

# COMBAT

## AIR MUSEUM

June 2021 | July 2021  
Vol. 37, No. 3

# CAM 17<sup>th</sup> Annual Run to benefit Museum

By Kevin Drewelow



Photo by Kilo Hobbs

Runners leave the 2019 starting line

The Combat Air Museum will host our annual CAM 5K/10K run and 4K walk on Saturday, September 25 at the Museum's Hangar 602 on Topeka Regional Airport. The Museum has hosted a race for 17 years and uses the proceeds to cover expenses over the winter when our monthly attendance is lower.

Last year we conducted a virtual run due to the pandemic. We're excited about returning to an in-person race and this year's race has been named TOPGUN to honor the 52nd anniversary of the establishment of the US Navy's Fighter Weapons

School. We chose the original Navy spelling over the later Hollywood two-word spelling.

This year we will honor longtime CAM member and patriot Lt. Col. Eliot H. Potter on our commemorative race shirt. The shirt will display the names of sponsors who donate \$100 or more to the race. To become a sponsor, call the Museum at 785.862.3303.

One lap on our USA Track and Field-certified running course is 5,000 meters; 10K runners will run two laps of the course. Walkers will follow a non-certified abbreviated course.

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**European Liaison Officer** - Huw Thomas  
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## MUSEUM HOURS

January 2 - February 28/29  
Mon.-Sun, Noon - 4:30

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

March 1 - December 31

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

Sun. Noon - 4:30 P.M.

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

### Closed

New Year's Day, Easter,  
Thanksgiving, Christmas Day

## PLANE TALK

Newsletter Layout & Design  
Jennifer Anderson

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

*We welcome  
your comments.*

Your membership is  
important to us.  
Join the  
**COMBAT AIR MUSEUM**

# From the Chairman's Desk

By Gene Howerter, Chairman, Board of Directors



When some say we are living in strange times, I must admit I can identify with that philosophy, especially at the Combat Air Museum. I recently thought I don't even know what time of year it is these days. What with the Museum being closed for a time with COVID-19 and reopening at a time when children are often in school, but yet they are visiting the Museum with parents in the spring time as if it were summer, it's confusing to one's senses. It's as if spring and summer had joined together as an all-around summer. The good news is this dilemma has brought to the Museum a greater influx of families, compressed into a never-ending season. Even after being closed for a time the Museum is pretty much back on track with its usual annual attendance. Along with this change, we have noticed an increase in gift shop sales as never before, which is good. As Chairman of the Combat Air Museum Board of Directors I can assure you our staff does breathe a big sigh of relief. We are all hoping and praying COVID-19 is a once in our lifetime event.

As the Museum returns to normal, I would like to take this opportunity to fill you in on what is taking place here. This summer, Deputy Chairman, Dave Murray organized his Young Aviator classes again. The first class in June was a success with very attentive students enrolled. As I write this article, the second class, which will take place July 19 - 23, is now in the planning stage with a full enrollment of 20 students. Dave expends a lot of time and energy on each class which is evident as some students always ask if they can attend a second time. On another note, I would like to honor both Jim Braun and Nathan Benfield with the Museum's prestigious "Above and Beyond" award for stepping up and mowing the Museum's grounds this summer. Jim has been push mowing the front yard while Nathan plows through the remaining Museum grounds. We all thank them for their contributions to the Museum. Kudos also to Kevin Drewelow for helping Jim from time to time.

In the past few weeks the Combat Air Museum has been ecstatic over the donation of three more aircraft to our collection. This now brings the total number of planes in our hangars to 45, with 27 being the sole property of the Museum. Others are on permanent loan from various governmental agencies.

The Gerry O. Sibley Trust donated the Vultee BT-13A Valiant and it arrived at CAM on June 15. We would like to thank the Capitol Federal Foundation, which has really been, as they say, "True Blue" for over 120 years, for their loving support of the BT-13A Valiant. They are our corporate sponsor of this aircraft and we thank them from the bottom of our hearts.

# PLANE TALK

# An Aeroscout

## in Vietnam

By Dennis Smirl

The Combat Air Museum held its first post-pandemic membership luncheon on June 14 with a very compelling speaker and Museum member, retired U. S. Army Lieutenant Colonel Rod Willis, a Vietnam veteran and multiple medal recipient.

