

COMBAT AIR MUSEUM

→ → → Plane Talk → → →

The Official Newsletter of the Combat Air Museum

Topeka Regional Airport Topeka, Kansas

April / May 2015 • Vol. 31, No. 2

Planning is underway for the 22nd Annual Celebrity Pancake Feed Volunteers, we need your assistance

by Gene Howerter

The 22nd Annual Celebrity Pancake Feed is Saturday April 25, 2015. As always the feed will be held in Hangar #602. It begins at 7:00 AM and runs until 12:00 PM. The admission fee is \$6.00 per person, which provides all of the pancakes you can eat, with an initial serving of coffee and orange juice to drink. The admission fee also covers admission to the Museum. Advance tickets can be purchased from various members and in the Gift Shop. For more information concerning advance ticket sales, please call Deloris Zink or Gene Howerter at 862-3303. You can use cash, check, or credit card for the purchase of these. Let's make this year's fundraiser the best ever. Please invite all of your family, friends and neighbors to attend. Keep in mind, money raised from this event benefits the Museum immensely throughout the year.

Bob Carmichael of Perkins Family Restaurant will take charge of the grilling once again and provide the pancake mix, sausage, butter and syrup. Bob is also the head pancake flipper, quality control officer, and coach for our celebrity flippers. Remember to thank Bob for his service to the Combat Air Museum the next time you eat at Perkins Family Restaurant in Topeka.

Entertainment scheduled so far include the ever popular "Soul-full Singers" from the Countryside Methodist Church, along with the "Blumont" musical group. We have requested a KC-135 Stratotanker from the 190th Air Refueling Wing, Kansas Air National Guard for static display on the flight line side of Hangar #602. The aircraft will be open for inside tours for those who wish to get up close and personal with the plane.



There should be more participants and entertainment by the time this event takes place.

We sent letters and made phone calls in early March to prospective celebrity flippers. As in the past, we go for a mix of flippers, including elected officials in our local, state, and national governments, local radio and television personalities, local business and corporate per-

sonalities, military personalities, faculty and administration and sports representatives from Washburn University, and other public folks known around Topeka. Suggestions are always welcome and encouraged; please call Gene if you have suggestions.

Again this year we are replacing the silent auction. Last year we went to a format we call "Fly-In" Market Sale. Again, items will be priced, tagged and sold directly to the buyer. There is no bidding involved. By all accounts this way of handling sales was very successful last year so we are going to stick with it. This has made it very convenient for those who purchase early to leave with their newly acquired gem instead of having to return

"Pancake Feed" con't. on Page 9

Inside This Issue

Show and Tell: Dr. Ward shares artifacts from his collection 3

Revitalization project for EC-121 Warning Star 4

Reader writes of surviving EC-121 plane crash 5

Contributions to Hangar 605 project 7

Test Pilot from Buffalo, Kansas (Part 1) 8

Dillon's Plus Card helps CAM 12

Combat Air Museum

Topeka Regional Airport

Hangars 602 & 604

7016 SE Forbes Avenue

Topeka, KS 66619-1444

Telephone (785) 862-3303

FAX (785) 862-3304

www.combatairmuseum.org

Provided by

Rossini Management Systems, Inc.

Email: office@combatairmuseum.com

Museum Curator

Danny San Romani

Office Manager

Deloris Zink

Board of DirectorsGene Howerter - *Chairman*Dave Murray - *Vice Chairman*Tad Pritchett - *Secretary*

Les Carlson

Don Dawson

Stu Entz

Raymond Irwin

Doug Jacobs

Ted Nolde

Dick Trupp

Museum Hours

January 2 - February 28/29

Mon. - Sun. Noon - 4:30 P.M.

Last Entry Every Day is 3:30 P.M.

March 1 - December 31

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

Last Entry Every Day is 3:30 P.M.

Closed New Year's Day, Easter,

Thanksgiving, Christmas Day

Newsletter**Layout & Design**

Toni Dixon

785-865-4221

Plane Talk, the official newsletter

of Combat Air Museum

of Topeka, Kansas,

is published bi-monthly.

Your comments are welcomed.

From the Chairman's Desk

Gene Howerter, Chairman, BOD

by Gene Howerter

It is hard to believe that our April Membership Luncheon is just around the corner. The Museum is gearing up for another eventful high season. We have already logged a pretty good first two months in this new year.

Our February Operating Summary, (Key Performance Indicator)- Visitors to the Museum for Jan/Feb we had 882 paying visitors for the period. That represents a significant 53.4% increase over last year for the same period. When you couple that figure with the Average Entrance Rate Paid & Gift Shop Profit Paid by these visitors, we had an OK beginning in 2015. Please continue talking up the Museum to all of your family and friends and we should be able to stay in the black another year.

