

# COMBAT

## AIR MUSEUM

December 2021 | January 2022  
Vol. 37, No. 6

# Operation El Dorado Canyon

By Dennis Smirl

CAM's presenter for the December 2021 membership meeting and covered-dish luncheon was Mr. Richard P. McKee, a lieutenant colonel retired from the United States Air Force (USAF) and now Director of Mission Support, 505th Command and Control Wing, Detachment 1, Air Combat Command, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. His topic for the day was the United States raid on Libya on February 14, 1986. Known as Operation El Dorado Canyon, the purpose of the raid was to end the terrorism campaign of Muammar al-Qaddafi, the former leader of Libya.



Lt Col Rick McKee

Photo by Klio Hobbs

or face the consequences of American military operations.

When Qaddafi failed to comply, Reagan directed an attack on Qaddafi's headquarters and other targets. The Air Force chose to use the General Dynamics F-111F Aardvark due to its long range and precision weapons targeting system.

A Royal Air Force base northeast of London, RAF Lakenheath, hosted a wing of F-111s nearest to the Libyan targets. A dozen aircraft from the 48th Fighter Wing were chosen as the attack aircraft. EF-111 Ravens from RAF Upper Heyford and two types of tankers, Boeing KC-135 Stratotankers and McDonnell KC-10 Extenders, would accompany the Aardvarks. The tanker mission involved transfer of fuel from tanker to tanker as well as from tanker to F-111.



Photo provided by USAF

General Dynamics F-111F

This complex logistical problem (keeping the

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COMBAT AIR MUSEUM 2



## Topeka Regional Airport

Hangars 602 & 604  
7016 SE Forbes Avenue  
Topeka, KS 66619-1444  
Telephone (785) 862-3303  
www.combatairmuseum.org

Website Hosted by  
Rossini Management Systems, Inc

Email: office@combatairmuseum.com

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**Office Manager** ~ Nelson Hinman, Jr.  
**UK 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**  
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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.  
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**COMBAT AIR MUSEUM**

## From the Chairman's Desk

By Gene Howerter, Chairman, Board of Directors



The Combat Air Museum was saddened to hear that we had lost one of our best friends with the passing of Robert "Bob" Dole, December 5, 2021. The final time we saw Senator Dole at the Museum was May 28, 2015. What a glorious day it was at the Museum as we dedicated the "Bob Dole Education Center." I will never forget Bob remarking, "I don't know why I deserve an award from the Air Force, as I was a member of the infantry." As all of you know, here at the Combat Air Museum we honor all branches of the service, not just the Air Force. We have many aircraft and exhibits which represent the Air Force, Army, Coast Guard, Marines and Navy.

As I remember it, the first favor we ever asked of Senator Dole was if he could help the Museum secure the title for two aircraft we had on loan from the government. The first was the Grumman US-2A Tracker which we restored to flying condition at the Olathe Naval Station southwest of Kansas City and then flew to Topeka. The other plane, a North American T-28 Trojan, came to us on loan from the Navy after being stored at the Aircraft Maintenance and Regeneration Center at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base near Tucson, Arizona. After some correspondence with Senator Dole and some persuasion, in time the Museum did in fact acquire sole ownership and the title to these two airplanes. At that time the Combat Air Museum was a flying museum and believe me we flew these planes to airshows for years until the Museum stopped flying aircraft over 25 years ago. Lastly, we shared with Bob the fact that the Combat Air Museum possesses and displays many items related to the US Army in World War II.

To me, the highlight of the dedication day occurred after Bob's staffers informed us that Bob would probably only be able to stay for about an hour or so. Right on time, Bob appeared with his entourage of staffers in a Kansas Highway Patrol car where he was seated in the front passenger's seat. When he entered the Museum I saw a different Senator Dole who looked like a light bulb had been turned on. Not only were there many locals but numerous people who had driven all the way from Russell, Kansas just to see their beloved friend. Other invited guests included Congresswoman Lynn Jenkins, Governor Sam Brownback and Topeka Mayor Larry Wolgast. After each addressed the crowd, we dedicated the Museum's Conference Center in the name of Bob Dole.

