

COMBAT AIR MUSEUM

✈ ✈ ✈ Plane Talk ✈ ✈ ✈

The Official Newsletter of the Combat Air Museum

Forbes Field Topeka, Kansas

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Vietnam-era pilot shares the story of his 23 days of survival in enemy territory

The presentation given during our June Membership Luncheon was much like having a live presentation of a History Channel documentary. The story given by our guest speaker, **Roger Locher**, about his shoot down and evasion from capture in North Vietnam was fascinating.

Mr. Locher is a native Kansan born northwest of Sabetha. He graduated from Sabetha High School and attended Kansas State University. At KSU, he was in Air Force Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC). He was commissioned a Second Lieutenant in 1969.

One of Mr. Locher's assignments was with twin engine Convair T-29 *Flying Classroom* aircraft at Mather Air Force Base (AFB), California. He was later ordered to McDonnell Douglas F-4 Phantoms at Holloman AFB, New Mexico, but traded that assignment for an F-4 unit in Southeast Asia. In preparation for his overseas assignment, he attended Survival School at Fairchild AFB, Washington and Water Survival School at Homestead AFB, Florida. Upon completing these schools, he received orders to Ubon, Thailand.

"Survival," con't. on page 10



photo by Don Mathers

*Roger Locher
telling of his
evasion and
escape in
North
Vietnam.*

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Combat Air Museum

Forbes Field • Hangars 602 & 604

P.O. Box 19142

Topeka, KS 66619-0142

Telephone (785) 862-3303

FAX (785) 862-3304

www.combatairmuseum.org

Provided by

Rossini Management Systems, Inc.

Email: combatairmuseum@aol.com

Museum Curator

Danny San Romani

Office Manager

Lois Ecord

Board of Directors

- *Wing Commander*

Gene Howerter - *Vice Wing Commander*

Stu Entz - *Secretary*

Don Dawson

Don Mathers

Martin Moyer

Dave Murray

Tedd Nolde

Tad Pritchett

Dick Trupp

Newsletter Editing & Design

Toni Dixon

Dixon Communications

(785)865-4221

Museum Hours

Monday - Saturday

9 A.M. - 4:30 P.M.

Last Admission 3:30 P.M.

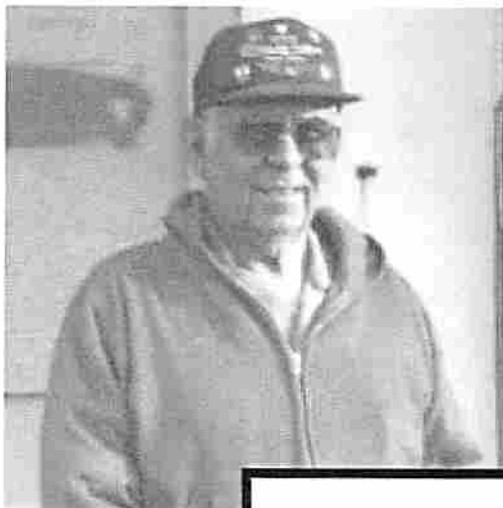
Sunday Noon - 4:30 P.M.

Last Admission 3:30 P.M.

Plane Talk, the official newsletter of Combat Air Museum of Topeka, Kansas, is published bi-monthly.

Your questions and comments are welcomed. Submit information for

Plane Talk to CAM office.



*Nick Nickerson.
Always a friend ready to help.*

In Memoriam Marlin E. "Nick" Nickerson

June 12, 1924 –

June 7, 2007

#13

30 years member



*Nick and pilot Hal Pottorf before a commemorative flight
in the Fairchild.*

Another of CAM's "Greatest Generation" member-volunteers passed away on June 7, 2007. **Nick Nickerson** joined Yesterday's Air Force Kansas Wing on January 14, 1977. Two years later YAF became Combat Air Museum. Fortunately for us, Nick stayed involved with the Museum in one way or another over the next 30 years. Even after his health kept him from physically working at CAM, Nick supported the Museum through its fund raisers and as an ambassador-at-large promoting us to the many people he met and befriended.

Perhaps with the exceptions of working in the Gift Shop and being a tour guide, there was not an aspect of operating and maintaining the Museum that Nick was not a part of. He was there for Air Shows and other fund raisers and was involved in many of the early projects to improve the hangars and museum grounds. And for anyone who needed an extra hand or two on a project, Nick was there to gladly provide help.

First thoughts of Nick include his infectious smile, his enthusiasm, and his optimism. He readily admitted that he loved this Museum and its people and being a volunteer here. Even when talking with him on the telephone, you could feel his smile. Nick had a way of making a difficult problem or task not so difficult. Perhaps it was just great common sense or a different way of analyzing the situation, but he could offer suggestions others had not thought of to solve the problem. People listened as Nick offered his views. Look at the picture of Nick at the table talking, and note how everyone is paying attention. It is just one example of how people respected Nick and his opinions.

Nick was a master craftsman with wood. Three examples of his work are in the entranceway to Hangar 602. These are the large shadow boxes. Two of them are built into the walls, the third, and most ornate, is mounted on another wall. His last wood project for the Museum was building the speaker podium in the Conference Room. But perhaps his best work for CAM is some that can not be seen. This was the Fairchild UC-61K restoration. The metal frame fuselage is covered with wooden stringers and formers. The wings and empennage are virtually all-wood construction. Nick spent many hours repairing and replacing wood pieces in the aircraft. When his work was done, it was covered with the fabric covering for the fuselage and wings. Loyd Ellison was the lead restorer on the aircraft, and Nick was one of only about a handful of people who helped



When Nick spoke, people listened.

him with this project. His work was key to making the Fairchild fly again.