I want to thank all of you who have heard the call and supported the Museum by sending extra money when paying your annual dues. As I reported in previous issue of *Plane Talk*, the Museum is always very close to even, financially, at the end of each calendar year. Without these extra donations we would have been in the red each of the last few years. Let me take this opportunity to thank each of you again for your support. Please continue your support as we strive for financial success in 2015. Just a reminder, if you are a donor to CFC (Combined Federal Campaign) or know anyone who is, CAM is certified to accept donations from the CFC.

Planning is now under way for one of our two biggest fundraising events of the year. **Saturday, April 25, 2015**, CAM will hold its 22nd annual **Celebrity Pancake Feed**. Letters are now being sent to this year's celebrity pancake flippers. We are always looking to invite new, first-time celebrity flippers, and I look forward to welcoming many of our

special guests who have been flippers in the past. Guest flippers include state and local politicians, radio and TV personalities as well as sports figures and distinguished friends of the Museum and community. If you have suggestions for flippers, please let me know ASAP.

Along with the pancake feed, we will also be having great entertainment including music, song and dance as time will allow. Again this year we will have a Fly-In Market Sale fundraiser. This new format has replaced what used to be a silent auction. For more information on Page 1 regarding details on the Pancake Feed. We are always looking for donations for this fundraising activity. New and like-new items are encouraged for donation. Please drop them off at CAM. For more information, call 785-862-3303.

Finally, I want to thank all of our members and supporters of the Combat Air Museum for keeping the faith with us throughout all of these years. As we begin the year 2015, the Museum will be celebrating its 38th year of operation. There have been a lot of birth pangs over the years, but again, by all accounts, the Museum is still opening its doors each day thanks to our great volunteers and all of our supporters.

For me there will always be a lot of wonderful memories, both past and present, of this museum over these years, and I trust there will be many more for all of us. It is my hope that, as members of the Museum you will visit the Combat Air Museum often. We are a "family friendly" institution. Please come and bring all of your family and friends for a fun-filled visit.

We hope to see you at the Museum, where the coffee pot is on every day for your enjoyment.

→ → →

Show & Tell

Dr. Howard Ward shares articles from his collection of military artifacts

by *Stu Entz and Dave Murray*

Dr. Howard “Howie” Ward was our presenter for the February Membership Luncheon. Howie talked about his lifelong interest in the collection and display of military artifacts and memorabilia. He brought a small cross-section of his collection of Civil War, WWI, WWII, Korean, and Vietnam War memorabilia to show to us, including insignia and patches from the German WWII Luftwaffe and various German military forces, including Nazi Party armbands.

His display of WWI and WWII battle helmets included those from the British/French and German forces in WWI, indicating the major differences between the German “coal scuttle” helmet (“Stahlhelm”) which essentially covered the wearers’ head and ears and the British and American “Brodie” headgear that was more like upside-down large soup bowls. The French helmet that Howie showed was along the lines of the British design, but of a lighter steel construction, with less head protection from bullets and shrapnel.

Essentially, for the first year of the war, all combatants went into battle without any purposely built protection. Even the characteristic Pickelhaube spiked helmet of the German forces was only constructed of hard leather. It was only by the end of 1915/beginning of 1916 that most nations designed and distributed steel headgear designed to protect against shrapnel injuries to the head. Head injuries dropped dramatically when the new hardened helmets were introduced. In contrast to the Hadfield (12% manganese content) steel used in the British “Brodie” helmet, the Germans used a harder silicon/nickel steel. As a result, and also due to the helmet’s form, the “Stahlhelm” had to be formed in heated dies at a greater unit cost than the British helmet, which could be formed in one piece.

Other military memorabilia shown included WWII canteens from the various forces, a German bread pouch, and a WWI Gas Mask container. Various original magazine covers from WWII demonstrated the progress of the war and showed some of the most important political figures from the warring nations.

Dr. Ward was born in Mt. Vernon, Illinois and lived most of his youth in Effingham, Illinois. He completed his undergraduate studies in Pre-Medicine at the University of Illinois in Champaign, and his Medical Doctorate at Northwestern University in 1962. From 1966 to 1968 he served in the United States Air Force at the 838th Tactical Hospital at Forbes Air Force Base. Dr. Ward recounted that after his assignment to the Topeka Air Force Base he called Randolph Air Force Base to ask if he might be assigned to a more interesting military posting where his specialized medical skills could be put to better use. The



*Dr. Howard
“Howie” and
Marilyn Ward
- photo provided
by the Wards*

Air Force agreed and gave as an alternative, a base in Bangkok, Thailand. The second question that Dr. Ward asked was, if he put the phone back on the receiver, would the Air Force forget that he called with his first question? Fortunately for all of us, the Air Force did forget that call.

After serving in Topeka, Dr. Ward returned to St. Louis but elected to return to Topeka in late 1969 to join what is now the Cotton-O’Neil Clinic. He was the third physician in the group that is now comprised of more than 200 physicians. He retired from active practice in 2006 and in 2007 the new Stormont-Vail Cancer Center building was named the Howard N. Ward Medical Building in his honor.