Rod stems from a military family. His father was stationed at Laughlin Air Force Base, Del Rio Texas, when Rod graduated from high school. Several days after graduating, Rod enlisted in the U. S. Army, and was sent to Fort Polk, Louisiana for basic training. While in training, he was selected to attend Infantry Officer Candidate School (OCS) at Fort Benning, Georgia. After graduating from OCS, Rod spent some time in the Ranger Department before being selected to attend helicopter flight school at Fort Wolters, Texas. After graduating from flight school, he was assigned to D Troop, 1-4 Cavalry (Darkhorse) in South Vietnam.

Rod told the attentive lunch crowd that he flew the Hughes OH-6 Cayuse in the aeroscout role, flying at treetop level looking for enemy soldiers for their accompanying Bell AH-1 Cobra gunship to attack. When they found the enemy, they dropped smoke grenades to mark the target for the Cobra or strafed the target themselves. An excellent weapons platform, the Cayuse was also built for survivability in a shoot-down or operational crash—a feature, according to Rod—that was not evident in most of the other helicopters in the fleet. Stronger than most helicopters in the cabin area, Rod said he used up more than one OH-6 Cayuse in his first tour, walking away from crashes with only minor injuries.

In his first Vietnam tour, a twelve-month stint, Rod was wounded twice and received two Silver

Stars and two Purple Hearts. Once his tour was complete, Rod returned to the United States and was assigned to a more mundane work situation. Bored with that assignment, and life itself, Rod volunteered to return to Vietnam, serving again with the Dark Horse unit, where he remained until the truce was signed in January of 1973.

Rod told the group of his exposure to Agent Orange. The Ranch Hand missions he flew utilized two helicopters from the U. S. Army and one U. S. Air Force Fairchild C-123 Provider cargo airplane loaded with chemical defoliant. The helicopters flew below and behind, ready to suppress any ground fire aimed at the C-123. During each of these missions the helicopters were exposed to the defoliant spray, and since the OH-6s flew with their doors removed, the defoliant would get inside the cockpits and on the skin and uniforms of the helicopter crews.

Rod also talked about hunter-killer missions that employed one or more Huey helicopters and one Cobra. Once the Hueys got the attention of enemy troops the shooting started, the Cobra would arrive with its heavy load of weaponry and finish the fight.

Rod's unit, Darkhorse, received many decorations for service in Vietnam. The exploits of Darkhorse have been written about in two outstanding books, "Low Level Hell" and "Gunslingers in Action." For his individual acts of honor and bravery, Rod was awarded four Distinguished Flying Crosses, two Silver Stars, two Bronze Stars, three Purple Hearts, seventy-three Air Medals, and four Crosses of Gallantry. His career in the U. S. Army spanned 26 years and he retired in 1992. ♦

Photo by Kilo Hobbs  
Rod Willis discussing his Vietnam experiencePhoto by Kilo Hobbs  
Chairman Gene Howarter (left) and Rod Willis

# 2021 Calendar of Events

## August

9-Membership Luncheon

## September

25-Combat Air Museum Topgun 5K/10K Run & 4K Walk

## October

9-Girls in Aviation Day  
11-Membership Luncheon

## November

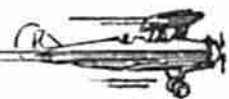
7-Daylight Savings time ends  
25-Thanksgiving, Museum closed

## December

13-Membership Luncheon  
25-Christmas, Museum closed

## LOGBOOK

### Great Aviation History



**LOGBOOK** magazine is a print journal chronicling the entire range of aviation history. We would be happy to send you a complimentary issue.

If you would like to review **LOGBOOK** magazine, please drop us a note at:

[www.logbookmag.com](http://www.logbookmag.com)

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COMBAT  
AIR MUSEUM

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## New & Renewing Members

### New:

Dr. Allan Ayella & family | Dail Blake & family | Rob Fletcher & family | Frank Gannon | Robert & Pamela Hanks | William & Marilyn Hensley | Charles Hill | John "Randy" Mettner | Daniel Pearson & family | Adam Polter & family | Marc Schultz & family | Thomas Ward & family

### Renewing:

Nels & Jennifer Anderson & family | Scott Barbu | Wes Barricklow & family | Shelly Buhler & family | Dr. Ronald Barrett | George Catt | Donald & Shirley Crenshaw | Paul & Betty Frantz | Richard Gates | Debra Graybeal & family | Chuck Hanna | Al Holloway | Raymond & Cheryl Kulp | Joseph | Ledbetter & family | Marcy Lee & family | Jedediah Makin & family | Bill Shaffer & family | Capt. Herschel Stroud & family | Larry & Diane Todd | Dr. Rees Webber & family | Mike & Carla Welch | Don & Gayle White | Steve & Rosie Williams

## Visitors

1,385 people from 41 states, Guam, Mexico, Nicaragua and the Philippines visited the Combat Air Museum in June.