There came the time when Nick's health kept him from doing the physical labor he had done for so many years. But that initially did not keep him from coming to the Museum to see what was going on and to visit with other volunteers. Then one day Nick called to tell us he had voluntarily surrendered his driver's license. He was still able to occasionally make visits to CAM, and when he could not, he called up to see how we were doing. He never lost his enthusiasm for the Museum.

Nick entered military service on June 8, 1943. After basic training and other schools, he became a part of the Army Air Forces and served in England with the 325th Bombardment Squadron, 92nd Bombardment Group, Eighth Air Force, as a Photography Specialist. He was involved with many aspects of "Photo Recon" work, including flying on bombing missions as a cameraman. He was involved with preparing the photographic mapping of invasion sites in Normandy, France, and participated in the air offensives against the Rhineland and Ardennes-Alsace. Nick was honorably discharged October 3, 1945.

Those at the Museum who had the good fortune to know and work with Nick could not help but catch at least some of his enthusiasm and devotion for CAM. With him, it was not just a matter of looking back at where CAM had been or where it is now. His view of the Museum included where it could be for future generations, and as long as he was able, he gave his support to ensure we continue into the future. That is great legacy to leave for anyone. ➔



The SNB, T-33, and C-47 lined up and ready for the start of Family Day.

CAM adds aircraft to 190th Air Refueling Wing Kansas Air National Guard Family Day

On June 9, CAM participated in the **190th Air Refueling Wing, Kansas Air National Guard Family Day** at the 190th's facilities on the north end of Forbes Field. The Family Day also marked the end of the 190th's 50th Birthday celebration. CAM was invited to participate and asked to bring three aircraft of the type that had been flown in the 190th's inventory since it became an Air National Guard unit. We were asked to bring the Douglas C-47 Skytrain, Kilroy; the Lockheed T-33; and the Beech SNB (flown in the Air Force as a C-45). The 190th flew these types when based out of Hutchinson, Kansas.

The day before the event, a small convoy departed CAM with the three aircraft in tow, **Gene Howerter** in the Air Force three-wheel scooter, and an escort vehicle from the 190th. Upon arrival at the 190th Master Sergeant **Kevin Drewelow**, a member of CAM, marshaled the planes into position for the next day's event.

On Saturday, several CAM members arrived at the 190th to sit with the aircraft. Drawing back on air show days, lawn chairs were placed in the shade under the left wing of Kilroy. It was a beautiful, bright, sunny day. Some of the CAM folks attended a dual retirement ceremony and dual promotion ceremony that took place before the Family Day events began. After that, it was a continual flow of people back and forth among the 190th's hangars.

Many present and former 190th members stopped by to talk with us, and we learned from the "old-timers" when they had flown the types of aircraft we brought from the Museum. The 190th had basically one of each of the aircraft. The C-47 and C-45 were support aircraft. The T-33 was used for pilot currency and proficiency when the unit flew F-80 Shooting Stars.



The T-33 with its wing tanks in place.



The SNB in the foreground and a KC-135 in the background.

Other participants in the celebration included a group of Star Wars fans who made their own costumes and dressed the part of various characters from the movie series. Mock battles between good and evil forces took place several times. In between battles, members of the group would join us in the shade. We found out from one warrior that he had small fans installed in his helmet to help with cooling. Good thing, too, as that bright sun had to make those costumes hot.

Captain Jack Sparrow from *Pirates of the Caribbean* was also present and visited the various venues. The actor portraying Johnny Depp portraying Captain Jack Sparrow was in excellent character form.

Volunteers who sat with the planes during the day included **Don and Peggy Dawson, Gene Howerter, Jim Braun, Danny San Romani, and Stu Entz**, who shared his time between CAM and the Rolling Thunder chapter of the Military Vehicle Preservation Association. Rolling Thunder had several military vehicles on exhibit.

By late afternoon the crowds had thinned, and we hooked the tugs and Stu's jeep up to our aircraft. With Gene in the scooter and Kevin Drewelow in the escort vehicle leading the way, the convoy headed back south to Hangar 604. Other volunteers were present when we got back to the Museum, and all the aircraft were placed back into the hangar. It had been a good day, and we visited with a lot of folks stopping by to look at the planes and talk of their experiences in the 190th. →



Peggy Dawson with Captain Jack Sparrow.