Dr. Ward could only bring a few items from his extensive 25 year collection. His lifelong hobby started when he was a young boy, greeting the WWII army trains that passed through his town. He would stand alongside the carriages and yell to the soldiers, asking for army patches. Many threw patches down to him and from that inauspicious beginning there bloomed a very impressive collection.

Dr. Ward mentioned that his wife, Marilyn, has always been very tolerant of his hobby and has been to many a military and gun show, with him to purchase original items for the collection. He also described the methods for bringing items into the house without arousing extra scrutiny, including having the items stored at a friend’s home for a period, or sneaking a piece into the basement at midnight.

→ → →

An Update on the revitalization project for the EC-121 Warning Star

by Wes Barricklow

Work continues on the revitalization project for the Museum's EC-121 Warning Star. To date, the entirety of the work has been in the "behind the screens" category. Work has been completed on a project plan including a rough time line for the project. Resources for the project continue to be recruited with a total of ten individuals now signed up to work on the various aspects of the project.

One of the biggest milestones was reached a few weeks ago, when the final decision was made on where the Warning Star would be permanently located on the Museum grounds. After considering multiple options, it was decided that the aircraft will remain at its current location. There will be some additional site work involving the aircraft, including securing the front nose gear to the apron, working on installing some landscape type material around the exterior of the aircraft, and installing a permanent underground power source for the interior of the aircraft.

Work is also underway with a major paint company to see if we can secure the needed paint, primer and clear coat at either a substantially reduced price or, best case scenario, as a donation. This work is ongoing and we hope to have a final answer in the near future.

As the weather begins to improve and we move into spring, we will be planning and executing work days for the project. If you want to be part of this project and have not signed up, contact either Project Managers Stu at 221-2121 or Wes at 640-9156. We welcome all who want to provide their time and resources to the project.

→ → →

In Memoriam Katrina V. Clark

#3891
1939-2015
January 9, 2015
Topeka, Kansas
Eight-years Member



EC-121T 52-3418 arriving to Forbes Field May 1981. - photo by Gene Howerter

Calendar of Events

April

Sunday April 5

Easter Sunday
The Museum is Closed

Monday, April 13

Membership Luncheon
Jean Wanner Education Conference Room
11:30am
Seaman High School Students
Present National History Day Projects

Saturday, April 25

Celebrity Pancake Feed
Hangar 602
7am - 12pm

May

No events scheduled.

There is no Membership Luncheon in May.
The next luncheon will be
Monday, June 8, 2015.

→ → →

Visit our website
at www.combatairmuseum.org



A WV-2 Warning Star of Airborne Early Warning Training Unit Atlantic (AEWTULANT)
- Internet photo

***Plane Talk* reader relates a story of his survival of a WV-2 Warning Star plane crash that killed five crew members**

In response to an initial call for volunteers to work on the Lockheed EC-121T by Chairman Gene Howerter in his column in the December 2014/January 2015 issue of *Plane Talk*, we received a letter from CAM member the Reverend Larry R. Thomas of Shawnee, Kansas. Reverend Thomas is a former flight engineer on EC-121 and C-121 aircraft with almost 5,000 hours with these Lockheed aircraft. He included with his letter a story he wrote about a plane crash he was in on August 9, 1962, in an WV-2 (EC-121) trying to land at Patuxent River Naval Air Station, Maryland. He also included photocopies of newspaper clippings, some with photographs of the crashed aircraft and crewmen. In August 1962 the US Navy designation for the EC-121 was WV-2. The aircraft were named Warning Star. The following month, a re-designation of all US military aircraft took place under the influence of Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, and the Navy WV-2s became EC-121Ks. The aircraft involved in this crash was WV-2, US Navy Bureau Number 141324. The following is Reverend Thomas' story.

GOD'S PROVIDENCE AT WORK

"The clouds looked black and thunderous. Streaks of lightening hurtled from the sky to the ground. It looked ominous from 10,000 feet. The plane flew on. We were over Richmond, Virginia. The storm is just ahead. It would be good to get home. Home is Patuxent River Naval Air Station in Lexington Park, Maryland. Our squadron was AEWTULANT (Airborne Early Warning Training Unit, Atlantic).

AEWTULANT flew the EC-121, Super Connie, four engine aircraft. The plane was a modified version of the TWA's super constellation passenger plane which flew the skies for many years. The Navy version had a radar dome on top and bottom of the aircraft. Its function was to provide radar patrol for various missions. It was a forerunner of the AWACS jets of today.

AEWTULANT responsibilities included ground school for flight engineers and pilots, simulator training flights

in a semi-trailer set up with the cockpit of the EC-121 and actual flights in both C-121 and EC-121 aircraft. We were a training unit for squadrons flying radar patrol from Argentina, Newfoundland, to the Azores Islands and to Iceland.

