October 2021.

Good news: we’ve been able to reopen the Museum’s hallways and inside restrooms. They had been closed pending planned renovation work, but those plans have been delayed. We will announce any changes as appropriate.

We also are continuing work on a rededication ceremony for the Museum’s restored C-119B aircraft that took part in the rescue of American and Allied troops in December 1950 in North Korea. Watch for more information.

Be sure to keep checking the Museum’s webpage at amcmuseum.org for updates and new information.

Johnny Taylor
Director, Air Mobility Command Museum
Air Mobility Family,

It is an honor to have been selected as the next AMC Museum Foundation president!

We will work with John Taylor and staff to continue the vision of Gen. Walt Kross who started the Museum and later designated it as the AMC Museum with its mission as an aviation, aerospace, education, scientific, cultural, historical, and inspirational facility.

While the 436th wing commander in the early 90s, Sue and I fell in love with the Museum and its mission. We also grew to appreciate the incredible work of the staff and volunteers. During that time, we kicked off the renovation of Delaware’s only World War II hangar to be the future home of the Museum. Now a reality, there is a need to expand and improve the facilities – it will take the dedication of all to make this a reality to ensure success for decades to come.

I look forward to working with everyone who shares such a common mission vision . . . we must all focus on the future and remember that “It is all about the Air Mobility Command Museum.”

A special thanks to Don Sloan who has served as Foundation president for 13 Years. His passion and leadership have helped continue the Museum as the No. 1 tourist attraction in Delaware. I proudly yield back the rest of this page to Don.

— Bill Welser

Congratulations to Bill Welser, the new president of the AMC Museum Foundation; I’m excited to pass him the yoke.

In 2008, when I became president of the AMC Museum Foundation, I hardly expected to be sitting in the seat for 13 years. Close friends know I’ve never claimed to be the smartest guy in the room. I did, however, always try to have a lot of smart folks around me, like Paul Gillis, long-time friend, and board vice president. Paul and I worked together in the 512th Operations Group – he impressed me from Day One. As the Foundation’s vice president, he was an indispensable right-hand man who seemed to be everywhere, knew something about almost everything and was more than capable of putting that knowledge to good use. An early example? Using his considerable abilities, Paul got our then-fledgling annual AMC Museum Summer Camp started, coordinating instructors, curriculum, and flights. The results are still visible today with a hugely successful summer camp program. No one person can fill Paul’s shoes for the Museum or the Foundation. We all miss Paul.

Rich Harper spent lots of time, often with wife Dotty, supporting Museum events for the Foundation or speaking to local organizations on behalf of the Museum. Jim Douglass tutored our restoration volunteers in tube and fabric work – as in our CG-4A. Ed Perkowski conceived and orchestrated the first Veterans Day celebration. His many years of detailed planning and superb execution of that event helped set the standard for our Museum’s patriotic events.

Bob Mench has a talent for buying/selling and has been a fundraiser extraordinaire. Jim Fazekas and Paul Roy joined the board from our volunteer pool. I think both were pleasantly surprised at how similar the enthusiasm – and motives – were for both the Museum volunteers and the Foundation. Bob Berglund, with his retail background, has always been quick to shake his head and question
“Why are we spending money on that?” His persistent efforts have saved us many dollars over the years.

Phil White was secretary of the AMCMF for 17 years! Normally that would be enough said for such an involved job, but he also orchestrated our Annual Golf Tournament for most of that time, setting a tournament fundraising high his last year. The golf tournament has been replaced with our Annual Summer Fundraiser; we’re still trying to match Phil’s record.

Besides his volunteer position as secretary, Jeff Brown manages Foundation membership and continues to do an incredible job as editor of the Hangar Digest. Two of his articles have been picked up and published in the NMUSAF quarterly publication, Friends Journal. Jeff also has picked up some of Paul’s “additional duties.”

Jim Schultz continues to move us from the early days of Harry van den Heuvel’s green ledger book (ah, life was simpler then) through a long line of treasurers, each who helped bring us a bit closer to the modern accounting world. Still very labor intensive, it’s a mostly thankless, but extremely important, job that he does so well.