The photo of Alexander Pokryshkin

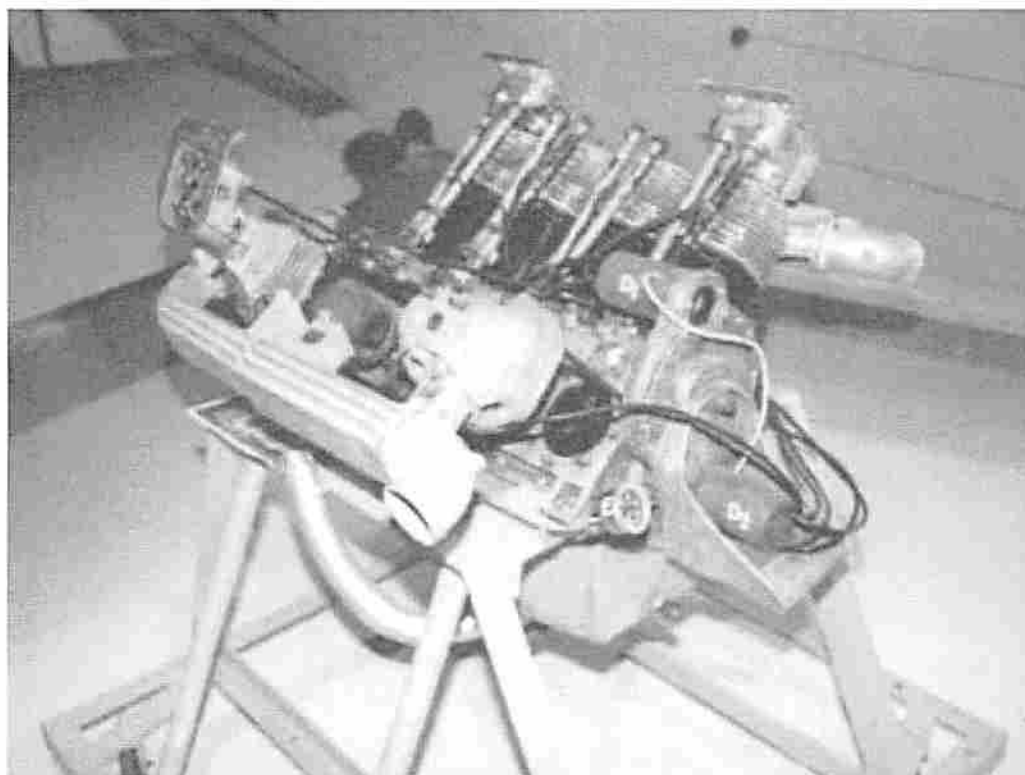
Always something new to see

Volunteers work on new exhibits and perfect some existing ones

Two new exhibits were put in the hangar bay of Hangar 602 since the last newsletter. **Gene Howerter** completed an exhibit on Soviet Military Aircraft using 18 model aircraft and other artifacts. Hanging in the back of the case is a 30 inches X 40 inches photograph of Alexander Pokryshkin a World War II hero of the Soviet Union and its second leading ace with 59 aerial victories. A model of Pokryshkin's US-built Bell P-39 Airacobra is in the case. It has 35 victory markings on it. Gene included several color photos of Soviet aircraft in the exhibit along with signage. There is also a set of nine mirror badges in a small holding case that shows images of eight Soviet aircraft. The ninth badge shows that this is a commemorative set from the International Air Show, Aerospace '90 at Will Rogers Airport, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. CAM member **Eric Walther** donated the set to CAM a number of years ago. It was given to him by one of the Russian crews at the Air Show.

Gene arranged the exhibit so there is room for future model aircraft.

Dale Allen completed his work on the partial TANK engine that had been in a storageroom in Hangar 604 for many years. There were not enough parts to build a complete engine, but certainly enough that it makes a great cutaway-type ex-



The cutaway of the TANK conversion engine is by the Jenny.

A three-quarter inch wedge (in the center of the photo) made a big difference in the appearance of the Bf-109 mockup. Photo by Don Mathers.

hibit. It was originally built circa 1928–1932 as a conversion of the famous Curtiss OX-5.

Beginning in 1928, the Milwaukee Tank Company began converting Curtiss OX-5 liquid-cooled engines into an air-cooled engine designated the V-502, a 115 horsepower (86kW) engine. The company also made a V-470 conversion model. The engines were labeled simply with TANK. The lower half of the engine on exhibit definitely shows its Curtiss heritage. Some sources refer to the conversion as a TANK OX-5.

The onset of the Great Depression took its toll on this venture, and by 1932 Milwaukee Tank Company had essentially dropped out of the aircraft engine market.

Aircraft that were modified to carry the TANK conversions included the Curtiss Robin, the 1931 Curtiss-Wright Travel Air 2000-T, and the 1932 American Eagle A-101-T. The Rowley-Curtiss JN-4D-2 Jenny replica in our collection has a TANK engine.

Dale made wooden shapes to replicate several engine accessories that we did not have. They are allegedly painted purple to stand out, but Dale's association with Kansas State University may have had some influence on color choice. **Tom Witty** labeled the accessories with letters that correspond to letters on the signage for the engine. It is on exhibit by the Jenny.

In our last issue of *Plane Talk*, we reported on the Naval Air Station Olathe exhibit, but we forgot to include a couple of volunteers who did work on a key artifact in the exhibit. There is a large diorama of the air station originally made by the Photo Interpretation Lab, Air Wing 88 in June 1954. We wanted to ensure the individual parts and pieces of the diorama stayed on the base section as we were installing the diorama vertically rather than flat.

About that time, CAM member **Cookie Langberg** was going to be in Kansas and called to say she was spending a day in Topeka, and did we have anything for her to do at the Museum? Cookie, by the way, lives in St. Paul, Minnesota. Curator **Danny San Romani** had just the thing for her to do. For her day at



the Museum, Cookie used a small artist's paint brush and a bottle of white glue to paint glue around the bases of all the objects attached to the diorama base. There were also several areas where the textured surface was showing cracking, so Cookie coated these with glue, too. If you have seen the diorama you will understand this was a bit of a tedious task. The fuel farm alone had 27 fuel tanks spaced closely together to brush glue around. Cookie spent the better part of the workday working on the diorama.

With that task complete, **Don Dawson** helped Danny install a Plexiglas panel over the top of the diorama and then place it into the exhibit case. It takes up about 1/6th of the exhibit area.