I had arrived in "Pax River" in July, 1962, with a pregnant wife and one son. We located an apartment in Lexington Park called Center Gardens. After two years of flying, I had already amassed almost 4,000 hours as a flight engineer while stationed at Barbers Point, Hawaii. Flight crews deployed from there to Midway Island for 18 days and flew 14-16 hours of radar patrol from Midway to Alaska and back. Shore duty was next. I was sent to Pax River to teach flight engineers school. However, instructors were required to not only teach in the classrooms and fly training flights, but we were often assigned to fly night radar patrol for a missile range and weekend flights to various destinations.

On August 8, 1962, a Wednesday morning, I was assigned to fly to Corpus Christi, Texas, so we could exhibit our plane to graduating pilots from pilot school located there. It was hoped that some of the graduating pilots would choose to fly the EC-121. After arriving and cleaning the plane, we were given overnight passes. I called some friends that I had been stationed with in Hawaii and went over to their house for a meal and visit. I stayed in the transient barracks that night.

Arriving back at the aircraft the next morning, I noticed the other flight engineer, Master Chief Heinbach, was not there. He arrived a few minutes later looking worse for the wear. He had been out all night. He announced that I was to be responsible and then proceeded to climb into a bunk and went to sleep.

It was a long 5-hour flight back to Pax River. As we arrived over Richmond, I was tired. When we suddenly hit the rough weather, Chief Heinbach woke up and said he would relieve me. I told him that I was doing okay and

"WV-2 Plane Crash" con't on Page 6

"WV-2 Plane Crash" con't. from Page 5

we were only 20 minutes from touchdown. All at once, I felt this strange sensation – an inner voice that said, "Get out of that seat." I don't know why, but I said to the Chief, "Relieve me for a few minutes while I get a cup of coffee." He did. In a few minutes, I made my way back to the cockpit and said to the Chief, "Okay, I'll take it back now." But he replied that he was doing okay and would take it the rest of the way home.

I stood in the cockpit as we approached Pax River. The clouds were darker now and the rain started. The pilot radioed for landing instructions and (I found out later) we were given to the GCA (Ground Controlled Approach) radar controller. As long as you flew down the guideway he gave, you would arrive over the end of the runway at approximately 100 feet altitude.

As we made our approach, the rain grew harder. Soon, it was like a gully-washer. Radar lost contact and we were told to apply power and go around for another approach. This time, Approach Control radioed that we would be guided toward the runway by the Air Surveillance Radar, but that we were responsible for our altitude. We started in again. It was raining so hard that no one could see out the windows of the plane. We were relying strictly on instruments and guidance from radar control. The ride was bumpy.

Just then, a red alternator warning light came on the flight engineer's upper panel. No problem. I told Chief Heinbach that I would go back to the middle of the aircraft and trip the circuit breaker. As I turned to go aft, I glanced at the altimeter and saw it was 500 feet. I knew I had to hurry.

Just as I stepped out of the cockpit, we hit the tops of the trees. The pilot called out, "Max Power" and Chief Heinbach said, "I've given you all I can give." Those were the last words I heard him speak. All at once we were back in the air, but we had lost flying speed. The plane shook. We were in a stall.

I sat down on the bunk just behind the cockpit. I tried to get a seatbelt on but couldn't. AD2 Russell, who was sitting there, put his arms around me. Suddenly, we hit the ground. The lights went out; white hot fire broke out in the middle of the aircraft. I knew we were all going to die. Pictures of my life flashed before me. A panic feeling settled in. I was not ready to meet God.

I had been in the aircraft at 10,000 feet when we practiced the stall procedure many times. The "Connie," after stalling, always fell to the right and when enough speed was regained, the pilot reestablished control. It happened that way 999 times out of 1000. I found out later that this time the plane had lifted up out of the trees, but leaves, limbs, etc. went down the air intakes to the engines and they lost power. On this fateful day, August 9, 1962, that plane fell to the left. Why, no one knows. I believe that

God put his hand under the plane that day and began to guide it.

No, we did not make the runway, but crashed on the bank of a small pond not far from a children's day-camp center. Most of the children had boarded buses to go home. The camp's director and counselors after smelling and seeing the smoke, got the rest of the children out.

AD2 Russell, who had held me as we crashed, was the first to head to the cockpit. He tried to open the front hatch, but it was stuck. Finally, with both of us trying, it came open. I glanced to see if I could see Chief Heinbach, but all I saw was broken hydraulic lines and part of the nose gear sticking up through the cockpit. We were all sprayed with hot hydraulic fluid.