Many thanks to all other past and current board members whose names I haven’t mentioned. You’ve freely volunteered your time and efforts over the years with the shared goal of keeping the Air Mobility Command Museum the best! And of course, thanks to you, the Friends of the Museum. Your continued, generous support allows the Foundation to complete its mission of supporting the Museum.

“Thank you, Mike Leister.” Mike spent more than 30 years taking our Museum from a one-plane show to the best Air Force field museum in the nation. His enthusiasm, hard work, perseverance, knowledge base, teamwork and “We’ll get there” attitude helped keep the job challenging, yet fun. Mike, an early Foundation Life Member, and I would frequently have impromptu meetings discussing Museum/Foundation business, occasionally even disagreeing on a subject. Two stubborn redheads, we’d toss some ideas around, maybe holler and fuss a bit, work out an equally beneficial solution, shake hands and go to lunch. I’ve missed working with him.

Finally, our volunteers remain the Museum’s lifeblood. Over the years, those monthly reviews of visitors’ glowing comments have continued to drive home that fact. Restoration volunteers to do remarkable work, thus enabling our tour guides the ability to help bring their vast experience and incredible stories to life. Store volunteers help guide our guests toward that perfect memento that helps keep those great memories alive. Without our volunteers, this Museum just couldn’t exist! Thank you.

I’m looking forward to a great future with our new president. “Bill, you have it!”

Fly safe!
Don Sloan

In July 2021, Hangar Digest Editor and AMCMF Board Director Jeff Brown had the honor of presenting a special plaque to Paul Bechly of Wilmington, Del. A longtime Foundation member, Paul had recently decided to upgrade his membership to the Eagle level. For more information on the differing levels of Foundation membership, please turn to Page 18.


Welser succeeds retired US Air Force Reserve Col. Don Sloan, who stepped down from the presidency, which he had held since 2008. Sloan remains a member of the board.

Retired US Air Force Reserve Chief Master Sgt. Mike Wysong received the board’s united vote in favor of his nomination as the group’s vice president.


The board unanimously reelected retired USAF Master Sgt. Jeff Brown and Mr. Kevin Taha as directors, both for three-year terms.

Brown and retired USAF Col. Jim Schultz were selected to retain their respective positions as board secretary and treasurer.

Any active member of the Air Mobility Command Museum Foundation may stand for election to the 15-member board. Board members serve staggered three-year terms.

For information about board membership, email Jeff Brown at secretary@amcmf.com.
AMCMF’s Summer Fundraiser bounces back

Opinions are pretty unanimous: 2020 was a tough year. The Air Mobility Command Museum was forced to shut down for several months due to the coronavirus pandemic and visits to the Museum during this time dropped to zero. Revenue to the AMCM Foundation suffered as well.

While much of the operational costs at the AMCM are underwritten by the federal government, funding in other areas comes only from the nonprofit Air Mobility Command Foundation. Over the past few years, the Foundation has provided the money needed to replace all the display mannequins in the main hangar, upgraded several exhibits, and purchased parts and other supplies necessary to restore and maintain our display aircraft. The Foundation also supports the Museum’s many volunteers and publishes and distributes the quarterly Hangar Digest newsletter.

How is the Foundation able to provide this vital service?

We have three primary sources that support the Museum: Foundation memberships, sales through the Museum’s gift shop and our online eStore, and contributions made through our annual Summer Fundraising Campaign, held annually from April through September.

Generous donations to the Fundraiser come from community groups, individuals, and businesses throughout the area around Dover Air Force Base. They and others recognize the AMC Museum’s obligation to present the Air Force’s history to the public and provide future leaders opportunities to learn about aviation. It is their donations that keep the Foundation flying straight and level.

Despite the setbacks of 2020, those who support the Foundation stepped up in 2021 to provide more than $6,300 in financial and in-kind donations. As a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization, donations to the Foundation may be claimed as deductions under Internal Revenue Service regulations.

The Foundation is pleased to recognize the private individuals, groups, and organizations that have continued to support our efforts as part of the National Museum of the United States Air Force’s field museum system.
AMC Museum Foundation

Foundation, Museum mourn the loss of Paul Gillis

(This story includes comments from an interview with Paul Gillis shortly before his passing.)

