

Local volunteers carefully preserve pieces of Air Force history near the shores of the Great Salt Lake at Hill AFB, Utah.

# Aerospace History at Hill

Photography by Paul Kennedy

**T**ake Interstate 15 north toward Ogden, Utah. Over a gentle rise and to the right, you'll see them—rows of neatly arranged aircraft glinting in the sun. Spanning more than 36 acres, the Hill Aerospace Museum, located at Hill AFB, Utah, features an outdoor "Air Park" as well as indoor displays of aircraft, missiles, uniforms, flight gear, artwork, and aircraft engines. The Air Force Heritage Foundation of Utah began raising funds in 1983 to create the museum, which opened in 1987. Today, the museum houses nearly 60 aircraft, including a one-of-a-kind SR-71C "Blackbird."

Most of the larger aircraft in the collection can be seen in the Air Park. Visitors stroll through the grounds at their own pace, following well-placed signs, or take advantage of volunteer guides, who offer detailed, knowledgeable answers to questions about the museum's displays and the base.



This B-29 bomber (near left), known as Hagarty's Hag, was transported to the museum in pieces in 1983. Delivered to USAAF in August 1945, it was turned over to the Army in 1953 at Dugway Proving Ground, Utah, where it fell prey to weather and vandals. Museum volunteers restored it over an eight-month period. In the background is a newer acquisition, a C-124 that served with the Utah Air National Guard during the late 1960s. Volunteers found the aircraft at Aberdeen Proving Ground, Md., and arranged to have it disassembled and moved to Hill in 1992.



At the center of the museum's acreage is a 52,000-square foot building, donated by the state of Utah in 1991, in which 20 aircraft, ranging from a PT-17 trainer to the SR-71C, are on display.

The SR-71C, which was built from the rear section of the first YF-12A and an engineering mock-up forward fuselage, first flew in 1969 and served as a trainer. One of the collection's gems is a professionally restored P-38J, rescued from a site on Buldir island, Alaska, where it had been used as a ground target for other P-38s after it crashed in February 1945.

This 1943-era chapel—used as the base chapel until 1984—was saved from destruction, moved to its present site, and restored by the museum's foundation and through local contributions. It features a re-creation of a stained glass window commemorating the efforts of the 384th Bomb Group, assigned to Wendover Field, Utah, in World War II. The original window was placed in the Parish Church of St. James the Apostle, Grafton Underwood, UK, on May 21, 1983.



The museum's collection is not limited to aircraft. Fragile documents and memorabilia, many belonging to Maj. Ployer Peter Hill, after whom Hill AFB is named, are carefully maintained in a climate controlled environment (right). Curator Carol Nash wears gloves when handling these pieces, since dust, humidity, or even oils from the hands can speed the deterioration of paper and photographs.



Col. William L. Evans, USAF (Ret.), contributed flight gear and uniforms spanning his 32-year career. Together with more recent donations, this display illustrates the many changes in USAF uniforms and gear, from World War II to the present.

At left is the flight suit Evans wore when he flew B-47s with the 43d Bomb Wing in the 1950s. Note the eye patch, which was issued to nuclear-capable bomber pilots. Theoretically the patch would keep one eye safe from being blinded by a nuclear flash, giving the pilot a chance to return with his aircraft.

Museum volunteers give many reasons for their dedication and hard work. For some, it's a chance to work on "an old friend"—for others, an opportunity to pass on their experiences to a younger generation of aviators and aviation fans. At right, E. Don Peterson readies a rivet gun in preparation for maintenance work on one of the Air Park aircraft, which require constant vigilance. Peterson also brings his firsthand knowledge and unique perspectives on aviation to audiences in the museum's education seminars.





Above, emphasizing the dedication of the museum's restoration workers and volunteers, is an accurately restored B-17G cockpit. At right, Robert Cosgrove continues work inside the cramped bomber. Flying Fortresses were heavily used in every World War II theater, but by 1945, when this aircraft was delivered, the B-17 was virtually obsolete. After a stint with the Brazilian Air Force, this bomber was returned to USAF in 1968 and then loaned to various aviation museums until the Air Force Heritage Foundation of Utah acquired the airplane in 1987. Foundation member and local businessman John Lindquist, who was a navigator in the 493d Bomb Squadron, sponsored the aircraft, and the plane was given 493d markings and the name Short Bier (after an aircraft on which Lindquist served) in his honor. It symbolizes the hundreds of B-17s that came through Ogden Air Depot during the war.



Inside and out. A walk through the Air Park will often reveal one of the volunteers—aviation buffs who make up the majority of the Hill Aerospace Museum workforce—hard at work performing one of the countless tasks necessary to safeguard aircraft exposed to the elements. Here, one volunteer undertakes the daunting task of polishing the exterior of a C-124.



To ensure its displays are accurate in their history as well as restoration, the museum includes a well-stocked research library—home to computer databases and hundreds of volumes ranging from the most elementary books on military flight to detailed technical manuals. The technical manuals on the various weapon systems provide an invaluable resource for the museum's preservation crews. At right, librarian Sandee Whitson, one of many persons working behind the scenes at the Hill museum, checks on some information in the library's computer.



The collection includes many examples of helicopters as well as fixed-wing aircraft. Here, a mannequin sports fire-fighting garb while posed at the rear of an HH-43 helicopter. The Huskie, sporting a unique rotor system that made the helicopter a very stable platform from which to work, was used as a fire-fighting and rescue aircraft in the Vietnam War.

Ogden Air Logistics Center, located at Hill, through the years has played an important part in maintaining a number of weapon systems, including providing depot-level maintenance for F-84, F-89, F-102, B-47, and B-57 aircraft. Ogden also assumed prime responsibilities for early missile systems such as the SM-62 Snark and IM-99 Bomarc, as well as Atlas and Minuteman ICBMs. At right, the Minuteman I and Bomarc A- and B-model missiles displayed outdoors help present a complete picture of the Air Force, past and present. ■