In July, 1,798 visitors from 44 states, Puerto Rico, Canada, Columbia, Ecuador, Italy, Peru and Venezuela toured your Museum.

To become a member, click on  
[www.combatairmuseum.org/membership.html](http://www.combatairmuseum.org/membership.html)

or call the Museum at  
785.862.3303

# In Remembrance

By Gene Howerter



**David Arlan Houser**  
1st Lieutenant, United States Army  
September 29, 1928 – June 6, 2021

Dave Houser was a charter member of the Combat Air Museum. Even though Dave lived to the fine age of 92 years old, he was still volunteering at the museum right up to three weeks before his death. Dave enjoyed building and restoring airplanes during his time at the Museum. He spent a lot of his time restoring the Museum's Beech SNB to flying condition. Years ago, Dave even built and flew his own homebuilt experimental airplane. He enjoyed building scooter airplanes for children in our workshop, which we sold in the Museum's gift shop. Dave could often be seen at the Museum decked out in his flight suit giving tours. He often flew to airshows on weekends with his friends at the American Flight Museum in support of their AC-47 "Spooky" gunship.

Dave earned a Bachelor of Architecture degree from Kansas State College when it was mandatory for young men to join the Reserve Officers Training Corps program. After his military service from 1952 to 1954, he worked for several architectural firms in Topeka, Kansas over the years. In retirement, Dave not only volunteered at this Museum and his church, he also spent time at Hope Street Academy, where he rocked babies over the lunch hour.

Rest in peace Dave, you were a true friend of all of us here at the Combat Air Museum: you will be missed. ♦

From the Chairman... continued from page 2

The other two, both 7/8 scale replicas, a 1916 Nieuport 11 in Lafayette Escadrille colors and a 1915 Morane Saulnier Model L, were gifts to the Museum from Dick and Sharon Starks of the Kansas City Dawn Patrol based at Liberty, Missouri. It is always nice having something new in our Museum for returning guests and members to see!

As for our future, the Museum has numerous plans for upcoming events. One major project will be the construction of a roof over the top of our table and chair storage area. This work will be done by the Fix-It-Friday crew members as soon as possible. When completed we will invite the Dawn Patrol members back to assemble the Morane. The plane will sit on top of the new roof structure for display purposes. We hope to have this completed by early fall of this year.

Finally, I will remind you that we will hold our annual 5K-10K run and 4K walk September 25th at 8:00 a.m. We will send letters to all of our past sponsors soon. If you would like to become a sponsor of this event, we ask you to donate a minimum of \$100; this fund raising activity helps the Museum financially in the slower winter months. If interested, call our office at 785-862-3303 or e-mail office@combatairmuseum.com and tell us you want to be a sponsor. I also would encourage each of you to sign up as many family and friends to participate in this event as you can. For more information, you will soon find details on our web page. I hope to see all of you soon at the Museum! ♦

★ ..... ★

CAM Annual Run ... continued from front page

We will once again depend upon Museum volunteers to support several race functions such as staffing the registration table, placing and retrieving mileposts and cones on the course, elapsed time recorders, among other tasks. To learn more about volunteering for the race, please call Gene Howerter at the Museum, 785.862.3303 or by email at chairman@combatairmuseum.org.

Participants will find race brochures at www.combatairmuseum.org and online registration is available at www.active.com. ♦

# Museum



Photo by Kevin Drewelow

Chuck Watson, Deb Lamere, Karma and Genesis enjoy the shade of the BT-13 at the airshow

**Thunder Over the Heartland Airshow...** Combat Air Museum volunteers towed aircraft and staffed a display at the first Thunder Over the Heartland Airshow at Topeka Regional Airport during the last weekend of June. The show went on despite a few intermittent showers and a large crowd turned up for both days. With severe weather in the area during the days before the air show, retired meteorologist and CAM member Paul Frantz provided expert advice to the tow team prior to moving aircraft. Dave Murray, Gary Naylor, Chuck Watson and Joe Wulfschuhle, among others, moved our Consolidated BT-13A Valiant, Grumman F9F Panther and Republic F-84



Photo by Kevin Drewelow

Thanks to Gary Naylor, our Tubular Products scooter went to the airshow too!