The Air Mobility Command Museum Foundation board of directors extends its deepest condolences to the family of board Vice President Paul F. Gillis, who passed away at home Friday, Aug. 13, 2021.

Gillis, 71, was a Lifetime member of the Foundation, which he joined in December 2005. He was elected to the board in April 2006 and had served as its second-in-command since September 2009.

Gillis was the Foundation’s jack of all trades when it came to special projects. He was the driving force behind the annual Aviation Summer Camp and the Foundation’s memorialization programs. Rolling up his sleeves as a volunteer, his technical expertise included wiring many of the Museum’s display aircraft with internal lighting, increasing both visitors’ safety and their ability to appreciate the planes.

He never was afraid to get his hands dirty, whether it was threading new wires through the dark recesses of a World War II airplane or placing commemorative bricks outside while working in the stifling heat and humidity of a Delaware summer.

Tributes to Gillis poured into the Foundation following news of his passing, including condolences Delaware Sen. Chris Coons and memorial proclamations from the Delaware State House of Representatives and State Senate.

The latter noted how Gillis touched and enriched the lives of those who had known him, saying in part, “He made the world in which he lived a better place for having passed through.”

A remarkable career

Gillis was born on Apr. 19, 1950, in Winthrop, Mass., where his love of flying was born while watching the air traffic going in and out of the nearby Logan airport – right over the family home.

A 1969 visit to an older brother, a pilot stationed at Dover Air Force Base, Del., cemented his desire to join the Air Force. Commissioned as a second lieutenant in 1972, he received his pilots’ wings and was assigned to Plattsburgh Air Force Base, N.Y., flying the Boeing KC-135 Stratotanker.

After six years on active duty, he joined the Air Force Reserves at Dover and, for a time, flew commercial aircraft from Philadelphia.

He eventually was hired as a full-time air reserve technician, flying the C-5A Galaxy out of the Delaware installation.

In 2000 he commanded a dangerous high-priority mission to Greenland for which he and his C-5 crew were presented the Air Force Association’s Outstanding Reserve Aircrew Award – President’s Award.

Gillis served as director of operations for the 326th Airlift Squadron during Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003. As chief of the 512th Operations Group standardization and evaluation section, he was certified as a C-5 flight test pilot, flying check-outs of new avionics and flight control/engine issues.

He was known to many as the “go-to” guy when it came to any questions about the C-5. In 2004, he was one of the first people consulted when a Travis AFB, Calif., C-5’s engine was destroyed by a missile attack while leaving Baghdad, Iraq.

He retired from the Reserves in 2005.

Gillis was recognized numerous times during his 33 years of service for his piloting and outstanding management skills. His military honors included four awards of the Meritorious Service Medal and two awards of the Air Force Commendation Medal.

‘I got carried away’

Gillis’ wife, Carol, steered him to his eventual membership at the AMC Museum Foundation.

“I told him when he retired that he’d better find something else to do because he wasn’t going to be hanging around the house all day,” she said.

Always interested in electronics, Gillis held a degree from the Lowell Technological Institute, which he described as “the best engineering school in Massachusetts.”

That expertise proved invaluable when he took Carol’s advice to get out of the house. His dedicated volunteer work in and around the Museum became legendary, especially when it came to demonstrating his electrical skills.

“The tour guides were saying they needed more light inside the C-47 [Skytrain],” Gillis said. “It was dark in there, and it slopes up, and so people were tripping and stumbling. The tour guides had to use flashlight.

“I was asked to fix the lighting in there, and I guess I got carried away,” he admitted.

In addition to installing LEDs around the hangar and inside other decades-old aircraft, he fit solar panels for lighting the C-141B and the C-119, mounted exhaust fans inside aircraft, and rewired electrical outlets and intercom systems. He even built a solar-powered pump used to refuel some of the Museum’s special purpose vehicles.