After the program concluded, some guests toured the Museum while many more entered the Bob Dole Education Center so that they might talk with Bob. We wisely made the decision to place four chairs close to Bob's position so that guests who wanted to talk with him would get some quality time along with their conversation. As I said

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# The Flight of "Hairy Mike"

By Joe Wulkuhle

*[Editor's note: approximately 10% of the aircraft that flew from North America to Great Britain during World War II were lost en route due to a variety of reasons. This is the story of one of those aircraft and its crew, including Leo Wulkuhle of Topeka, Kansas, uncle of CAM member and volunteer Joe Wulkuhle]*

Boeing B-17G Flying Fortress serial number 42-40012 was one of the newest models of the famous bomber and would have been one of the first B-17Gs make the Atlantic crossing to England. The B-17G had additional machine guns and other improvements which greatly improved the aircraft's ability to defend itself against opposing enemy fighter aircraft. Thousands like it would follow in the months to come.



Boeing B-17G

The ten young men who crewed 012 had just completed their final training and were heading off to war. They were: Second Lt. Carlisle M. Craig, pilot, age 23, Roanoke VA; Second Lt. William S. Hancock, copilot, age 23; Second Lt. Richard E. Hargrove, navigator, age 23, Paducah, KY; Second Lt. Robert M. Baum, bombardier, age 28; Staff Sergeant Stuart C. Penberthy, flight engineer and top turret gunner, age 25; Sgt. James C. Gorman, gunner, age 25; Sgt. Joseph A. Kanakis, gunner, age 19; Sgt. Leo B. Wulkuhle, gunner, age 22, Topeka, KS; Sgt. Robert J. Yates Jr., born 1923, Huntington Park, CA—at some point Sgt. Yates was hospitalized, left behind, and not aboard the aircraft; and Cpl. William C. Ruffner, Jr., radio operator age 21, Butler, PA.

The crew's mission was to ferry the aircraft to Prestwick, Scotland and then on to a replacement

depot in England where it would eventually be assigned to an operational unit. The mission code name was "Hairy Mike." The aircraft and crew departed their training base at Kearney, Nebraska, stopped at Presque Isle, Maine for a period of time and then continued to Gander, Newfoundland arriving sometime around December 8.



Gander in 1943

Sitting on the ramp at Gander, Newfoundland on the evening of December 17, 1943, the aircraft held 2700 gallons of 115/145 aviation gasoline, enough for 15 hours flying time. The aircraft weighed 55,000 pounds, 10,000 pounds below the maximum allowable weight. The aircraft had recently been through a 25-hour inspection of the engines which included an oil change, new spark plugs and operational checks. Other recent documented maintenance included repairs to the pilot and copilot's oxygen system, a new hinge on the escape hatch, a second repair to the pilot's oxygen system, three new batteries, and a new gyro compass.

The weather at Gander and the area around Newfoundland was reported as clear with visibility unlimited. The winds were from the west to southwest at 10-20 miles per hour. The crew taxied the aircraft to the runway and departed at 10 p.m. Newfoundland time. The crew planned to fly the Great Circle Route across the Atlantic, cruising at 11,000 feet and later climbing to 15,000 feet. Corporal Ruffner would make periodic radio checks with Prestwick. Half an hour after departing

# 2022

## Calendar of Events

### February

- 1-Winter hours continue through end of month
- 14-Membership Luncheon

### March

- 1-Normal hours resume, Museum open  
Mon-Sat 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., no visitors admitted  
after 3:30 p.m.; Museum open Sun noon-4:30 p.m.
- 13-Daylight Savings Time begins

### April

- 11-Membership Luncheon
- 17-Easter, Museum closed
- 30-Celebrity Pancake Feed

### June

- 13-Membership Luncheon
- 20-24 Young Aviators Class

### July

- 11-15 Young Aviators Class

### August

- 8-Membership Luncheon

### September

- 24-Combat Air Museum Winged Foot 5K/10K  
Run & 4K Walk

From the Chairman's Desk ... continued from page 2

earlier. Bob's staffers thought he would only be able to stay about an hour: well, that hour turned into at least another two as Bob was really enjoying the conversations. I noticed that quite often as Bob conversed with others, he always extended his good arm to hold onto a person's hand. I noticed that same gesture as I watched him on television, greeting and conversing with veterans at his beloved WWII Memorial in Washington, D.C. You can see it for yourself in the photo as Dave Murray, Dick Trupp, and I enjoyed our conversation with Senator Dole that day. It is very rare to have such a good relationship with a loving character such as Bob was, let alone a politician with a genuine interest in all people whether they be in Kansas or Washington, D.C. We all will miss you Bob, rest in peace. ♦



Bob Dole at CAM in 2015

Photo provided by CAM

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

# Combat Air Museum's MiG-15

By Dennis Smirl

Another of the classic aircraft that make up the still-growing collection at the Combat Air Museum is the Russian MiG-15. Or, in our case, the Polish Lim-2, a license-built copy of the Russian MiG-15bis, a later, improved model of the original MiG-15.

