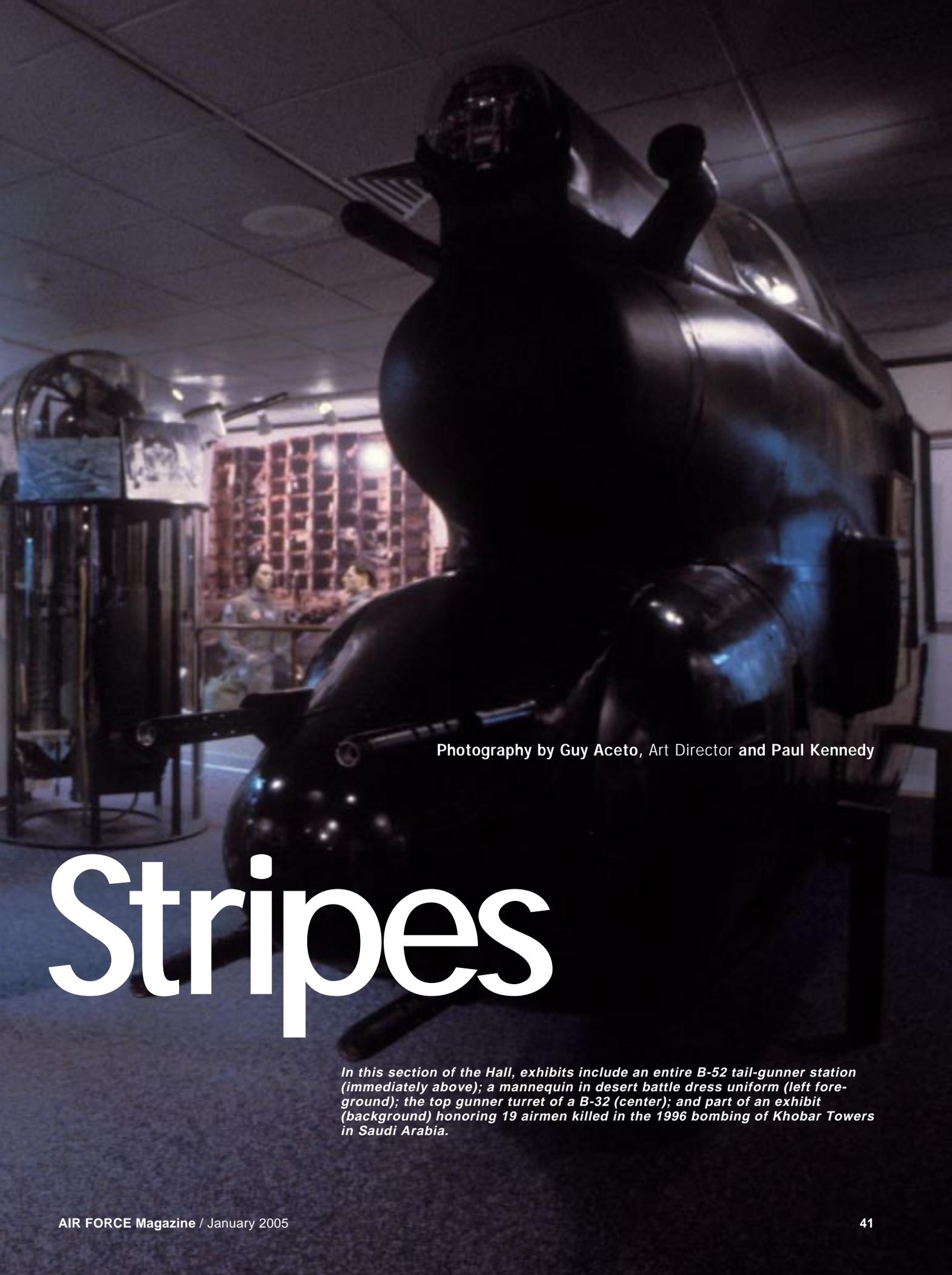


A photograph of a museum exhibit. In the foreground, a mannequin is dressed in a desert military uniform, including a tan bucket hat, a light-colored short-sleeved shirt with patches, and camouflage-patterned pants. The mannequin is standing in a glass display case with a wooden frame. In the background, another mannequin in a different uniform is visible, and a sign above it reads "WWII TO DESERT STORM". The setting is a museum gallery with a dark carpet and recessed ceiling lights.