As we filed out of the airplane, I ran into another sailor standing in the rain looking at his hands. They were black. He had received 3rd degree burns while climbing out of the aircraft. I took off my undershirt, wrapped it around his hands and led him out to the road, some 20 yards ahead. Emergency crews were arriving in pickups and they helped him get into the back of one. One of the emergency crewmen tried to get me to get into the back of his pickup. I ignored him and made my way back to the plane. I looked inside to see if I could find Chief Heinbach. I did not see him. Then, I remembered that fuel tank No. 5, which is in the belly of the plane only contained 50 gallons of fuel. If the fire got to the vapors, it would blow up. So I left the plane and started toward the road, helping other victims as I went.

Suddenly, I remembered that my wife, Darlene, would be waiting for me at the hangar. So, instead of getting in the pickups which were taking crew members to the hospital, I knocked on the window of a car which was stopped for the crash. I asked the driver if he would take me to AEWTULANT's hangar. But the traffic was too great and he could not turn around. So, I climbed out and knocked on another car which was going the correct direction. The driver let me climb in and we made our way to the hangar.

Arriving there, I went up to the window of my wife's car. She rolled it down and I said, "Honey, I am okay." With a bewildered look, she said, "What happened to your flight suit?" My flight suit zipper was busted. I don't remember how I did it, but must have broken it trying to get my undershirt off to wrap around that flier's hand. Just then, a number of officers and others arrived and asked what happened. I described the crash to them. I was ordered to go to the hospital and someone took me, but I was okay. The ordeal was over.

Later, I learned that the men in the rear of the aircraft could not get the back hatch open and had to crawl out through a crack in the top near the middle of the aircraft. They slid onto the wings and into the pond. Most received 3rd degree burns and were in the hospital for a year.

AD2 Russell, after leaving the aircraft, saw the plane commander in the co-pilot's seat and proceeded to rip

off the sheet metal and pull him from the aircraft. For his actions, he received the highest award given during peacetime, the Medal of Freedom.

Five men died, including Chief Heinbach. We would all have been killed if the plane had crashed in the trees and not on the bank of that small pond. Why did I escape? Was it God's voice speaking to me in the flight engineer's seat? Why did Chief Heinbach die and not me? I will never know until we see God. But I firmly believe that "God's Providence" was at work that day. My family and I started going to church and I made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ. A few years later, I left the navy after serving one tour in Vietnam. I went to school, entered the ministry and served as a pastor for 24 years. Was this the reason why God spared my life?"

In his letter, Reverend Thomas wrote that he was in Vietnam in 1966 and in 2008 was found to be suffering from effects of Agent Orange. He wrote he will not be able to physically take part in our planned work on the EC-121T, but we hope we can use him as a reference source.

→ → →

2015 Events

April

- 5 – Easter Sunday; Museum closed
- 13 – Membership Luncheon
- 25 – Annual Celebrity Pancake Feed

June

- 1-4 – Young Aviators Education Class
- 8 – Membership Luncheon

July

- 6-9 – Young Aviators Education Class

August

- 3-7 – Young Aviators Education Class
- 10 – Membership Luncheon

September

- 26 – 11th Annual Winged Foot 5k/10K Run

October

- 12 – Membership Luncheon

November

- 1 – End Daylight Savings Time
- 26 – Thanksgiving; Museum closed

December

- 14 – Membership Luncheon
- 25 – Christmas Day; Museum closed

→ → →

WV-2 Plane Crash

Seventeen crewmen and two passengers were aboard BuNo 141324 when it crashed. All five casualties were from the crew. Injuries to the survivors ranged from very minor to severe.

Fatalities:

Pilot – Lieutenant Walter R. Fillmore
 Copilot – Lieutenant Commander W. I. Anderson
 Flight Engineer – Master Chief Petty Officer John Mark Heinbach ADCM
 Radar Technician – Petty Officer Second Class Dale L. Payton AT2
 CIC Radar Operator – Petty Officer Third Class Kenneth W. Taylor ACW3

Surviving Crew:

Navigator - Lieutenant Dan Daniels
 Navigator – Lieutenant (junior grade) A. J. Pongress
 Ground Support – Petty Officer Second Class G. Russell ADR2
 Electrician – Petty Officer Second Class James Gettle AE2
 CIC Operator – Petty Officer Third Class J. E. Bruner AC3
 Ground Support – Petty Officer Second Class G. R. Foshee
 Flight Engineer – Petty Officer Second Class Larry R. Thomas ADR2
 Radioman – Petty Officer Second Class James W. Coursey AT2
 Radioman – Petty Officer Third Class J. L. Hackbarth ATR3
 Radar Technician – Petty Officer First Class D. M. Weathers AT1
 Ground Support Chief Petty Officer A. F. Edwards AMC
 Ground Support – Petty Officer Second Class J. W. Kilgore AD2
Surviving Passengers
 Lieutenant Commander L. R. W. Duncan
 Captain W. H. Belcher, US Air Force

→ → →

Contributions to the Hangar 602 Renovation Project

by Dick Trupp

Thank You! Thank You! Thank You! As of Wednesday, March 11 we, Combat Air Museum, have contributed \$6,215 toward the Hangar 602 Renovation Project. This allows me to ask for matching funds from prospective donor organizations/foundations, and makes our self-supporting effort impressive to these prospects.