The Lockheed T-33 jet trainer now has tip tanks installed on its wings. Volunteers mounted the tanks in early June. As reported in last winter's issues of *Plane Talk*, Don worked on repairing and painting the tanks.

"Exhibits," con't. on page 14



One of the new signs before the 77th Street/Gary Ormsby Drive exit of US 75 southbound.

Could it be a sign of...

Over four and one-half years ago we did an article on then Wing Commander **Dick Trupp** in the November 2002 *Plane Talk*. A portion of that article related how Dick had been working with the Kansas Department of Transportation (KDOT) and Kansas Turnpike Association (KTA) to improve highway signage for Combat Air Museum. At the time, we did not write how long Dick had been working with KDOT and KTA, but it had been at least a number of months. We did report on Dick's efforts on relocating some existing signage along US Highway 75 south of Topeka that would better direct traffic to the Museum. The distance involved was about 2.1 miles from the 53rd Street exit to the 77th Street/Gary Ormsby Drive exit. In 2002, we even wrote about how two KDOT employees followed the existing signs and experienced troubles getting to CAM after they exited US 75.

Go back to the first line of this article. To say it again, we wrote that first article over four and one-half years ago. But today, we can happily report that about two months ago, the signs Dick worked so hard to get changed, were changed. Not only does this benefit Combat Air Museum; it benefits Heartland Park Raceway. Perseverance pays off.

To say that Dick experienced some frustration in getting things through the state bureaucracy is an understatement. And part of the rules and regulations are federally mandated. You can only list X-number of attractions on one sign, and only Y-number of signs can be put up over a given distance. And then someone decides what attractions have priority over others to be listed on a given sign. Dick spent about two years working with one pair of KDOT employees only to find that neither had the authority to make sign changes. At least he can say he has some familiarization with the system.

Is Dick done with signs now that the change along US 75 has happened? No. Along with the US 75 sign change, he, and representatives of Heartland Park, were asking for changes to a sign along the I-470 bypass that comes off Interstate 70 eastbound and heads south and then east before hooking up with Topeka Boulevard and the Kansas Turnpike. The fix to that sign seemed simple enough. Add a smaller sign to the larger one to direct traffic onto US

Join the Combat Air Museum!

Your membership and support are important to us.

HOPE???

75 south to get to the raceway and Museum. Apparently it is going to take something else, as that large sign has been removed completely, and we are waiting to see what, if anything, will take its place.

A couple of non-KDOT signs advertising the Museum have come down over the past several months. One was a sign the Museum put up near the Kansas Turnpike back about 1998. It really had too much information on it to be very effective and was set back from traffic lanes making it somewhat hard to read. KTA solved the problem of that sign when they added more traffic lanes to the Turnpike on a stretch of road between Topeka and Lawrence and took it down.

We asked to have the second sign taken down. It was a billboard facing the eastbound lanes of Interstate 70 about four miles west of the intersection of I-70 and Kansas Highway 99. The sign itself was great, but we were paying a monthly rental on it, and that monthly fee increased every year. We placed a photo of the billboard in the Gift Shop, and for a year asked visitors if they learned about CAM by seeing that particular billboard. We kept track of those who responded, "Yes," on our sign-in sheets and tallied the total number of visitors covered by an affirmative response. If every visitor covered under those responses had paid full fare to see the Museum, we would still have lost money renting the billboard space.

One more sign rented from the same company as above was along the Kansas Turnpike between the two Topeka exits. It did not rent for a lot of money, but not many people ever recorded it as a way they learned about the Museum. It, too, came down.

The two "wind sock" signs CAM volunteers put up along US 75 over the past year and one-half have been successful. We own the signs and do not pay rent on the properties. One change regarding these two signs since we put them up is the State of Kansas now issues numbered plates that have to be attached to the signs. This is apparently a tracking method for the state to see which signs have been authorized for erection and which have not.

In the meantime, Dick is still looking for a couple more places to put up windsock signs for traffic coming into Topeka from the south and west.

Let's see. Two point one miles in four point five years equals about 0.47 miles/year to move a couple of signs. That is a lot of patience.

→ → →

The second new sign along the 77th Street/
Gary Ormsby Drive exit ramp.



"Survival", con't. from page 1

En route to Ubon, Locher attended US Pacific Air Forces (PACAF) Jungle Survival training west of Clark AFB, Philippines. He referred to this training as Snake School. At this point in his presentation, he related a story about hunting coyotes near Sabetha and talked about "getting nervous," both of which he said played a part later in his story. Coyotes are territorial and usually roam in an area about four miles in radius. A wily coyote can misdirect a tracker in a circuitous route, or have them backtracking a trail. Locher also hunted pheasants and related how the birds would sit tight when closely approached but if someone stopped close by, they often "got nervous," took off, and were shot. Had they stayed put, it was likely a hunter would pass them by.

On the last day of jungle survival training, the trainees were turned loose in the countryside to hide. The Air Force then had local Filipinos search for "downed" pilots. The Filipinos got a 50-pound bag of rice for each pilot they "caught."

Before his departure from Clark, Locher's orders were changed to Udorn, Thailand for further assignment to either the 13th Tactical Fighter Squadron or the 555th Tactical Fighter Squadron. His assignment was to the 555th, the *Triple Nickels*, of the 432nd Tactical Reconnaissance Wing. There were two squadrons of F-4D Phantoms and one squadron of RF-4Cs in the Wing. Locher started with the F-4Ds as a Weapon Systems Officer (WSO).

