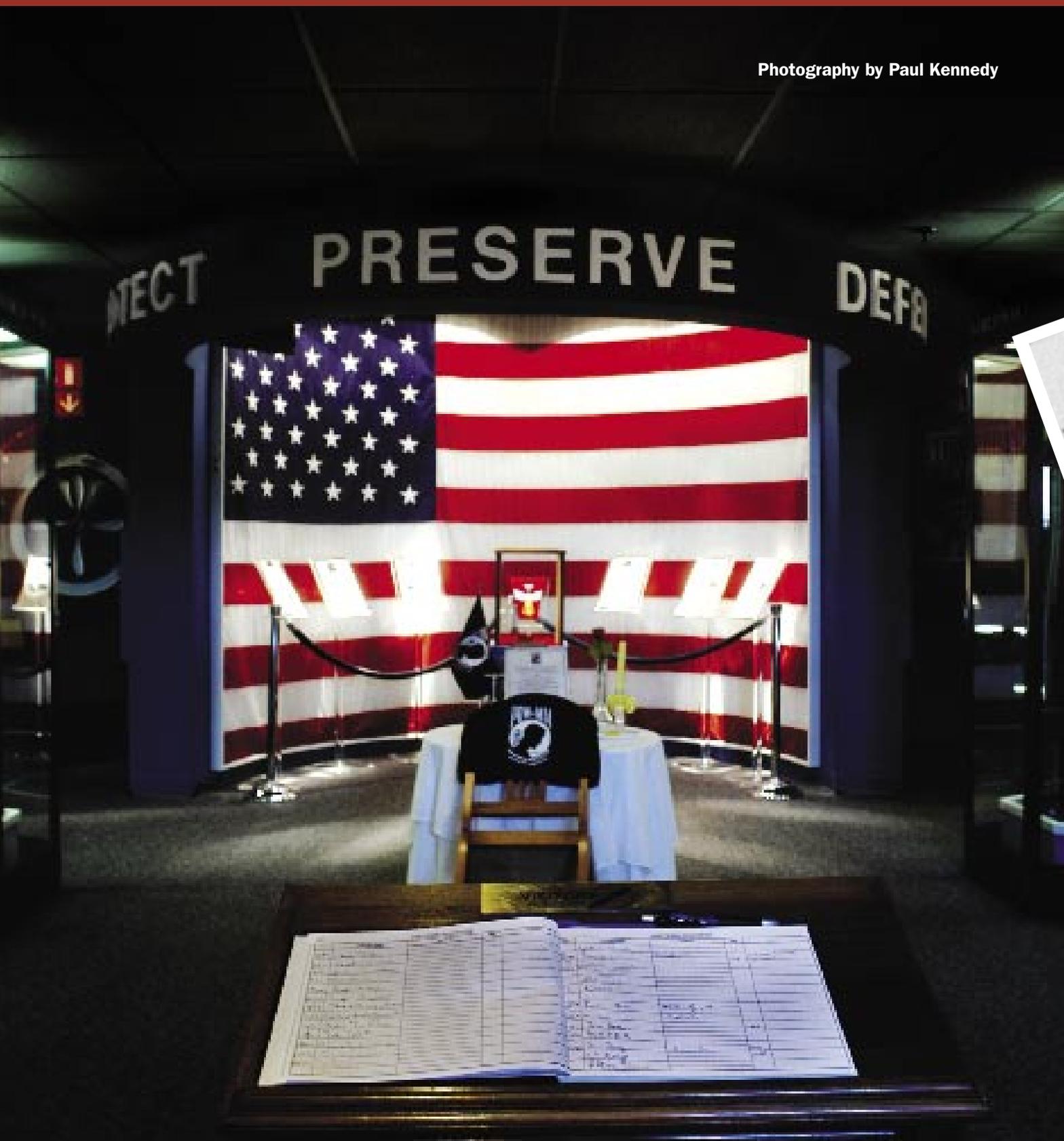


Enlisted Heritage

Photography by Paul Kennedy



Under Glass

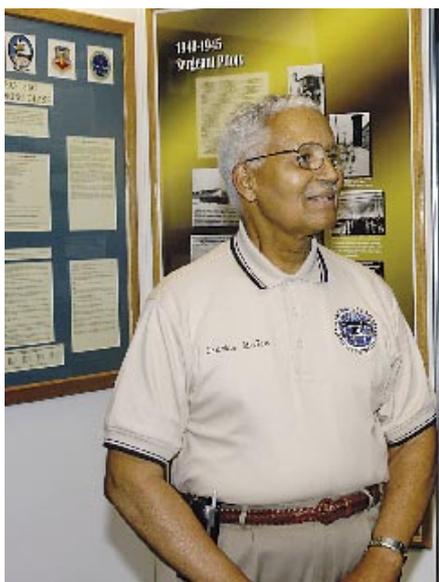
With the opening of its new 3,700-square-foot wing, Enlisted Heritage Hall is stepping up its efforts to preserve the history of the nation's enlisted airmen.