Coming as a huge surprise to many of the intelligence-gathering organizations of the Western world, the MiG-15 was an outgrowth of the post-World War II political reshuffling that makes the period 1945-1950 so interesting to historians.

At the end of the war, the Soviets knew their air force was obsolete. They had captured a great deal of technology and significant numbers of aeronautical engineers following the Nazi collapse. The Germans had developed jet engines and put them to good use in such aircraft as the Messerschmitt Me-262; they had concentrated on axial-flow design, rather than centrifugal-flow engines but did not have sufficient resources to further develop a follow-on engine with the thrust necessary for trans-sonic flight. The Soviets picked through the material they had captured and learned enough to build a few underpowered jet airplanes that had no real military value.

The Soviets needed a powerful engine, and they found it in a most peculiar way. Rolls-Royce, in Great Britain, had a new engine they called the Nene. It could produce more than twice the thrust of the captured German engines, and Rolls-Royce shared that technology with the Soviets and the United States government. The Soviets disassembled and reverse-engineered the copies Rolls-Royce made available to them, improved the design somewhat and produced the RD-45. The Soviets also had engineering data on the benefits of a swept wing. The Soviets used British engine technology, German wing design knowledge, and their home-built fuselage to create a new aircraft that was, for them, a huge jump in technology. The resulting aircraft, the MiG-15, was an aerial dogfighter equal to anything in the world.

Early versions had some problems and several were lost in flight tests. Still, the Soviets persevered and the improvements made to the MiG-15 made it a more dependable weapon in most instances. One problem they never fixed was windshield and canopy fogging. If the MiG-15 was at high altitude and descended rapidly, visibility from inside the cockpit



Combat Air Museum MiG-15

Photo provided by CAM

was lost, a fatal flaw. There was a hot-air hose from the engine compressor, and the pilot could defrost parts of the canopy, but it meant the pilot's hand on the stick or the throttle had to be diverted to the hot-air hose in order for him to see out.

Another problem with the MiG-15 was the horizontal tail. Elevators, a holdover from the subsonic piston-engine days, were used to control pitch but at high speeds were all but useless. The all-flying tail or stabilator, used to great effectiveness on the North American F-86E and F-86F Sabre, was a technology that escaped the Soviet engineers.

A real plus with the MiG-15 was its climb rate. It had a better thrust-to-weight ratio than in the F-86 series and could out-climb the Sabre in almost any combat scenario. Even more in its favor, the MiG-15 had a combat ceiling of almost 50,000 feet, while the ceiling for the F-86 series was in the neighborhood of 40,000 feet. Russian pilots used this advantage with great success as they would loiter well above the F-86s and wait until the Sabres were low on fuel before diving their MiG-15bis aircraft to attack the Sabres. When that happened, American pilots faced a very unpleasant choice. They could stay and fight and run even lower on fuel, or they could run south at very high throttle settings, again burning scarce fuel. And yes, the Russians flew MiG-15s marked as North Korean. Politics.

Back to improvements. The Soviets further improved the RD-45 engine which became the Klimov VK-1. It was slightly larger than the Nene-based RD-45 and only required a minor change in fuselage design.

In all, the MiG-15 was a fluke, an aircraft that came together for all the wrong reasons. Its dismal combat record in Korea was heavily skewed by the use of poorly trained North Korean pilots in the second and third year of the Korean conflict. During the first year of combat, pitting the F-86A against the MiG-15, the kill ratio was one to one. Russian pilots flying the MiGs were highly proficient because most of them were World War II veterans. When the North Koreans

# Museum

**Chinook rotor blades...** Shortly after we obtained our CH-47D Chinook helicopter, a person with Avion/Avtask in Wright City, Missouri, called the Museum. Avion/Avtask repairs and reconditions Chinook rotor blades for Boeing and the U.S. Army. They offered to repaint our blades for free if we delivered the blades to their facility near St. Louis. Museum members Deb Lamere and Gary Naylor loaded the blades on a borrowed trailer and delivered them to Avion/Avtask on December 14. They met company president Joe Wilson and toured the Avion/Avtask facility. Deb and Gary were extremely impressed with everything they saw there. Avion/Avtask is an employee-owned business and the workers were honored and delighted to meet Deb, a former US Army Chinook crew chief and flight engineer. Avion/Avtask offered to paint our blades as a way of giving back to the Chinook

community and to help preserve the legacy of the long-serving CH-47. Deb and Gary plan to return to Avion/Avtask to retrieve the blades in April. In the meantime, Deb and others will work on the rotor hubs and attaching parts to prepare them for assembly and installation on our Chinook.