Thunderstreak to the static display area. Bruce Couch, Kevin Drewelow, Deb Lamere and Chuck Watson set up and staffed a display at the aircraft where we met visitors, told them about CAM

and helped them climb aboard the Valiant. Everyone we spoke with was happy to be at an airshow in Topeka once more and hoped it will happen again. A few days later, airshow organizers said Thunder Over the Heartland will indeed return next year!

**Flight simulator and tours return to CAM...** Now that enough of our volunteers have been vaccinated against COVID, our flight simulator is open for business and CAM is once again offering tours on request. We had closed the flight simulator since social distancing was not possible. During the downtime, we updated our simulator software to the new 2020 Microsoft version but the new program was not playing well with our hardware. Mike Madden, a member of the Museum's board of directors, returned the sim to its previous version while he works out the problems. Paul Frantz, Mike Madden, John Plumb and Chuck Watson have been staffing the simulator since, providing nearly daily coverage and flight experience to our visitors. We've also supported several tours for groups and our Young Aviators classes, all made possible by willing volunteers.

**CAM gains a 3D printer...** Thanks to a generous donation from the Capitol Federal Foundation, CAM now has a Snapmaker 2.0 A350 modular 3-in-1 3D printer. This remarkable machine can serve as a 3D or additive printer; a laser engraver; and a Computer



Photo by Kevin Drewelow

Danny San Romani and Deb Lamere assemble the Snapmaker 3D printer

# Notes

By Kevin Drewelow

Numerical Controlled (CNC) router. The printer has a 16" by 23" bed and will handle a wide range of materials such as wood, leather, plastic, fabric, paper, non-transparent acrylic and more. Several Museum members are working together to launch this great new capability at CAM. Deb Lamere, assisted by Danny and his sister Deb San Romani, are assembling the printer. Deb, Mike Madden, Dave Murray and Ted Nolde will comprise the local team while Huw Thomas will provide expert guidance from the United Kingdom. Huw taught industrial design at the University of Kansas and five years ago used a 3D printer to produce an 80% scale rotary engine and, four years ago, a Lewis machine gun for our Airco DH-2 replica. Enough leftover 3D printed engine parts remained to go into our Fokker Dr.I replica. Initially, we plan to print a pair of rotary engines to fit into our recently acquired Morane L and Nieuport II replicas. Later, we will print a pilot's head, complete with helmet and goggles, to make mannequins to place in our various World War One replica aircraft.

**CAM display at the Kansas Aviation Expo...** Dave and Judy Murray and Deb Lamere represented CAM at the inaugural Kansas Aviation Expo at Freeman Field in Junction City on June 5. They staffed an informational display and spread the word about our Museum. They said it was a positive experience and they look forward to next year's event.



Photo by Dave Murray

Deb Lamere, Genesis and Judy Murray (l-r) at the CAM display in Junction City



Photo by Kevin Drewelow

Steven Price back aboard our EC-121T Warning Star

**EC-121 radio operator returns to his "office"...** Steven Price was a radio operator in the Air Force and later transferred to the Air Force Reserve, where he served aboard the Combat Air Museum's EC-121T Warning Star, 52-3418. He visited our museum on June 28th to donate some items from his flying days and took time to return to his office aboard 418. He has some fond memories of his time on Warning Stars!

**CAM restoration team can do anything!** Our Saturday restoration team usually focuses on aircraft restoration and maintenance, but recent events have turned their skills in other directions. Our aircraft tow tractor has suffered for years with marginal if ineffective brakes. Joe Wulkuhle, our tow team driver, finally had enough and enlisted the team to overhaul the brakes. They researched, obtained and installed the necessary parts and the brakes now work very well. Right on the heels of that success, one of the large doors in hangar 604 refused to fully close. Gary Naylor and Joe Wulkuhle looked into the problem; Million Air loaned us a high lift so Gary could climb up onto the top of the hangar door rails to inspect them. He found some bent metal, but nothing that would stop the door. Kevin Drewelow and Gary visited the Metropolitan Topeka Airport Authority (MTAA) to see their construction blueprints for hangar 604. The MTAA has drawings for most but not all buildings on the airfield, and fortunately for us, 604 is among them. Gary and Joe soon decided it was necessary to access the