“He was our go-to guy when it came to lighting the aircraft,” recalled Museum Director John Taylor. “You can’t just plug in these old airplanes and put power to them. You have to figure out how to do it, and Paul was the guy who did that.”
Gillis also took some good-natured ribbing when it came to his height and the fact he’d been losing his hair since his mid-20s. Often having to wedge himself into places where even a much shorter man would have had trouble, he got the reputation of never being able to complete a job without somehow lacerating his scalp.

“He always was inside tight spaces, and because he was bald, he always had a Band-Aid on his head,” Taylor said.

Gillis’ low-key personality was well-known to everyone he worked with.

“Just talking to him, you’d never have known he was an electrical engineer,” Deputy Director Eric Czerwinski said.

“He never gave you that impression. He was just the average Joe. Some people come across as trying to be superior to others, but not Paul.”

Former board of directors Secretary Phil White said his friend and fellow pilot was one of the nicest individuals he’d ever known.

“He truly was a person who enjoyed life to the fullest,” White said.

“Willing to tackle any task or help anyone needing assistance, Paul always had a smile that emanated to all of those around him while doing projects big or small.

“I’d never known him to put out 100 percent in any endeavor he undertook,” White said. “It would be great if all of humanity could be as kind and as nice as Paul Gillis.”

White was on the board when the Foundation formed an education committee to bolster the Museum’s Aviation Summer camps. As committee chair, Gillis worked out a blueprint for the type of instructional program needed and a basic plan for a building dedicated to teaching aviation subjects.

Former tour guide and educator and now Delaware state Rep. Jeff Spiegelman recalls Gillis’ commitment to educating the young.

“He was a very intelligent, very creative, and very dedicated man,” Spiegelman said. “He was very excited to be working on the summer camps. Like so much else, he’d throw himself into it. He had a giddiness about it, but that’s what he did with any project.”

Spiegelman considered Gillis “a prince of a person.”

“He had that big smile, that happy-go-lucky attitude,” he said.

“Paul was just so cool.”

As a member of the board of directors, Gillis also supervised a massive upgrade to the Museum’s store and gift shop, overseeing contractors and personally installing the necessary telephone and computer wiring.

A humble man

Away from the Museum, Gillis was a member of St. Paul’s Episcopal Church in Camden, Del., where he served several times as a junior warden. In addition, he was a member of the Shoreline Garden Railroad Club, where he had served as president, and of the Model Skipjack Sailing Club at the St. Michael’s Museum. For years, he joined a group of fellow veterans for a camping/canoeing Columbus Day weekend; the group’s unofficial name was CRABS, which stood for Canoeing, Rowing, and Boating Society.

In addition to his interests in railroading and sailing, he was an avid and skilled woodworker who enjoyed making furniture for his home. He designed and built a large display plaque that honors the Museum’s significant donors and financial contributors. However, despite his good nature, there were a few things Gillis found genuinely distasteful: cheaters, con artists, and those who blame others for their mistakes, Carol said.

“He really disliked people who lied,” she said.

“He was a true engineer and could not tolerate incompetence,” Gillis’ brother, Richard, added.

“But if someone did something wrong, he’d calmly talk to them and give them a chance to correct it,” Carol said.

“He also didn’t like people who put on airs, people who tried to be something they weren’t,” she added. “He just wanted people to be themselves.”

And there was something a little more mundane that turned Gillis off.

“He didn’t like vegetables,” Carol recalled. “I gave him a piece of broccoli; he took a small piece and said, ‘There, I ate the tree. Now leave me alone.’

“He was just a meat and potatoes guy.”

Gillis also could surprise people, recalled USAF Reserve Chief Master Sgt. Steve West.

While on a C-5 flight to Egypt, West’s term of service was ending, and he asked Gillis to administer his reenlistment oath. He thought the ceremony could be given a unique twist if it were performed while in flight.

Gillis had a better idea, West recalled.

“He turned over the controls to his copilot and jumped out of his seat,” West said. “He told me, ‘Let’s do it right now.’

“I took the oath while we were flying directly over the Pyramids,” West said.

In reflecting on his life and career shortly before his passing, Gillis said he wanted to be remembered simply “as a humble man,” but one with an insatiable curiosity about the world. His wanderlust, he said, made him always want to see the next road or learn what was over the horizon.