In 1968 President Lyndon Johnson stopped major bombing raids over North Vietnam. Locher said the F-4Ds escorted RF-4C Phantoms on recon missions over southern North Vietnam. During this time he received orders to a Navigator assignment that would transfer him to Europe on a three-year assignment. Rather than take the new orders, Locher extended one year at Udorn. He

said that when the US started bombing in North Vietnam again, they used laser-guided bombs. In November 1971 there was increased activity from North Vietnam troops pushing around the ends of the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) and more activity in the Plain of Jars, Laos, against Hmong tribes who supported the US.

Mr. Locher saw his first MiG fighter, a MiG-21, in December 1971, and said the air war began really heating up in January and February 1972. F-4s of the 555th worked with Forward Air Controller (FAC) aircraft and escorted AC-119 and AC-130 gunships. He

flew as an FAC in the F-4, as well as flying on bombing missions. He said they flew both day and nighttime missions. When they flew with the gunships, the F-4s provided Combat Air Patrol (CAP) against possible MiG fighters during the usually four-hour long missions. Locher said a flight from Udorn, Thailand to Hanoi, North Vietnam was about the same distance as flying a mission from Topeka to St. Louis.

On one night mission on February 21, 1972, MiG-21s were trying to set up an ambush. Then Captain Locher and pilot Major Robert "Bob" Lodge shot down one of the MiG fighters. It was the first nighttime kill for the Air Force since 1968 and the first for both Locher and Lodge.

Missions went further north. On May 8, 1972 Haiphong harbor was mined. MiG activity notably increased when such high value targets were involved, and this brought about the second shoot down of a MiG-21 by the team of Locher and Lodge. The following day, May 9, Locher flew a FAC mission.

On May 10, a concerted effort was made against the Paul Doumer Bridge and Yen Vien railway marshaling yards near Hanoi. Thirty-two F-4s carrying two 2,000-pound laser-guided bombs flew against the targets. A laser designator was mounted in the back seat of one F-4 in each flight of four Phantoms. This F-4 would go into an orbiting turn and mark the target with its laser,



Roger Locher telling of his evasion and escape in North Vietnam.

Photo by Don Mathers

keeping it "lit" as the guide for the 2,000-pound bombs.

The time over the target was 10 A.M., and there were four flights of MiG-21s in the air during the raid. Locher said the approach to the target was at 500 feet altitude and Mach .9 speed before they zoomed up in a 20-degree climb. Flying again with Bob Lodge, their F-4 carried AIM-7 radar-guided Sparrow missiles. Engaging the MiG-21s, they fired one Sparrow at a range of about 12 miles, but it missed. They fired a second Sparrow at about nine miles and got an orange fireball, their third shoot down. Their wingman got another MiG-21. The first MiG pilot ejected.

Mr. Locher said things got close. He remembers the number 53 on a MiG's nose, and it had blue canopy trim. He said they got as close as 50 feet. But they had no gun on the F-4, just air-to-air missiles that could not be used in such close quarters. As Lodge got behind another MiG-21 and was letting it get far enough ahead to use missiles, three MiG-19 fighters joined the fight.

Locher remembered hearing, "Lead, break right," then felt a big "whump" in the Phantom. Initially, he thought they had been in a mid-air collision with a MiG, but the right engine or the area around it had been hit by 30mm cannon fire from a MiG-19 fighter. The F-4 yawed, slowed, and smoke filled the cockpits. Locher and Lodge needed to go on a southwesterly course of 210 degrees to get to the nearest safe area, but the Phantom was losing all its hydraulic fluid and would quit flying once the fluid was gone. They were at about 10,000 feet altitude when hit, and Locher remembered going through 8,000 feet. The aircraft was out of control, and he could not reach his face curtain to eject because of the negative G forces. He was able to pull the bottom ejection ring and safely ejected from the aircraft.

There was lots of noise, and Locher could not see for three or four seconds. Then the parachute opened, and as he pivoted in the chute, two MiG-19 fighters flew by. He saw his F-4 hit the ground, and there was no other parachute in the air. The remainder of the F-4 flight flew away. Unknown to Locher at the time, Bob Lodge did not survive the shoot down, and as no one else in the other Phantoms saw Locher's parachute, he was presumed killed also.

As he descended, Mr. Locher knew he was going to hit the trees, and he was in the wrong attitude for doing this. When his descent stopped, his parachute was in the trees, and his toes were on the ground. He was down in enemy territory for sure. He was about 45 miles north-

west of Hanoi. His choices were to go west to the Red River or go east and try to get to the Gulf of Tonkin. He was some 75 miles east of the Laotian border and nearly 100 miles west of the Gulf of Tonkin. There were no rescue helicopters to come in. The area was too "hot." He keyed his locator beacon on his beeper radio and tried a voice broadcast, but got no answers. Not wanting the enemy to pick up his transmissions, he shut the transmitter down and decided to use it sparingly.

Knowing that locals and soldiers would be combing the area for survivors, Mr. Locher began evasion tactics. Unable to open his rucksack, he threw it downhill, towards the crash site. He remembered how useless his flight helmet was once on the ground. In fact, the overall white helmet became a liability in the green woodland and jungle setting. Then he remembered the coyote tricks from his Kansas hunting days. Walking on wet leaves and grass he started downhill towards the crash site then changed direction while leaving as little trail as possible to follow. He planned on 45 days to get to a safe area, and he also knew the Yen Bai MiG base was about 10 miles east of his position.