Photo by Deb Lamere

Deb Lamere, Joe Wilson and employee Charlie

**An Eagle for CAM?...** After delivering the Chinook blades, Gary and Deb headed south to see a McDonnell Douglas F-15A Eagle stored in a hangar. Gary worked on Eagles during his Air Force career; he learned one of his old jets was going to the boneyard and asked us to see about obtaining it. The Air Force Museum stated that aircraft would not be made available, but then told us about the F-15A near St. Louis. We arranged for Deb and Gary to see it. Gary found the jet intact and partially disassembled. The Air Force Museum told us

that CAM is one of seven organizations that have expressed interest in the Eagle and have invited all seven to submit their plans for transporting, displaying and restoring the Eagle, the seventh F-15A off the production line. You can learn more about this aircraft and donate to the effort at <https://tinyurl.com/F-15A2022>.



Photo by B. Sveinsson

71-0286 in 1980

**Hughes OH-6 Cayuse on display...** We told you in the last issue that CAM would receive a Hughes OH-6 Cayuse light observation helicopter on loan to display through April. Thanks to some volunteers from both CAM and the Marine Corps Reserve unit at the south end of Forbes, we attached ground handling wheels to the skids and pushed the small helicopter the quarter mile from the American Flight Museum to CAM. We moved our Republic F-84 Thunderstreak outside and put the Cayuse in its place. Since the Cayuse is an airworthy helicopter, we needed to make it safe for public display. Joe Wulfskuhle, an experienced OH-6 mechanic, disconnected the battery and installed the doors. We then roped off the Cayuse and placed an informative sign that Gary Worthy, owner of the helicopter and a decorated Vietnam veteran who also flew them in Vietnam, provided. Take advantage of this opportunity to see a small but very effective historic flying machine!

**Morane update...** Our volunteers continue to make progress on our Morane L replica. Dave Murray and Gene Howerter put up the letters on the side of the storage room below the Morane. Ron Shirrell, Ted Nolde and Mike Welch placed some green outdoor carpet beneath the Morane and elevated the tail. Nelson Hinman, Jr. refinished the propellers for the Morane and Nieuport 11. Deb Lamere continues to

# Notes

By Kevin Drewelow

print parts for two 80% scale Le Rhone rotary engines which will go into the Morane and Nieuport.



Photo by Kevin Drewelow

Morane L with new sign

**Mirick Aviation Gallery...** Dave and Gene also mounted the "MIRICK AVIATION GALLERY" letters above the Bob Dole Education Center in hangar 602. The letter make the art gallery more prominent and pays homage to James Mirick, an aviation artist and longtime area art teacher. Mr. Mirick visited CAM a few months ago; he enjoyed the gallery organized by his former student Chuck Watson and he appreciated the gallery being named in his honor. Ted and Sharon Nolde hung a large 48 star American flag donated by their son Brad above the art gallery which adds to the visual impact.



Photo by Kevin Drewelow

Dave Murray adds finishing touches

**Clarkson students analyzed our Curtiss Jenny...** CAM's partnership with Dr. Craig Merrett and his aeronautical engineering students at Clarkson University in Potsdam, New York continues. Dr. Merrett mixes aviation history and engineering by assigning a certain aircraft from a participating museum to a group of his students. Last fall, a group

analyzed stresses placed on the wings and tail surfaces of the Curtiss JN4D Jenny when flown by pioneering aviator Bessie Coleman. CAM shared drawings and other data from the records we received from Elton Rowley, who built our replica Jenny. Dr. Merrett invited us to participate in a Zoom meeting where the students presented their finding and took questions. This was the second consecutive semester we've worked with Dr. Merrett and his students and we look forward to doing it again soon!