“I’m an adventurer,” he said. “Have you been to the Pyramids or the Acropolis? I’ve been to both and more. I’ve been so many places in the world and done so much in my life.

“How many people can say that?”

Gillis was interred with full military honors at the Delaware Veterans Memorial Cemetery, Bear, Del. Memorial contributions in his name may be made to the AMCM Foundation, P.O. Box 2024, Dover AFB, DE 19902-9998, to the Wounded Warrior Project, P.O. Box 758516, Topeka, KS 66675-8516, or Purrfect Haven Cat Rescue, P.O. Box 1737, Dover, DE 19903.

What happened to my last Hangar Digest?

There’s no such thing as a perfect world, which we learned following publication of the July-September 2021 Hangar Digest. A printing error meant the issue was mailed out missing four pages. With no way to figure out who got the incomplete copies, the printer fixed the problem and sent out a second set of newsletters to everyone.

So when it comes to the July-September 2021 issue, you can say you got two for the price of one!
Cold wind and rain outside gave Nolan Pierce and son Caden a perfect reason to come inside the AMCM hangar, where they were greeted by volunteer Ken Smith. The father and son were on their first visit from their home in Columbia, Md. “We move around a lot,” the elder Pierce said, “so we wanted to see what the Museum was all about.”

NOTE: background cloud photographs on Page 16 and Page 17 were taken at Omaha Beach, Normandy, France

Portraying a World War II Women’s Airforce Service Pilot (WASP), Museum guide Emily Malone briefs the Stone family of Dover. From left are Anthony, Geneva and Nicklas Stone, and Ilias Rosas of New Jersey. Nicklas found the AMCM to be “pretty good,” while Ilias opined, “It’s amazing!”

Christopher Ford of BenSalem, Pa., looks over the Museum’s display of a Falcon air-to-air missile. Christopher was at the AMC Museum with the Josh Pagan family of Magnolia, Del. What was Chris’ Museum rating? “100 Stars!” he said.

Robertta Allen of Smyrna, Del., brought friends Helen and George Zimmer to the Air Mobility Command Museum in late September. All three originally hail from Long Island, N.Y., but 17 years ago the Zimmers sold their home, hit the road in their recreational vehicle and have been traveling ever since. This was their first trip to the AMCM. “We like to leave no stone unturned,” George said.
Sammy Marcario, 6, of North Oaks, Minn., appears somewhat surprised at the size of what he’s looking at: the undercarriage of the Museum’s C-5A. Sammy was awed by the big aircraft’s many features, saying, “They even have an upstairs!” Sammy was accompanied to the AMCM by his grandfather, Neil Sullivan of Lewes, Del.

Stephan Wagner of Center Valley, Pa., was hard at work repainting the Museum’s refurbished C-119B Flying Boxcar. The aircraft, one of eight that dropped bridge sections to trapped soldiers and Marines in North Korea, is being restored to its 1950 appearance.

AMCM tour guide Dave Ferguson explains the refueling capabilities of the Museum’s KC-135 Stratotanker to the Murray family of Buffalo, N.Y., during their visit in July. From left are Ferguson, Joanne Labombard, Cullin Murray, and Eleanor, Keira and Kevin Murray.

A sign of the times: AMC Museum volunteers Jeff Kirwan and Bill Reilly work to install new opening and closing signs along the Museum’s approach roadway.

On one of several trips outside the campus of the AMC Museum, reenactors Emily Malone, left, and Patrick O’Neill traveled to Fort Miles, near Rehoboth, Del., on Sept. 25, 2021, for Delaware Defense Day. Visitors learned about Delaware’s military history over the years. They were joined by fellow reenactor Nick Saborio, not pictured.
**Become a member!**

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Donate $100 to the AMC Museum Foundation Bench Program and have your name printed on a plaque on the bench of your choice. We’ll also recognize you in the museum’s quarterly newsletter, Hangar Digest, and on our website.

The benches are already on our ramp near their respective aircraft to complement the static displays. These 8-foot-long benches are high-quality plastic-coated rolled steel with cast aluminum legs.

Visit store.amcmuseum.org/bench to learn more and order online! A print and mail version is available as well.

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