Captain Locher and Major Lodge were shot down shortly after 10 A.M. As there was still plenty of daylight, Locher did a brush cover over himself. About 10 minutes later, the mind games began. Would he get caught? He thought he was safely concealed, but what if? The pheasants "getting nervous" came to mind, and he became determined to not move. Locher said North Vietnamese searched for him most of the afternoon. He did not move until it got dark.

The North Vietnamese took up the search again the next morning. They moved up and down the hill trying to flush him out. Children joined in the search, and Mr. Locher thought for sure the little kids would find him. That evening, he moved further down the hill. He cut a banana tree to get its water, then continued to move down and to the west.

On the third day, Locher got his water from a rainstorm. Using the rain as cover, he continued working his way west to get further away from the villagers. He reflected that they never used a dog in their search for him. At this point it is important to say that Mr. Locher was not covering a lot of ground with these movements. They were calculated to ensure his concealment. Locher said he went into survival training mode for a "chunk" of

"Survival", con't. on page 12

"Survival", con't. from page 11

time. In total, he would spend 23 days on the ground. In the first seven days the heat was on from searchers looking for him. He said during that first week food was not a factor. Then he felt hungry. Psychologically he felt very hungry during the second week, then he found he could turn the hunger sensation on or off. But as time went by he became very weak and lost 30 pounds.

Mr. Locher recounted that when he first got out of his parachute, he stayed in one spot to collect himself. He tried opening the pockets of his rucksack (survival pack) and could not make his fingers work to grab the pocket zippers. He lay on his back for five minutes to get his breath and concentrated on controlled breathing to calm himself. But he never got his fingers to work to grab the zipper tabs (because of shock, which eventually wore off). Everything in the rucksack pockets was unavailable to him, so it became an expendable item to toss down the hill and help throw off the searchers.

Locher said he kept track of the days in a small notebook. His goal was to see the Red River. He walked mostly at dawn, with the sun at his back, and at dusk, with the sun in front of him. He did not travel during the day or at night. But May 13th almost proved to be an unlucky day when he was walking during daytime and nearly walked into a village. Realizing his mistake, he decided not to walk back out for fear of being seen, so he hit the ground and covered up. He heard the village sounds as he hid under foliage. Later, he heard two boys approaching and put on more cover. They kept coming, and Locher said he began to psyche himself out about getting caught as their footsteps got closer. The boys were moving a water buffalo that decided to stop right by Locher. He felt sure one of the boys was standing on his right thigh. The other boy left and came back with an older youngster. Locher thought his time was up, but the older boy was only summoned to help get the water buffalo moving again. The boys and water buffalo moved to the village without incident. Locher later determined that the water buffalo had stood on a sapling, and it was

the sapling putting the pressure on his thigh, not one of the boys. Such were the mind games he dealt with.

Because of his proximity to the village, Locher remained covered until after supper, and it was almost dark. He was waiting for the villagers to go to sleep. Something he observed during his time in enemy territory was that there was nothing for villagers to do after dark, so they went to bed. Once he felt the people were down for the night, he went behind the village and climbed to a ridgeline.

Locher stayed in one spot for three to four days. During this time he had to fight the feeling to just give up. He was beaten down physically and felt if he had the opportunity, he could eat raw poultry.

He remembered the night of May 31 as being particularly miserable as it rained and he experienced some hypothermia. He overslept, and when he awoke he saw it was full daylight and villagers were in the fields. He decided to stay put until dark. Later, he looked to the southwest towards the Yen Bai MiG base. He could see they were firing surface-to-air missiles (SAMs) at US warplanes.

The following day, US aircraft were in the area again. RF-4 Phantoms, escorted by other F-4s, were over the Yen Bai area. Locher keyed his radio beacon and transmitted by voice the call sign of his aircraft the day he was shot down, *Oyster I Bravo*. He requested that anyone hearing his transmission shift to the guard frequency. F-4 pilots picked up his transmission, and Locher spoke with pilots in the escorting Phantoms.

A search and rescue (SAR) flight was directed to the area. It was made up of Douglas A-1 Skyraiders, called "Sandys" and Sikorsky HH-53 helicopters, known as "Jolly Green Giants" or "Super Jolly Green Giants." But there was genuine concern on the parts of both rescuers and the downed pilot. Roger Locher had been down for three weeks and was presumed dead. Was it really he on the radio? And if it was, did someone have a gun to his head? The possibility of an ambush was very real. From Locher's view, he was concerned about the rescue force flying into a hot area, and he was also

Roger Locher had been down for three weeks and was presumed dead. Was it really he on the radio? And if it was, did someone have a gun to his head? The possibility of an ambush was very real.

worried about the force drawing attention to his location, but he did not say not to come.

One of the A-1 pilots, Ron Smith, ran through an authenticator question for Locher to answer. Authenticator questions consisted of four specific questions that had four specific answers. Such questions and answers were established by fliers before they flew in combat operations so that in the event they were shot down, rescuers knew it was them talking on the radio and not the enemy.

Smith asked Locher the maiden name of his mother, which Locher answered correctly, but Smith and others were still leery of a trap. Locher could have been captured, tortured, and given up his authenticator information. As it was, the rescue force was a short distance away from Locher's position and under intense anti-aircraft fire. A MiG fighter was also in the air and made two high-speed passes near the rescue force. Adding to the problem was a low fuel state in the helicopters, so the rescue was called off for the day.