Continued on pg 10

# Vlissingen

## rear-guard to a section of the Atlantic Wall

*[Editor's note: In October 1944, Allied ground forces needed to occupy the port at Antwerp, Belgium to speed resupply of their armies. Walcheren is a former island that guards the approach to Antwerp which had been reinforced against invasion as part of Hitler's 'Atlantic Wall, even encircled to prevent attack from inland. The Allies finally bombed the dikes and dams on Walcheren to flood the defensive bunkers. Huw Thomas recently visited Vlissingen and describes what he found.]*

Some of the more powerful reminders of World War II can still be seen on Walcheren Island, approximately 80 miles southwest of Amsterdam, The Netherlands. During their occupation of the Dutch territory, the Germans built a significant network of static coastal and land defenses.

Landfront Vlissingen was constructed to protect German forces from any attacks the Allies mounted from the landward side of the 'Atlantic Wall', being sited just inland of the now demolished Seefront Vlissingen.

The Vlissingen 'Landfront' installation dates from 1942-1944, forming a 6-mile-long defensive line around the city of Vlissingen, between Valkenisse in the west and Fort Rammekens in the east. The significance of these defenses becomes obvious when one realizes Walcheren Island protects the Belgian port of Antwerp - which the Allies were desperate to liberate and utilize themselves. Antwerp would be crucial for an invasion of Germany, as it was the largest deep-water port close to Germany that the Allies could hope to capture intact. Antwerp is an inland port connected to the North Sea via the River Scheldt; its commercial importance today reinforced by the frequency of large container ships plying these waters.

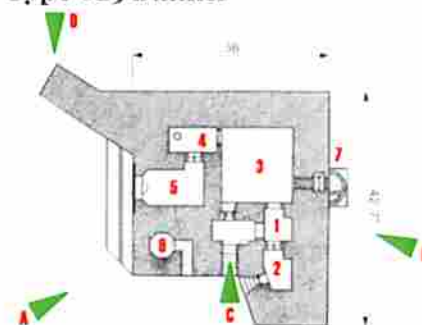
Approximately sixty concrete works belong to the Landfront Vlissingen, such as bunkers, gun emplacements and dragon tooth barriers, complemented by a 0.6 mile long, anti-tank ditch. Some of the bunkers still have the original earth cover and, in several bunkers, registration numbers (see image), instruction texts and (parts of) camouflage have been preserved. The primary structures are eerily well preserved, with the imprints of the wooden

formers plain to see; sadly, the military hardware has long since gone.

We chose to look at four bunkers, clearly visible from the N288 road, just West of Kouderkerke, The Netherlands - these coordinates will take you there, should you wish to see their exact position on a map (3.5354255 E, 51.4840564 N).

These four comprise of 3 Type 623 MG (machine gun) bunkers and 1 Type 631 AT (anti-tank) bunker.

### Type 623 Bunker



### Bunker type 623 - Key

- |                       |                                     |
|-----------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Concrete              | 1 Gas Lock                          |
| Stone                 | 2 Near Defense                      |
| Amusement compartment | 3 Crew Room                         |
| Steel                 | 4 Ammunition storage with periscope |
| Entrance              | 5 Combat Room                       |
|                       | 6 Open observation post             |
|                       | 7 Covered external ladder to roof   |

Machine guns provided comparatively cheap, yet highly effective defensive solutions - so the 623 bunker encased these positions in over 21,000 cubic feet of concrete for a single MG position - with the weapon placed behind an enormously heavy and expensive armor shield!

These bunkers were bombproof with walls and roofs of at least 6 foot 6-inch-thick reinforced concrete. A total of 6 examples of 623 were built along the Landfront. In contrast to the type 631 casemates, the machine gun was positioned (see room key 5) behind an armor plate that was only 2 inches thick. Because of this vulnerable protection, this type of bunker was more susceptible to frontal fire. The bunker was manned by 6 soldiers and had their own living quarters (see room key 3) with beds, cupboards, tables and stools available. This bunker design included a separate storage space for the ammunition stock (room key 4), as well as an access section and a gun slot (see room key 2) to defend the entrance to the bunker. A periscope (room key 5) and an open observatory (room key 6) were available for field observations.



# Landfront

By Huw Thomas, CAM European Liaison Officer

## External Bunker Imagery

Use the plan view to contextualize the image views.