Stories in

The Enlisted Heritage Hall preserves stories of airmen over the past century.



Photography by Guy Aceto, Art Director and Paul Kennedy

Stripes

In this section of the Hall, exhibits include an entire B-52 tail-gunner station (immediately above); a mannequin in desert battle dress uniform (left foreground); the top gunner turret of a B-32 (center); and part of an exhibit (background) honoring 19 airmen killed in the 1996 bombing of Khobar Towers in Saudi Arabia.

The Air Force Enlisted Heritage Hall, Maxwell AFB, Gunter Annex, Ala., arose from a collection of artifacts that sprang up in the lobby of the Senior NCO Academy shortly after its opening in 1973. The collection grew and was moved to a renovated building next to SNCOA. In 1986, the building officially became the Enlisted Heritage Hall.

At right, one sees a restored AC-47 gunship similar to the one in which A1C John Levitow performed the heroic act for which he was awarded the Medal of Honor. Standing on the viewing deck, visitors can see into the red-lit interior and hear a narration of the action aboard his gunship, Spooky 71.

Over the years, the hall grew from a simple display of heritage into a resource for educating and motivating future enlisted leaders.



In 1997, USAF established the Air Force Enlisted Heritage Research Institute, comprising a research and archives element and the Enlisted Heritage Hall. Though organizationally part of AFEHRI, the Hall is a privately funded entity, operating under the auspices of the Air University Foundation.



The number and sophistication of exhibits in the Hall have grown over the years, fueled by private donations, fund-raising efforts, and volunteers. The AFEHRI has just four full-time staffers. It relies heavily on volunteers and the technical assistance of skilled craftsmen from the Federal Prison Camp Program.

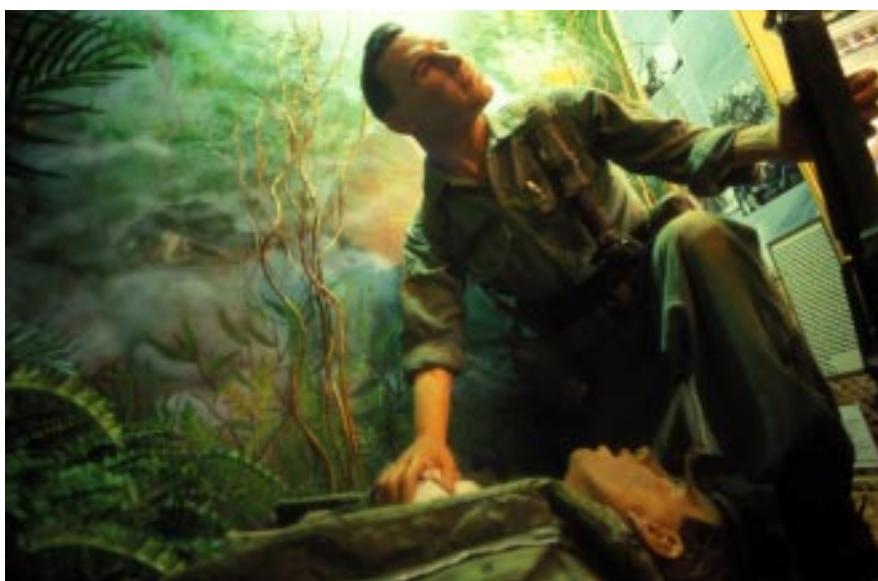
Above, glass enclosed exhibits reveal mannequins adorned in actual period uniforms donated by enlisted members. Above, right, is the French pilot license of American Eugene Bullard, who enlisted in the French Army in World War I and became the first black military pilot. At right, the Wall of Achievers features former enlisted members such as Johnny Cash, Charlton Heston, Chuck Norris, and Flip Wilson, among many others.





The Levitow gunship exhibit (at top) was a major effort. It showcases not just the aircraft but also a lifelike mannequin recreating action from Feb. 24, 1969. Despite being wounded, Levitow saved his fellow crew members by grabbing a burning flare and throwing it out of the aircraft before it could ignite the onboard ordnance.