That evening, General John Vogt, commander of the Seventh Air Force, canceled all planned missions over North Vietnam for the next day and directed all forces be diverted for the rescue of Captain Locher. The rescue mission would total nearly 120 aircraft including the SAR helicopters, their A-1 escorts, F-4 Phantoms, F-105G Wild Weasel fighter-bombers, EB-66 electronic jamming aircraft, an HC-130 command aircraft, and KC-135 refueling aircraft.

The new rescue force went in the next morning, June 2. The operation began with a diversionary attack by F-4s on the Yen Bai airfield and attacks against known anti-aircraft artillery and SAM sites in the area. With the diversionary attack taking place, the A-1s and HH-53s came in to locate Captain Locher. He communicated again with Ron Smith, who was flying one of the A-1s. It went something like this.

Smith: "*What's Kites?*"

Locher (after a confused pause): "*A place to drink beer.*"

Smith: "*What?*"

Locher: "*Beer!*"

Smith: "*You're the one I want.*"

Locher: "*Damn right I am.*"

Kites (Kites Bar and Grill) was an establishment in an area of Manhattan, Kansas known as "Aggieville," popular with Kansas State students. A member of the 555th knew Locher had gone to Kansas State and

figured he would know what Kites was. It was an impromptu authenticator made up to ensure that it was really Captain Locher on the ground and that he was not under duress. Until Locher actually got onto the helicopter's rescue hoist there was still some fear this was all an ambush in waiting.

Initially, Captain Locher could not spot the A-1s. He vectored them to where the helicopters had taken ground fire the previous day, then vectored them from that point into his position. Once it was confirmed, the A-1s went out to get the helicopters. All the while, the diversionary strike was going on and sonic booms were filling the air, and Locher remembered that the villagers were working as before.

About 9:30 A.M. four A-1s and one of the HH-53s were about a mile away from Locher's position. Captain Dale Stovall piloted the HH-53 to Locher by homing on his locator beacon. At this point in time, Locher felt the Law of Armed Conflict applied, and he was ready to shoot anyone, including kids or old people, to ensure his rescue. As the A-1s laid down a smoke screen, a device known as a static or jungle penetrator was lowered to the ground by the HH-53. The penetrator was a device pointed on its bottom that had flat arms folded up against its body so it could penetrate a jungle canopy. The person being rescued unfolded the arms and sat on them while holding onto the body of the penetrator while riding this "seat" up to the helicopter as the cable was reeled in. Locher said he held onto the penetrator until helicopter crewmen pried it out of his hands. They gave him a can of peanut butter cookies, which he promptly put into one of his pouches as he felt he would get shot down again before this rescue was over. The helicopters and A-1s had to depart northwest from the area to get away from the SAM sites. Ground fire was intense as the rescue force got away. Locher figured the helicopter would have to refuel from an HC-130 Hercules tanker or land in Laos. They got fuel from an HC-130 and landed three hours later at Udorn, Locher's home base.

Captain Roger Locher survived 23 days on the ground, deep in enemy territory. It was the longest duration between shoot down and rescue and the deepest penetration for a rescue during the Vietnam War. He had walked some 12 miles from where he was shot down to where he was hoisted aboard the rescue

"Exhibits," con't. from page 7

We had acquired a couple of additional tip tanks that had a lot of hail damage and other dents, and took sections of these apart to see what they were about. These tanks also had accessory parts that were missing from the ones we were going to mount on the plane, especially the glass navigation light covers.

Then we studied the tank release mechanisms in the wing tips to a) ensure they would hold the tanks once we put them on, and b) that we could take the tanks off again if need be. When the time came to install the first tank, a handful of volunteers helped hold and move the tank into position as Don watched the latch hook. The first few tries were unsuccessful, but after further study and the adjustment of some lock nuts, the first tank went on. The second tank went on the first try.

The T-33 looks much different and much better with tip tanks, and we were able to show them off when we took the T-33 up to the 50th Anniversary Family Day celebration at the 190th Air Refueling Wing, Kansas Air National Guard. [See related story on page 4.]

In last year's October/November issue of *Plane Talk*, we reported the saga of what happened to the Bf-109G movie mock-up after putting its wings back on.

We are happy to report the fixes made to the mock-up have held. But we noticed that the wings drooped. We went into the library and pulled out books on the Bf-109 and found out the wings on the fighter had a dihedral (upwardly inclined wing) of six degrees. Armed with this information we measured the wing lengths on the mock-up, made some scale drawings and determined that making some wedges about three-fourths of an inch wide and placing these between the fuselage and wings should produce the desired effect.

Don Dawson made the wedges and while looking at where to install them, found out we would have to pull the wings off the mock-up. Volunteers in 604 scheduled some time to do this, set up support tables with foam padding, and pulled one wing at a time as Don installed the wedges. The process went smoothly, and Don came away with all his fingers, and we now have six degrees of dihedral in the wings of the Bf-109.

Dave Houser has fabricated and installed wing fillets over the areas. He will cover these with fabric, followed by painting.

More projects are in the works, and we will report on these in future issues. →

CAM joins in at Armed Forces Day Celebration

CAM's representation at the Armed Forces Day Celebration at Heartland Park Raceway Topeka on May 19 included our 1941 Dodge Ambulance, our 1952 Willys "Follow Me" jeep, **Stu Entz** and one of his jeeps, **Beattie Dickson** and his jeep, and **Dick Trupp** and his M37 Weapons Carrier. Other CAM volunteers who were with the vehicles through the morning and afternoon included **Zak Amos**, **Don and Peggy Dawson**, **Chuck Urban**, **Danny San Romani**, and most of the **Naylor** family with **Gary**, **Susan**, **Desiree**, and **Rachel**.