On entering Enlisted Heritage Hall, visitors encounter a flag-draped alcove dedicated to enlisted Medal of Honor recipients such as A1C William Pitsenbarger (above left, with sidearm) and A1C John Levitow (bottom left, in flight suit). Equally important, the hall celebrates the vital everyday work of the nation's airmen, as depicted in other photos on this page.

The mission of the Enlisted Heritage Hall, part of the Air Force Enlisted Heritage Research Institute at Maxwell AFB-Gunter Annex, Ala., is to preserve the "rich and dramatic" story of airmen from the earliest days to the present. Its curatorial staff collects, preserves, and displays artifacts, papers, art collections, equipment, and other physical objects. In recent years, EHH outgrew its original space and launched construction (right) of a new, 3,700-square-foot wing.

The addition, which formally opened on June 2, is known as the "Berlin-to-Baghdad Wing" (signifying events from the 1948-49 Berlin Airlift through today's air operations over Iraq). Exhibits in the new space deal with the Cold War and post-Cold War periods. Its initial exhibit focused on airmen and the Berlin Airlift. The grand opening drew luminaries from around the Air Force.



In the photo at left, MSgt. Tony Brewer, an AFEHRI staff member, strikes up a conversation with retired Air Force Col. Charles McGee, a prominent member of the famed Tuskegee Airmen. McGee, a pilot in World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War, made the journey to Maxwell-Gunter to attend the dedication of the new wing, which coincided with the 2005 Gathering of Eagles, an annual aviation event held at Maxwell-Gunter.

Among EHH's exhibits is a tribute to the all-African American ground crews of the 332nd Fighter Group in Europe. These enlisted airmen kept the World War II Tuskegee Airmen flying and fighting.

The opening of the new wing had special meaning for the only three men to have served as AFEHRI director. Shown in the photo at right, they are (l-r) CMSgt. David Hamel, retired CMSgt. Wayne Fisk, and CMSgt. Malcolm McVicar.

Fisk, the founder and first director of the hall, is the first enlisted Eagle to be honored at the Gathering of Eagles. Hamel, who served as director for more than four years, oversaw the renovation of Heritage Plaza, a major expansion of the museum's exhibits, and the ground-breaking for the new wing. McVicar, who took over from Hamel earlier this year, has continued a tradition of aggressive leadership.





Many varieties of the Air Force uniform are on display on mannequins throughout the facility. The Berlin Airlift exhibit features a flight suit (above left) of the same type worn by Lt. Gail Halvorsen, the famed "Candy Bomber" who dropped sweets to children in the city. Next comes tiger-stripe combat fatigues, a nonstandard issue made in Udorn, Thailand, with the name tag and chevrons produced by local manufacturers; the pattern was donated by a former security policeman. The mannequin at right displays the desert camouflage hat, trousers, and shirt worn by retired CMSAF Frederick "Jim" Finch.

Photo at right is of a GAU-2B/A, 7.62 mm machine gun with linkless ammo storage and feed system, which was transferred to the hall from the History and Traditions Museum at Lackland AFB, Tex. This type of gun has been used operationally in the AC-47, AC-119G, AC-119K, AC-130A, and AC-130E/H gunships. It can spit out up to 6,000 rounds per minute. Enlisted crew members would maintain and reload the gun in flight.



At left, retired Col. Gail Halvorsen, the Candy Bomber, autographs a crate in the Berlin Airlift exhibit. At his side, retired Col. Guy Dunn awaits his turn to do the same. The crates are replicas of the kinds of cargo boxes carried into Berlin.

The main mission of AFEHRI is to enhance enlisted professional military education, thereby helping produce top enlisted leaders. Enlisted personnel attending courses at Maxwell-Gunter use the institute's research facilities and top-flight Web site, introduced in 1997, which provides ready access to numerous historical documents, information, and images.