At right, another enlisted MOH recipient, A1C William Pitsenbarger, is portrayed in a diorama, performing pararescue duties in the jungles of Vietnam. On April 11, 1966, Pitsenbarger jumped into the middle of a firefight to aid wounded soldiers and refused to leave on the rescue helicopter. He continued to aid the soldiers and helped fight off the enemy until he was killed. He received the Medal of Honor posthumously in 2001.



Staff photos by Guy Aceo



The Vietnam War collection at the Hall contains numerous artifacts, some of them mundane, everyday objects that recall the life of enlisted airmen during the long war. Many visitors donate items, such as those at left, to help tell the enlisted story.



At left, the Hall's prisoner of war exhibit from the Vietnam days is a study in stark realism.

Below, right, a likeness of CMSgt. Richard Etchberger stands behind a display of his Air Force Cross—one of only 23 awarded to enlisted members. When his radar site in Laos was overrun in 1968, he called in air strikes, radioed for air rescue, returned fire, and helped the wounded. He was killed by enemy fire.



At left, the mannequin of TSgt. John Chapman brings visitors closer to the present. Chapman was killed March 4, 2002, during Operation Anaconda in Afghanistan. A combat controller, he posthumously received the Air Force Cross for engaging enemy forces in two different positions to provide cover for his Army teammates.

Chapman was one of two airmen killed that day during Anaconda. The other, SrA. Jason Cunningham, a pararescue jumper, also received the Air Force Cross posthumously.





At left, the Medal of Honor display honors USAF's enlisted recipients. It is a central exhibit, often serving as the backdrop for enlisted ceremonies. Living enlisted USAF legends pay visits to the Hall to provide unique insights to students, visitors, and staff.

The Hall plans to open a new exhibit featuring MOH recipient SSgt. Henry "Red" Erwin, complete with lifelike mannequin.

Enlisted Heritage Hall also records the everyday life of USAF's enlisted force. At right, an exhibit showcases the basic training experience as it developed through the years, while another case explains the enlisted link to the Air Force's premier aerial demonstration squad, the Thunderbirds.

Below, an exhibit honors Army Air Forces' enlisted pilots of World War II.



Photo by Paul Kennedy



Above, a display highlights the work of enlisted electronic warfare operators. During the early days of the Cold War, USAF was short of EWOs for its new B-52 force, so it tapped 132 enlisted instructors from 1956 to 1964 to fill in until it could train enough officers.

At right, museum specialist William Chivette conducts a white glove, close-up inspection of an artifact, looking for signs of deterioration. Every artifact, even humble caps, receive such scrutiny.



AFEHRI and its Hall have outgrown their current space. A new 3,700-square-foot addition is under construction, with completion expected late this year. The addition will feature a student research and computer area and new archive space that will focus on the Cold War and relatively recent operations.

The new construction also includes a 2,300-square-foot courtyard.

AFEHRI comes under the College for Enlisted Professional Military Education and shares the CEPME mission of educating and developing the "best enlisted leaders in the world."

Enlisted personnel attending courses at Maxwell, such as the Air National Guard, Army, and Coast Guard troops at right, can use the Institute's research facilities. However, officials say that the "single most important tool" in the AFEHRI toolkit is its Web site, introduced in 1997. Students around the world can gain access to numerous historical documents, information, and images via the site, which got about 100,000 hits in each of the past two years.





The lineup of Enlisted Heritage Hall exhibits would not be complete without a display dedicated to those airmen who have achieved USAF's highest enlisted rank—Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force. Above, the Hall features portraits of each of the 14 Chiefs. Seen at far left is a bust of the first Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force, Paul Airey.

Exhibits cover all eras. The photo at right shows a glass case (foreground) containing artifacts of the Korean War, including a period uniform and helmet. Attached to the glass wall is an authentic "blood chit" for use in escape and evasion.

Currently, the Hall boasts some 85 displays covering 6,492 square feet of floor space.



The Hall uses a wide variety of artifacts, from simple utensils and personal uniforms to photographs and Air Force Art Collection paintings, to tell the story of the Air Force enlisted force and its contributions to military air and space power history. ■