Our group was among a number of military vehicles, some vintage and others in current inventory. A Bradley fighting vehicle and M1 Abrams tank were a couple of the present day armor nearby. An HH-60 Blackhawk landed and took its place on the outskirts of the military vehicles. Several vintage vehicles from the Rolling Thunder chapter of the Military Vehicle Preservation Association were across from us giving the public a variety of 50 and 60 year-old military vehicles to look over. Many folks would stop by to visit and relate past military experiences with this or that vehicle and people of younger generations wanted to know the history of the vehicles..

Equestrian teams from Fort Riley and the Kansas National Guard put on exhibitions in period dress of the 1860s-1870s in two grassy areas. A classic car show had a large number of entries in a parking area just south of our location, and visitors could try out their skills on a climbing wall near the concession stands.

The gates opened to the public at 2 P.M., and there was a constant stream of people the rest of the afternoon looking at all the various venues. It was a great day for everyone, and **Ray Irwin** and his staff at **Heartland Park** really had things well organized. Around 4 P.M. the military vehicles began preparing for departure to make way for the evening and nighttime programs, and our small convoy of vehicles headed back to CAM. →

"Survival", con't. from page 13

helicopter. He was flying his 407th combat mission when shot down.

With Locher in hand, there was some hope that Major Robert Lodge had also escaped, but that was not to be. Major Lodge's remains were returned to the United States on September 30, 1977.

Roger Locher remained in the Air Force and later retrained to be a pilot. In 1985-1987 he commanded the 4453rd Test and Evaluation Squadron which was responsible for testing the F-117A Nighthawk stealth fighter.

Another WSO in *Oyster Flight* on May 10, 1972, was Captain Larry Pettit, call sign *Oyster Four*. Larry Pettit was the WSO in the CAM's F-4D Phantom the day it downed a MiG-21 on October 12, 1972.

After his presentation, Mr. Locher took several questions from the audience and stayed after the luncheon ended to answer more questions and visit with members. His is a truly remarkable story of evasion and survival and we feel truly fortunate for having Mr. Locher as our guest. And we certainly thank Ralph Knehans for contacting and inviting Mr. Locher to be our speaker.

Other sources that address this story include:

One Day in a Long War, by Jeffrey Ethell and Alfred Price,

Vietnam Air Losses: United States Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps Fixed-Wing Aircraft Losses in Southeast Asia 1961-1973, by Chris Hobson, and The United States Air Force in Southeast Asia 1961-1973 An Illustrated Account, edited by Carl Berger. →

August Membership Luncheon features information on the Lockheed C-130 Hercules

Our scheduled speaker for the August Membership Luncheon is CAM member **Ralph Knehans**. Ralph's topic will be the Lockheed C-130 Hercules and his association with them, including his tour in Vietnam. Ralph spoke to us at the June 2006 luncheon, giving a very informative presentation of his duties with a Weather Reconnaissance Squadron of WB-29 Superfortresses during the early 1950s.

The August luncheon is August 13th at 11:30 A.M. in the Jean Wanner Education Conference Room, Hangar 602. →

New Supporters

Norman, Gary, & Gaylene
Bartlett
The Beatty Family
William, Gaylene, Traci, Penny,
Sean, Jason
Ray & Cheryl Kulp

Renewing Supporters

Richard Gates
Ralph & Margaret Knehans
Gerry Sibley

→ → →

Visitors

During **May**
the Museum had
1,287 visitors
from **40 states**
and
Australia
Canada
France
Great Britain

During **June**
we had
1,400 visitors
from **35 states**
and
Australia
Canada
France
Germany
Sweden

→ → →

Be a volunteer at our Winged Foot 5K Fun Run & Walk

Our Third Annual Winged Foot 5 Kilometer Fun Run and Walk is scheduled for **Saturday morning, September 29**. We need volunteer support for this event. You can sign up to help with registration, be one of the course monitors directing runners around Forbes Field, or pass out water to runners. Of course, as happened in the first two run/walks, you can be a participant.

If you cannot be there on race day, there are other ways you can help out. Encourage people or businesses you know to be a sponsor for the race. Or perhaps be one yourself. Sponsorships are \$100. Sponsors get their names printed on the race T-shirts, and **Gene Howerter** ensures sponsors get a race shirt.

Unless there is someone in the wings we do not know about, Gene will be the race planner, coordinator, gatherer of sponsors, head cook and bottle washer again for this fund raising event. Last year we had new course records set in the overall men's and ladies' categories. We hope to see more runners and more records fall in all age groups this year.

The run/walk starts at 8 A.M. on J Street by Hangar 602. Volunteers please be at the Museum by 7 A.M. →

August/September Calendar of Events

August

Monday – Thursday August 6 - 9
Aviation Education Class
Jean Wanner Education Conference Center
9 A.M. - 12 P.M.

Monday, August 13
Membership Luncheon
JWECC
11:30 A.M.

September

Saturday September 29
Winged Foot 5K Fun Run and Walk
Start and finish on J Street by Hangar 602
7 A.M. Volunteers at the Museum
8 A.M. Start Time

There is no Membership Luncheon in September.
The next luncheon is Monday, October 8.

→ → →



Combat Air Museum
P.O. Box 19142
Topeka, KS 66619-0142

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Longitude - 95°40'⁴⁰39.93"W

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