If you yet plan to make your personal gift to CAM's project, please give it your best consideration. My time line for completion of the work on the Hangar is summer/fall 2015. Thanks, again, for the wonderful response. Your help is much appreciated. →

US Air Force Captain Milburn G. Apt from Buffalo, Kansas became a test pilot in the 1950s

During 2014, CAM member Gary Naylor spent several weeks at Fort Irwin and the National Training Center in California's Mojave Desert maintaining US Army MQ-1C Gray Eagle unmanned aircraft systems. During his off times, Gary, a retired Air Force Master Sergeant, made a few visits to Edwards Air Force Base (AFB).

Edwards is home to the Air Force Test Center and operates the Air Force Test Pilot School. It is also home to NASA's Armstrong Flight Research Center. The Test Center conducts and supports research and developmental flight testing and evaluation of aerospace systems from their concept to combat. Test activities conducted by America's commercial aerospace industry also take place at Edwards. The base was originally Muroc Army Air Field in 1942, then Muroc AFB in 1948, before being renamed Edwards AFB in 1949. Airplane flight testing began at Muroc in 1942 with the jet-powered Bell XP-59 Airacomet and has continued to this day. Captain Charles "Chuck" Yeager at the controls of the Bell X-1 became the first human to break MACH 1, the sound barrier. Almost every US military aircraft since the 1950s has seen at least some of its test programs performed at Edwards.

Gary visited the Flight Test Museum, static aircraft displays on the Base proper, and others displays outside the West Gate, North Gate, and Blackbird Airpark. He also sought out accessible crash sites of several test aircraft flown over the years from Muroc/Edwards. One of the first was the crash site for a Northrop YB-49 Flying Wing flown by native Kansan Major Daniel Forbes, with Captain Glen Edwards, Lieutenant Edward Swindell, and civilian aeronautical engineers Claire Leser and Charles Bell. All five men died in a 1948 crash of this prototype bomber. A year later, Topeka AFB was renamed Forbes AFB, and Muroc was renamed Edwards AFB.

After one of his visits, Gary emailed CAM curator Danny San Romani asking if he knew of a Captain Milburn Apt and the Bell X-2 test aircraft. Danny was not familiar with Captain Apt, and he knew the X-2 as one in the famous series of X aircraft from the late 1940s through the late 1960s. As it turned out, Danny was in for a history lesson.

Air Force test pilot Captain Millburn G. "Mel" Apt was born in Buffalo, Kansas, in 1924 and graduated from Buffalo High School in 1942. He enlisted in the Army Air Corps after graduation, successfully attended flight school, and was commissioned in 1944. He served the remainder of World War II and until June 1946 in the Sixth Air Force, Caribbean Defense Command. He earned a Bachelor of Science Degree in 1951 from the University of Kansas and a degree in Aeronautical Engineering from the US Air Force



US Air Force Captain Milburn G. Apt of Buffalo, Kansas – LIFE Magazine

Institute. Apt graduated from the Experimental Flight Test Pilot School at Edwards AFB in September 1954, and three months later played a vital role in a harrowing test flight.

On December 22, 1954, Air Force test pilot Captain Richard James Harer was flying a test flight in a Lockheed F-94C Starfire all weather, day/night interceptor. The purpose of the flight was testing the suitability of an air-to-air combat maneuver in which the F-94's drag chute would be deployed to cause sudden deceleration in flight. The Air Force wanted to see what would happen by deploying this chute at 600 miles per hour. What happened was later described in the June 18, 1956, issue of LIFE Magazine.

Three fail-safes were built into this test flight in case things went wrong. Captain Harer could release the drag chute manually. If that did not work, he could trigger an explosive charge to blow the drag chute off the aircraft. If the first and second options failed, he could enter a dive with afterburner on and maneuver the jet so that the afterburner flames would burn the chute away. All three options failed, as witnessed by Captain Millburn Apt, flying in a chase plane.

Captain Harer deployed the drag chute at 20,000 feet and immediately tumbled out of control. As each fail safe failed, Harer was rapidly losing altitude with Apt flying alongside calling advice to him. Harer made a hard crash landing, bursting into flame. The LIFE article reported Apt landed at the same time beside the F-94, skidding to a halt. He left his plane and ran to the burning F-94. Apt found one side of the jet was not on fire and got up to the cockpit. It was filling with smoke, but he saw that Captain Harer was moving. Apt pulled the exterior canopy release, and it failed. The desert, dry lake bed had nothing for Apt to use to break the canopy. He banged on it with his fists only to cause some injury to himself. He could see fire entering the cockpit.