**Old friends reunite...** Don Brown is a retired Kansas Army National Guard master sergeant who served in the former 137th Transportation Company (Heavy Helicopter) when they flew Sikorsky CH-54A Tarhes, better known as Skycranes. During his time with the 137th, Don was a crew chief, flight engineer and aircraft inspector. Don visited CAM recently to see our CH-54A, serial number 67-18424. Don hadn't been inside a Skycrane in decades, but seemed right at home. He told us about some of his experiences during the Skycrane era along with some great stories. It's always a good day at the Combat Air Museum when we reunite veterans with their old aircraft! ♦



Photo by Kevin Drewelow

Don Brown in his former "office"

# From Farmland to Flying Field: Forbes at 80

By Kevin Drewelow

2022 marks the 80th anniversary of the construction of the military airfield south of Topeka near Pauline, Kansas. Less than two weeks after the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, Congress authorized construction of countless airfields across the nation. Contractors broke ground in early 1942 and within eight months, Topeka Army Air Field was training bomber crews. The base would continue to serve the nation over the next 31 years, gaining a new name in the process, but these military aircrews were not the first aviators to fly from this former farmland.



Photo provided by archives.gov

1932 map showing airfield near Pauline, Kansas

Al Wilson, a founding member of the Combat Air Museum, was one of the earliest aircraft mechanics in the Topeka area, starting work before the war began. He was employed at Topeka Army Air Field where workers received airplanes fresh from the factories and installed the latest modifications before sending them off to fly and fight. Al told me that before the war, people flew airplanes from a field north of 61st street and east of Highway 75. The massive hangar at the north end of Forbes Field stands on that location today. I couldn't find any evidence supporting Al's story until last year. The National Archives holds a collection of early aviation navigation maps and one of them from 1932 clearly shows a "Marked Auxiliary Field" where Topeka Army Air Field would be built ten years later!

"Army Air Base to Make Topeka a Defense Center" was the headline on the Topeka Daily State Journal;



Photo by Kevin Drewelow

The Topeka Daily State Journal Dec 1941

remarkably, there is no date visible on the page but it reads as if it was published in December, 1941. The top photo was taken looking north and mentions a "filling station" which is likely the vacant small concrete block building still standing on the northeast corner of Southeast 61st Street and Highway 75. Another article on the page stated, "It will place Topeka in an enviable position among cities in the field of aviation - and gives the city national prominence immediately in the defense program."

*Plane Talk* will continue to explore the founding and development of Topeka Army Air Field/Forbes Air Force Base throughout the year. ♦



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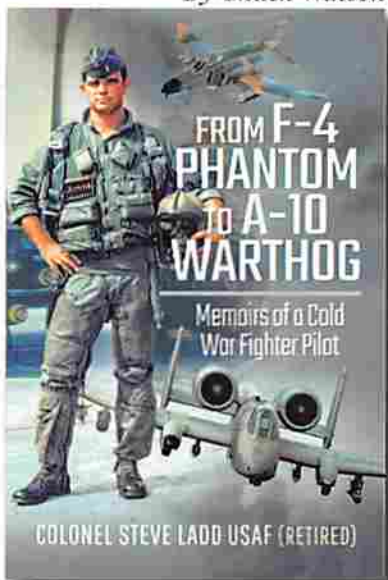
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# Pilot's Notes: A Book Review

By Chuck Watson

Unlike most aviation books I've read over many years, my most recent one is different in some good and yet some bad ways. "From F-4 Phantom to A-10 Warthog, Memoirs of a Cold War Fighter Pilot" by retired Air Force Col. Steve Ladd reads more like a several hour visit with a fun loving pilot around a table with plenty of drinks and old friends.



He traces his entire career from flight training, flying F-4s from Vietnam to Europe, the sudden conversion from Phantoms to Warthogs in England, Fighter Weapons School, a couple of desk jobs he fought, to his final job as Operations Director of the 81st Tactical Fighter Wing at RAF Bentwaters. No deep insights into actual flying or combat are covered, but plenty of stories of drinking, comrades, his English wife, more drinking and wild antics and not well hidden dislike of others not of his mold, and then...more drinking give the impression fighter pilot life is like an ongoing frat party among boys with wings.

I don't deny his long and dedicated service to America and our allies, but I found nothing new about the hours in the air between times in the officers' clubs. He is very honest that various political and social changes have made his 'good ole boy' Air Force days as obsolete as a biplane on the flight line—he often uses his abbreviated IMHO, (in my humble opinion) to discuss these changes. His manner of writing feels more like a flying standup comedian than a steely eyed killer of the skies.