Artifacts, from simple utensils to photos and diaries, tell the story of enlisted troops. As visitors spread the word about the EHH's existence, more and more enlisted and formerly enlisted members

contact the curators to donate their own memorabilia. Shown (l-r) in the photos above are a pair of leather flying gloves of the World War II era; Fisk's Vietnam-era belt with canteens, knife, and other useful

tools; and a World War II bomber crew member's leather face mask and leather cap with headset.



As photos at left show, EHH has collected an array of head gear. Clockwise from upper left: a woman's blue wool beret, which appeared in 1977; red headgear of para-rescue jumpers, issued in 1966 and still worn today; a security police beret with distinctive pin of Strategic Air Command; and a security police beret emblazoned with the K-9 dog handler emblem.

The photo below shows the glass case housing the SSgt. Henry "Red" Erwin Sr. Medal of Honor exhibit. It features a lifelike mannequin portraying Erwin as he was before he was disfigured in a World War II act of heroism that saved his aircraft and crew but left him with burns requiring 52 reconstructive surgeries. The model wears a flight suit and Mae West vest similar to the one worn by Erwin. A retired master sergeant, Erwin died in January 2002. His funeral flag adorns the wall to the rear.



Within EHH, artifacts cover all eras. Shown in the photo above is an authentic "blood chit," issued to a World War II airman deployed to the China-Burma-India Theater. Blood chits are handed out to aid downed airmen in escape and evasion.





The hall pays tribute to the contributions of all enlisted members, men and women alike, because all have played their part in the development of the Air Force. The photos above depict three clothing types:

(l-r) a woman's wool tropical blue 1084 uniform; a blue shade #33 polycotton corded uniform, a favorite in the 1960s and 1970s; and a woman's blue wool J-442.

The photo of the EHH display at right, with its teletype machine and fallout shelter sign, captures part of the museum's treatment of the story of airmen in the Cold War. The era is getting increased attention.

The hall also presents displays of technology from World War I, with artifacts ranging from early flying gear and uniforms to primitive telephones and other memorabilia. In another section, the curators present part of the history of Army ballooning and the career of Cpl. Vernon Burge, who in August 1912 became the Army's first enlisted pilot.



Benefiting from the donations of airmen, the EHH has become a repository of historical documents and memorabilia, large and small. Photo at left shows pages from a facsimile of a Soviet armed forces ID booklet. The Russian-language booklet, used in training courses, carried English translations to help airmen recognize what they were reading.

With its World War II exhibit, the EHH has expended much effort to make a record of the everyday life of an airman. The photo at right shows an authentic World War II footlocker containing period clothing, utensils, and other personal items. There are many World War II displays; one, for example, honors the Army Air Forces' enlisted pilots and other flying airmen.



At EHH, the life of airmen during the Vietnam War is portrayed in numerous artifacts, some of them mundane but well-remembered by those who fought in Southeast Asia. Photo at left shows some of the items donated over the years: printed communist propaganda leaflets, which were distributed around the South Vietnamese countryside, and a commemorative lighter.

The photos below show that communist propaganda wasn't always crude and blood-curdling. Nor, however, was it ever subtle. Shown here is an example, back and front, of a North Vietnamese "Christmas card," meant to intensify the loneliness and unhappiness of US troops far from home.



The artifacts above were used in the Philippines in the 1960s: a Security Police riot helmet and a poster for an anti-crime awareness program.





This desert boonie hat, now on display in the EHH, belonged to A1C Joseph Rimkus of Madison, Ill. Rimkus, a member of a weapons load crew deployed to Saudi Arabia, perished in the June 25, 1996, terrorist attack on Khobar Towers, which killed 19 US airmen. Rimkus' hat was donated by his parents, who considered it their most prized possession.



Pictured above are variations on the ubiquitous Vietnam War party suit. It was an off-duty outfit that was similar to a flight suit, except that it came in colors and with assorted patches and designs. The party suit originated in fighter squadrons but soon spread widely. They were often worn to farewell parties and special events. The one at top belonged to CMSgt. Dan France, the other to CMSgt. Wayne Fisk.



At left is a leaflet from a Vietnam War program called "Chieu Hoi," translated as "Open Arms." The program sought to encourage communist fighters to defect to the South. Possession of a leaflet guaranteed safe passage for anyone wishing to switch sides. This one reads, "Safe conduct pass to be honored by all Vietnamese government agencies and allied forces."



At left is an airman's World War I footlocker and clothing, typical of the Enlisted Heritage Hall displays that give visitors a unique glimpse of an important part of aviation history. ■