A jeep arrived at the crash site, and the driver ran to the plane with a five pound extinguisher. He emptied that on the forward part of the jet and handed the empty extinguisher to Apt. Apt began beating the extinguisher against the canopy with no success. The fire was getting to Harer. The jeep driver returned with a five-gallon gas can, yelling to Apt that it was full of water. Apt hit the canopy with some 50 pounds of weight and cracked it. He broke a hole with the next hit, and kept hitting until there was a hole large enough to pull the rather tall Harer out of the cockpit.

Captain Harer survived but lost both feet. He received artificial feet, was promoted to Major, and retired. Captain Apt was awarded the Soldier's Medal for his actions, the highest award for valor in a non-combat action (the Airman's Medal did not come into being until 1960.) Captain Apt continued with his flight test duties at Edwards.

In 1955 Captain Apt accepted an assignment to the Air Force Flight Test Center Fighter Operations Branch. He served as flight test engineer and project pilot on test programs involving the North American F-100 Super Sabre, McDonnell F-101 Voodoo, Convair F-102 Delta Dagger and Republic F-105 Thunderchief. By March 1956 he was taking part in flight tests involving somewhat of an aerial oddity.

In 1942 the concept of US Army Air Force heavy bombers physically carrying their own fighter escort underwent study. This was not an entirely new concept. The US Navy airships USS AKRON and USS MACON began carrying Curtiss F9C Sparrowhawk scout fighters in hangars built inside the airships in 1932. Both airships were lost in storm-related crashes in 1933 and 1935 respectively.

"Test Pilot" con't. on Page 10

"Pancake Feed" con't. from Page 1

for it or having to have it delivered. Remember, donations of items are encouraged. The set-up of tables displaying sale items will be the same as in previous years.

Marlene Urban is in charge of the Market Sale, but you may call the Museum for more information. All items for the Fly-In Market Sale may be brought to the Museum before April 23rd. Large items may be brought in on April 24th (Friday) when the tables will be set up. Please do not bring in items on the day of the pancake feed without making prior arrangements with Marlene. If your donation does not sell, and you want it returned, please indicate this on a note with your name and phone number and attach it to the applicable item.

Question? Please contact Marlene Urban at 379-5306 or urban.marlene@att.net.

Note: There will be a sign up sheet in the Gift Shop for volunteers to sign up for jobs and time slots for the day of the pancake feed. Hangar preparation will begin the Wednesday preceding the event. Starting about 9:00 AM we will start towing aircraft out of the hangar. Sign boards, an engine, viewing steps, and other odds and ends will need to be moved. On Thursday the main focus will be cleaning the hangar floor. Dusting of aircraft and exhibits will also be needed. Friday is set up day for the tables and chairs, serving line for the pancake feed, and tables for the Fly-In Market Sale along with the sale items.

Saturday requires a number of volunteers. The early morning volunteers need to be at the Museum by 6:30 AM. Syrup bottles will need filling and put on the tables along with the butter. Beverage stations need to be set up. Once the event starts we need volunteers to:

- Greet, welcome, and escort guest flippers to the grill
- Sell tickets at the door in the conference room,
- One volunteer to take tickets at the head of the food line.
- Serve beverages (juice/water) plastic ware, and condiments at the end of the serving line.
- Clean tables and replenish syrup bottles and butter.
- Clean floor spills.
- Change out trash bags.
- Transfer coffee pots and orange juice pitchers to and from the kitchen.

At the end of the event we need volunteers to clean up the hangar. All tables and chairs are taken down and stored. The floors are cleaned as needed; the aircraft will be re-spotted in the hangar and everything returned to their respective places.

We ask our members to help us where and when you can. Please call Deloris (at the Museum office) and let her know what you can do to volunteer for this year's event. If you wish, you can swing by the Gift Shop and sign up on the feed job duty sheet. We hope to see you at the Museum.

→ → →



"Test Pilot," con't. from Page 9

Other countries studied, and used, their own similar concepts with airships and bombers prior to and during World War II.

In 1947 a contract was let to build and test a "parasite" fighter for the giant Convair B-36 Peacemaker bomber. McDonnell built two jet-powered XF-85 Goblin fighters to be carried by the B-36. Tests of the capture and recovery of the Goblins were made on a modified B-29 Superfortress, and they proved unsatisfactory.

Other programs for the bomber-fighter marriage included Tip-Tow, where modified Republic F-84 Thunderjet fighters hooked up to the wingtips of a modified B-29. FICON (FIghter CONveyor) involved modified F-84 and RF-84 fighters hooking to a trapeze carried in the bomb bay of a modified B-36 and then being partially tucked into the bomb bay. Tom Tom was another attempt at wingtip hookups, this time with modified RF-84F Thunderflash reconnaissance fighters and a modified B-36. Milburn Apt was involved with FICON.

Initially, FICON dealt with the GRB-36 carrying its own fighter escort. By 1953, the fighter escort mission changed

to an extended reconnaissance mission. FICON operations planned to use the great range of the Convair GRB-36 to carry an RF-84 to a location within range of targets inside defended territory. The high speed and maneuverability of the RF-84 would allow it to dash into enemy territory, take pictures of the target(s), and rendezvous with the GRB-36. The RF-84 would then hook on and ride home.