To a young man looking for fun and good times, this book would be a good recruiting read; but for the serious historian and aviation fan, it is lacking. For just a fun and jovial read with some flying thrown in, it's worth checking out. ♦

# New & Renewing Members

## New Lifetime Members:

Dr. Clayton A. Lang

## New:

Mujahid Abdulrahim & family | George & Patty Cullan | David Hargitt | Angela Oxenberg | Darlene Thomas | Patrick Wilson & family

## Renewing:

Ted & Cindy Berard | Col. Jon & Peggy Boursaw | Les Carlson | Bradley & Star Caywood | Duane Coash & family | Steff Cunningham | Kevin & Susan Drewelow | Leon Dultmeier | Spencer Duncan & family | Russ & Kyle Elliott | Leonard Faulconer | Chris Fein & family | Monte Fuller | Henry Hickey | Frank Holsburg | Hal & Nice' Loney | Larry & Nancy Mann | Todd Morgenstern & family | Bruce Nall & family | Mary Ann Naylor | Loren Otis | Lawrence Oxenberg | Richard Painter | Jim Pinegar & family | Michael Rockefeller & family | Dennis & Galene San Romani | Joe Taylor & family | Chuck & Marlene Urban | Dr. Howard & Marilyn Ward | Steve Wodtke

\* ..... \*

## Visitors

628 people from 33 states, Austria, France, Germany, Taiwan and Turkey visited the Combat Air Museum in December.

# Next CAM Member's Luncheon

By Kevin Drexeloto

The next Combat Air Museum Members' Brown Bag Luncheon will take place on Monday, February 14 at 11:30 a.m. in the Bob Dole Education Center. Retired Brigadier General and CAM member Brad Link will speak about his experiences flying the Rockwell B-1 Lancer bomber from Wichita's McConnell Air Force Base in both the Air Force and Air National Guard. ♦



BG Brad Link, USAF (Ret.)

Photo provided by USAF

★ ..... ★

Operation El Dorado Canyon ... continued from front page

F-111s from running out of fuel) was exacerbated by politics. Flying straight from Lakenheath to Qaddafi's headquarters and then returning would have been challenging enough. Unfortunately, politics entered the picture when France and Spain denied permission for the United States to fly over their countries. This added hundreds of miles and many extra hours in the air as the flight path took the F-111s and their support aircraft south over the Atlantic Ocean all the way to Gibraltar, and then east over the Mediterranean Sea. One item that Mr. McKee added was one probably not thought about by most people. Refueling the F-111s was standard operating procedure but there is no provision for transferring engine oil inflight. Aardvarks were notorious for their high oil consumption: would the F-111s have enough engine oil for the round trip?

As the mission planners worked their way through the myriad problems that completing the attack would entail, a new set of numbers appeared: 24 F-111Fs and five EF-111 Ravens would make up the attack force, rather than the earlier, smaller numbers.

Finally, the entire armada took off, headed for Libya and a middle-of-the night attack where one of the new features of the F-111 would be put to the test: TAR, or Terrain Avoidance Radar would be used once the F-111s were over the Libyan Desert. At the time, this technology was relatively new, and it allowed the aircraft commander to set an altitude above the ground of as little 100 feet, maintained by the autopilot. Staying so close to the terrain made the attacking

F-111s difficult, if not impossible, to pick up on Libyan radar until the aircraft were so close that no anti-aircraft rockets or cannon would be effective.

As the jets continued across Libya, they split up into attack groups with specific targets. One group of six F-111s attacked Tripoli airport. Another group of nine F-111s attacked the Bab al-Azizia barracks. Other F-111s went after individual targets and one of them, piloted by a Captain Carson, used a toss-bomb profile to dispense a munition that flew several miles in an arc that landed on target.

The results of the raid were mixed. The USAF proved that such a long mission against a potential enemy could be carried out, with most of the attacking aircraft arriving on time, on target, to dispense heavy munitions. In doing so, the USAF only lost one aircraft and both of its crew members. The strike was the first American attack from the United Kingdom since World War II and the 13 hour flight was the longest fighter combat mission in history until 2001.

In summation, many of the goals of the operation were met. The aircraft hit several targets, seriously damaging or destroying them. Qaddafi's campaign of terror significantly declined after the attack.