Photo by Huw Thomas

Above: Looking from Point A, Huw Thomas in front of a 623 bunker – for scale



Photo by Huw Thomas

Photo by Huw Thomas

Above Left: Looking from Point B, 623 bunker, shattered external ladder area. Above Right: Looking from point C, 623 bunker, entrance. Below: Looking from Point D, a pair of 623 bunkers – next to a cycle path.



Photo by Huw Thomas



Photo by Huw Thomas

Above: Registration number on the 623 on opposite side of road, adjacent to 631 bunker

## Type 631 Bunker



Photo by Huw Thomas

Above: 631 AT bunker – located on opposite side of road to the pair of 623s. Below: Rear of previous 631 AT bunker – Showing external ladder access area and earth rampart.

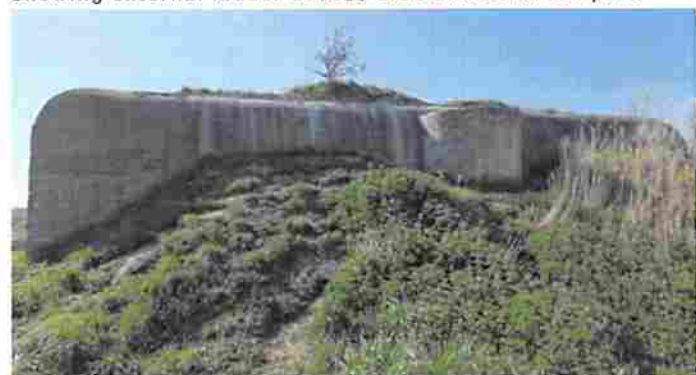


Photo by Huw Thomas

The 631 bunker comprised both MG position and an anti-tank gun. The typical weapon was a 4.7 cm PaK, which the German Army appropriated after over-running Czechoslovakia. Although only 4.7cm (approx. 1.8 inches) in bore, the gun had good armor piercing capability (nearly 3.5 inches at 110 yards).

## Westkapelle / Liberation of Walcheren

Further up the coast, at the town of Westkapelle, one can find a museum dedicated to some of the liberation efforts of Walcheren, including a landing monument in tribute to 4th Commando Brigade and the 81 British and 22 French soldiers who died during liberation of Walcheren.

Part of two Allied amphibious landings made on 1st November, 1944, the landing at Westkapelle encountered strong resistance from four German gun batteries and suffered heavy losses before they eventually silenced the guns.

The second landing, further East at Vlissingen went more smoothly, and by the 8th November, 1944, the fighting on Walcheren was over, finally freeing up unimpeded access to the River Scheldt and the Port of Antwerp. ♦

## CAM hosts Taps Across America

By Kevin Dretzelow



Photo by Don Thun

Herschel Stroud (left) plays Taps

America honors those who died in military service on Memorial Day, and the Combat Air Museum hosted its second Taps Across America event on Monday, May 31 to do just that.

A year ago, Museum member Herschel Stroud, a retired dentist, veteran and renowned musician, offered to play Taps at the Museum on Memorial Day at 3 p.m. He wanted to participate in Taps Across America, a new movement which encouraged buglers and trumpeters across the nation to play Taps at 3 p.m. local time. The movement got a great boost when CBS reporter Steve Hartman gave the story nationwide exposure. Herschel ascended the spiral staircase to our art gallery in hangar 602 and played Taps at 3 p.m. to the applause of the pandemic-diminished crowd on hand. That reception encouraged Herschel and CAM to grow and repeat the event for 2021.

This year's event was bigger and better thanks to Museum Chairman Gene Howerter, who spent hours planning and inviting organizations and individuals to participate. Visitors listened and danced to swing music before the ceremony began. The Washburn Rural High School Air Force Junior Reserve Officers Training Corps Honor Guard provided the opening and closing flag ceremony. Kansas Army National Guard Sergeant Major Jeremy Byers offered some stirring remarks and the American Legion Topeka North Post 400 Honor Guard and Firing Squad conducted a flag folding ceremony and fired three volleys. They presented the flag to founding Museum member and Air Force veteran Ralph Kniehaus in honor of his service to our nation.