Captain Apt flew a Republic RF-84K Thunderflash during FICON testing. The RF-84K design was a modification of the RF-84F Thunderflash, the most numerous and advanced tactical reconnaissance aircraft in the Air Force inventory at the time. Major differences between the two types included the RF-84K's retractable hook in the upper part of the nose, downward angled horizontal stabilizers to allow part of the K to fit inside the GRB-36 bomb bay, and rods attached to each side behind the cockpit as part of the recovery system.

On March 23, 1956, Captain Apt accomplished a hook on to a GRB-36D while piloting an RF-84K. It took him over ten tries to hook the nose hook onto the receiver. He came away from the experience with the opinion that hooking onto the trapeze in any level of turbulence was too difficult for an average jet fighter pilot.

The GRB-36/RF-84K FICON entered service with the 91st Strategic Reconnaissance Squadron (SRS). For the next year, 91st SRS pilots successfully flew their RF-84Ks, but by 1957 the development of better strategic reconnaissance aircraft, along with greater range provided aerial refueling, made the FICON concept obsolete. The 91st SRS's RF-84Ks were transferred to other units flying RF-84Fs and flew their missions from runways.

From FICON test flights, Captain Apt entered training to fly a much different aircraft. He became an X-plane test pilot.

(To be continued in the June/July 2015 Plane Talk.)

*Top: YF-84F hooking to a GRB-36
– Internet photo*

*Right: An RF-84K Thunderflash of
the FICON program. Planes of Fame
Museum, Chino, CA, August 1989.*



Supporters

New Supporters

Ryan, Sarah, Calib, Jayna Mellen
Jacob, Rebekah, Owen,
& Colin Pieper

Renewing Supporters

Oscar & Olivene Albrecht
Tim Behrens
Chuck & Connie Bradshaw
Monte, Marci, & Kenny Brokate
Les Carlson
Bill Clawson
Don & Peggy Dawson
Dennis & Mary Donahue
Rodney & Martha Duerksen
Norm Edee
H Philip & Darlene Elwood
Kent Garlinghouse
LCDR Walter Hoeg
Jane Holley
Harold Jameson
Mark & Kris Johnson
Ralph Knehans
Jim & Ruby Leighton
Richard Long & Sharon
McDomson
Todd, Kim, & Kate Morgenstern
Dave & Judy Murray
Ted Nolde
Joe Pullen
Reverend Larry Thomas
Dick & Jeanne Trupp
David, Connor, & Keira Trupp
Victor Tyler
Eric, Lyn & Mitchell Walther
William Welch
Merton Wilch
Tom & Mary Anne Witty
Deloris Zink

→ → →

Young Aviators Education Classes will be held

June 1-4

July 6-9

August 3-7

Check out our website
for more information

Visitors

During **January**
the Museum had
422 visitors
from **18** states, and
Argentina
Australia
Brazil
Costa Rica
Great Britain

During **February**
we had
460 visitors
from **15** states, and
Chile
Costa Rica
Ukraine

→ → →

Guest speaker for our next Membership Luncheon

High School Juniors of Seaman High School in north Topeka are our guest presenters for the April Membership Luncheon. Their presentations are their entries for the National History Day contest.

The theme this year is Leadership and Legacy in History. Mrs. Susan Sittenauer has brought students from her Advanced Placement US History class to our April luncheons for nearly a decade. She has taught at Seaman High School since 1985 and teaches an Advanced Placement Civil and Criminal Rights course as well as the History class.

→ → →

Learn more about the
Combat Air Museum at
www.combatairmuseum.org

You can help the Combat Air Museum when you use your Dillon's Plus Card



For our readers in Kansas there is a new way to support the Combat Air Museum while shopping at Dillon's. Dillon's is giving up to \$2 Million, 1/2 Million per quarter, to civic organizations whose members shop Dillon's in 2015. Here is what the Combat Air Museum needs you to do in support of CAM.

If you don't have email or you simply don't want to register your account information on line, call 1-800-576-4377, select option #3, and you will talk with a person. You will need a Dillon's Plus Shoppers Card. Give them the code numbers which are printed on the back under the bar code. When asked which organization you want to register with, tell

them the Combat Air Museum. Our number is 43200.

If you do not have a Dillon's Plus Card, you can get one at all Dillon's check-out or customer service counters. You can register on-line at <https://www.dillons.com/communityrewards>. Please hang in there until you are registered. CAM will be credited at 5% of each purchase every time you use your Dillon's Plus Card; excluding gas, liquor, etc. Ask all of your family and friends to support us, too. You don't need to be a member of CAM. I signed up by phone, it was free, and it was easy with no pressure applied.

Thank you,
Gene Howerter