At the end of the presentation, Mr. McKee answered several questions from members with additional detail and clarification. (Editor's note: learn more about the raid at <https://tinyurl.com/eldoradocanyon>)

★ ..... ★

Combat Air Museum's ... continued from page 5

took over, the kill ratio jumped to something in the neighborhood of fourteen to one in favor of the United States Air Force.

Production of the MiG-15 eventually reached some 18,000 aircraft, this figure including a tandem two-seat trainer version, the MiG-15UTI.

The MiG-15 was built under license in the People's Republic of China as the Shenyang F-2, in Poland as the LIM-1 and Lim-2, and in Czechoslovakia as the S-102. CAM's Lim-2 was built in 1955 and found its way to the civilian market in 1986. Registered as N15YY, Steve Craig donated it to our museum in 1995. ♦

# In Remembrance



**Rev. Larry R. Thomas**  
U.S. Navy veteran  
CAM #3812  
February 5, 1939–August  
16, 2021

★ ★ ★ ★ ★  
The Flight of "Hairy Mike" ... continued from page 3

Gander, "Hairy Mike" made radio contact with Prestwick ... then disappeared.

Only Army Air Force accident report 44-12-17-508 and very little additional information is available. Several aircraft searched for 012 and her crew, some as far as Iceland, but found nothing.

The report includes only some maintenance documentation, a detailed flight plan, search results, and crew information. The report does not specify the cause for the loss of the aircraft, only "Undetermined." At those latitudes during December, aircrews searching for the missing bomber would have been operating in darkness. The water temperatures would have been well below any that the crew could have survived for more than 5 to 10 minutes. All of the search efforts occurred five hours after the plane departed.

The answer to the question of what happened to B-17G 42-40012 on December 18, 1943 will never be known. Here I can only speculate and present my thoughts as to possibilities.

My first theory is the crew experienced disorientation initiated by an optical illusion. As mentioned previously it would have been quite dark at that latitude in December. According to the report, the weather at takeoff was clear with a light southwesterly wind. These are prime conditions to create an illusion where the stars reflecting on the water appear to blend together with the sky causing total loss of the horizon. This gives the appearance of being in a "fish bowl" with stars above and below causing the illusion of the aircraft climbing. The

natural reaction would be to push the control forward to lower the nose of the aircraft to find the horizon, which would cause the air speed to increase eventually to the point of structural failure. As noted above, the pilot's oxygen system had experienced leaks. If this problem recurred, the possibility of degraded ability due to hypoxia would have been greatly increased. The pilot, 2nd Lt. Craig, was instrument rated and had accumulated 100 hours of instrument time. He also had 175 hours of night flying and 475 hours total time with 30 hours in the B-17. By today's standards this is not much but in 1943 he was considered a very experienced pilot. He should have been able to recognize and immediately correct the situation. Most likely, none of his time was over water, which appears much different than flying over land. Even today while this illusion is well known, even experienced pilots encountering it have problems coping with it. I have intentionally experienced this under controlled conditions. Even after seeing it, recovering and seeing it again, it is very disorienting.

The second theory is weather. Although the weather at Gander was clear the crew was very likely to encounter adverse weather somewhere, especially during late December. At night, ice building on the leading edges of the wings and tail would be difficult to detect. Ice can quickly build to a critical amount causing loss of control. Although the B-17G was built with an anti-icing system, many were removed to decrease the aircraft weight to increase the load carrying capacity.

The third theory is mechanical failure. However, unless there was a catastrophic failure, the crew should have been able to make radio contact and attempt to return to Gander.

The details of their fate is not the important factor. These young men were a new crew, well trained with a strong spirit. They were among the first B-17Gs heading in harm's way to defend our country against a formidable and determined enemy. Their families and the world were deprived of knowing and having these men with us, but the crew of "Hairy Mike" are true heroes, never to be forgotten. ♦

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COMBAT 12  
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# The Bomber

White moon setting and red sun rising,  
White as a searchlight, red as a flame,  
Through the dawn wind her hard way making,  
Rhythmless, riddled, the bomber came.

Men who thought their last flight over,  
All hoping gone, came limping back,  
Marveling, looked on bomb-scarred Dover,

Buttercup fields and white Down track.

Cottage and ploughland, green lanes weaving,  
Working-folk stopping to stare overhead –  
Lovely, most lovely, past all believing  
To eyes of men new-raised from the dead.

*By Beatrice Ruth Gibb*



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