Over 100 people attended the event and everyone appreciated and enjoyed it. We look forward to participating in Taps Across America next year! ♦

## Next CAM Member's Brown Bag Luncheon

The next Combat Air Museum Members' Brown Bag Luncheon will take place on Monday, August 9, 2021 in the Bob Dole Education Center at 11:30 a.m. During his Air Force career, CAM member and retired Senior Master Sergeant Shaun Finn tested emerging weapons technologies, which required him to fly in an interesting variety of aircraft, including the Museum's Douglas EF-10 Skyknight, US Navy Bureau Number 125807; he will describe how and what it was used for during the period he was there. He also participated in a series of Patriot missile tests against QF-106A drones, high altitude balloon chase missions and a multitude of test sorties using both fixed and rotary wing aircraft. ♦



★ ..... ★

Museum Notes ... continued from page 7

adjustable door wheel carriages. Much to our surprise, the access panels came off easily and, with the application of heat, they were able to adjust the carriages which freed the door. Then our ancient fork lift began to misbehave. The gear selector would pop out of gear and go to neutral. The team reviewed the maintenance manual, adjusted the gear selector and fixed that problem. Then a hydraulic hose burst. The team drained and flushed the hydraulic system and replaced the hose. The fork lift retaliated with a coolant leak! As we went to press the team had determined a leaking drain valve was at fault and were sourcing a replacement part. Our aircraft maintainers can fix anything! We hope to have some aircraft restoration news for you in the next issue. ♦



# Horses Don't Fly!

By Richard Knight, UK Correspondent

The designation of "ace" is given to a pilot who has achieved five or more "kills" of an enemy aircraft. So which American was the first to achieve this notable achievement and when did he do it?

Well the UK's Royal Air Force Museum gives the accolade to Captain Frederick Libby, although as you will read later, some will dispute this honour. Born in 1891 in Colorado, Libby decided he needed the excitement of World War I and joined the Canadian Army to get there. As a medical orderly in early 1916, he decided that trench warfare didn't suit him, so he volunteered as an observer in the Royal Flying Corps - the forerunner of the Royal Air Force.

Flying from a French airfield in an F.E. 2b - a multipurpose two-man, pilot plus observer, biplane of the pusher design where the propeller sits behind the wing and provides "push" rather than the conventional propeller in front which



Royal Aircraft Factory F.E.2b

"pulls" - Libby shot down a German plane on his very first mission on 15th July 1916. Between 22nd and 25th August 1916 with No. 11 Squadron, he shot down a further four enemy aircraft, making him the first US fighter ace.

Some dispute this claim because Libby was actually an observer and not the pilot. However, as in these times it was the observer sitting in the front seat who fired the machine gun, the

Museum gives the title to Libby.

By November 1916, Libby had 10 kills to his name and was awarded the Military Cross. At this point he was sent back to the UK for training



Sopwith 1 1/2 Strutter

to be a pilot and in April 1917, he returned to France where he flew Sopwith 1 1/2 Strutters and de Havilland D.H.4 bombers. When America joined the war in 1917, Libby transferred to the US Air Service. By the time he was transferred back to the USA, Libby had at least 14 and maybe as many as 24 victories. He died in 1970 at the age of 79.

"Horses Don't Fly" is his story of a youth spent helping his widower father and older brother tame wild horses on their ranch in Sterling, Colorado to his misadventures as an itinerant cowboy from Colorado. He moved from there to Arizona, eventually landing up in California. At age 20, in San Francisco, Libby decided to try his luck in South America but, as the next boat happened to be going north, he ended up in Canada. After some other misadventures, Libby lost his grubstake in an oil well fraud scheme in Calgary, Alberta, and, on a dare, joined the Canadian Army's Motor Transport Corps and was shipped overseas to the World War I battlefields.

"Horses Don't Fly" is an engaging first-hand account that documents the end of one era and the beginning of another, by a man who managed to make the transition with remarkable success. As such it should appeal as much to scholars of the Old West as to World War I aviation buffs. ♦



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## *The Price-1940*

*By Audrey Grealy*

COMBAT AIR MUSEUM **12**

English pilot, young and eager,  
Still not even twenty-one,  
Giving in the cloudless skies  
The life that had but scare begun,  
Falling like a blazing comet...  
Someone's brother, someone's son.

Polish pilot, battle-hardened,  
Sad at heart with worldly strife,  
Ties of family and homeland,  
Cut as by a searing knife,  
Dying in his bloodstained cockpit...  
Someone's lover, someone's life.

German pilot, keen and youthful,  
Many years of life to spend,  
Shot down over English meadows,  
Fighting to the bitter end,  
Burning in the flaming aircraft...  
Someone's husband, someone's friend.

