

**This museum preserves the airman's side of history with artifacts, memorabilia, pictures, and special exhibits.**

# Enlisted Heritage Hall

BY COLLEEN A. NASH, ASSOCIATE EDITOR

**A**MONG dozens of displays at USAF's Enlisted Heritage Hall is the overhead turret of a Consolidated Vultee B-32 Dominator, the only one in existence. It is so complete that "all we have to do is plug it in and hit it with hydraulics, and we are ready to rock and roll on twin .50-calibers," reports CMSgt. Wayne Fisk. When visitors look closer at the turret, they see that it bears serial number 1.

In 1983, CMSgt. Bobby Renfroe, the first enlisted Commandant of the Senior NCO Academy, wondered why no Air Force facility existed to discuss and preserve enlisted heritage. With SMSgt. William Allen (now retired), Chief Renfroe kicked off a drive that led to the establishment of the Hall in 1984. Today, the museum at Gunter AFB, Ala., boasts 6,000 square feet of exhibit space and nearly 100 displays.

Equipment on display provides a close-up view of combat as seen by enlisted aircrews.

There's a B-17/B-24 ball turret so tiny that it's hard to imagine how a gunner, lying on his back with his feet up in stirrups, could ever track and shoot enemy aircraft.

There's a B-52D tailgun from the Vietnam era. The compartment looks fairly roomy. But, Chief Fisk points out, many Vietnam bombing flights lasted fourteen to sixteen hours. In the 1950s, during the Cold War, flights could last up to twenty-four hours. "So," explains Chief Fisk, who was the Hall's first director, "when one thinks of the amenities inside here—the seat that folds down into a bed, the hot cup for making coffee or tea, the little portable john—it is still austere for one to be locked in here for twenty-four hours at a time."

The exhibits not only testify to the role of enlisted



*At USAF's Enlisted Heritage Hall, students from the NCO Leadership School at Maxwell AFB, Ala., visit the Order of the Sword Room, dedicated to all known recipients of this special enlisted honor.*

Photo © Gary D. Wallace 1989



personnel in combat but chronicle their contributions to the development of airpower as well. The tour traces USAF's lineage from the US Army to the present, from the early days of ballooning to Vietnam.

One pictorial exhibit of Civil War balloons depicts the earliest Army use of lighter-than-air craft. A photograph, taken during the Civil War Battle of Fair Oaks, portrays enlisted men holding the ropes to a balloon. Chief Fisk notes that these men are precursors of today's USAF aerospace ground equipment personnel.

There's a tribute to Pvt. Frederick Libby, the first American to down five enemy aircraft in World War I, and an almost life-size painting of Cpl. Eugene Bullard, the world's first black fighter pilot.

Corporal Bullard flew missions with the French Flying Corps. His original 1917 pilot's certificate is prominently displayed. Corporal Bullard was "a national hero of France but a forgotten son of America," says Chief Hines.

In the World War II section, enlisted and sergeant

Photo © Gary D. Wallace 1989



**Heritage Hall Director CMSgt. Donald B. Hines, standing beside an almost-life-size painting of Cpl. Eugene Bullard, the world's first black fighter pilot, tells students from the NCO Leadership School of Corporal Bullard's contribution to enlisted heritage. Chief Hines has a master's degree in military history from the University of Alabama.**

Another exhibit honors the progenitor of today's enlisted Air Force, Cpl. Edward Ward. He became, in 1907, the first enlisted man appointed to the Aeronautical Division of the Signal Corps.

Also present in the exhibits of this era are photos of Cpl. Vernon Burge, the Army's first enlisted pilot. Lt. Frank Lahm taught him how to fly, and Corporal Burge received his pilot certification in 1912.

## The War Years

Enemy flags vividly mark transitions to different combat eras: the Bismarck flag of World War I, Nazi and Imperial Japanese flags of World War II, and North Korean and North Vietnamese flags.

"The advent of World War I revolutionized the use of both balloons and airplanes," says CMSgt. Donald B. Hines, the Hall's current director. "Tether ropes and early telephones illustrate early balloon utilization, while Jenny wicker seats, wing center struts, and personal flying gear depict the enlisted pilots' roles."

A rare photo, taken around 1918, shows a group of sergeant pilots standing beside a World War I aircraft. Nearby, there's a copy of the 1919 flying regulations. "Rule #21," notes Chief Hines, "says that aviators will not wear spurs while flying."

pilots are again recognized in a pictorial display. They flew virtually every type of aircraft in the World War II inventory. According to Chief Hines, plans exist to add many more original photos to this exhibit.

There's a tribute to enlisted crew members of the Doolittle raid and to two renowned gunners, Joseph Sarnoski and Johnny "Zero" Foley. A display case is filled with wartime artifacts such as patches, buttons, old silk maps, books, and pamphlets. A radio log tells the story of an aircraft and a radio operator's struggle to make it to Hickam Field, Hawaii, with "one motor out, other bad." There's a tribute to the Women's Army Air Corps.

Entering the section devoted to the Korean War, visitors notice that exhibits are few. "This is America's 'forgotten war,'" says Chief Hines. "At present, we have a display case containing only a few artifacts, like an old parachute and a helmet. We plan to add more photos and displays."

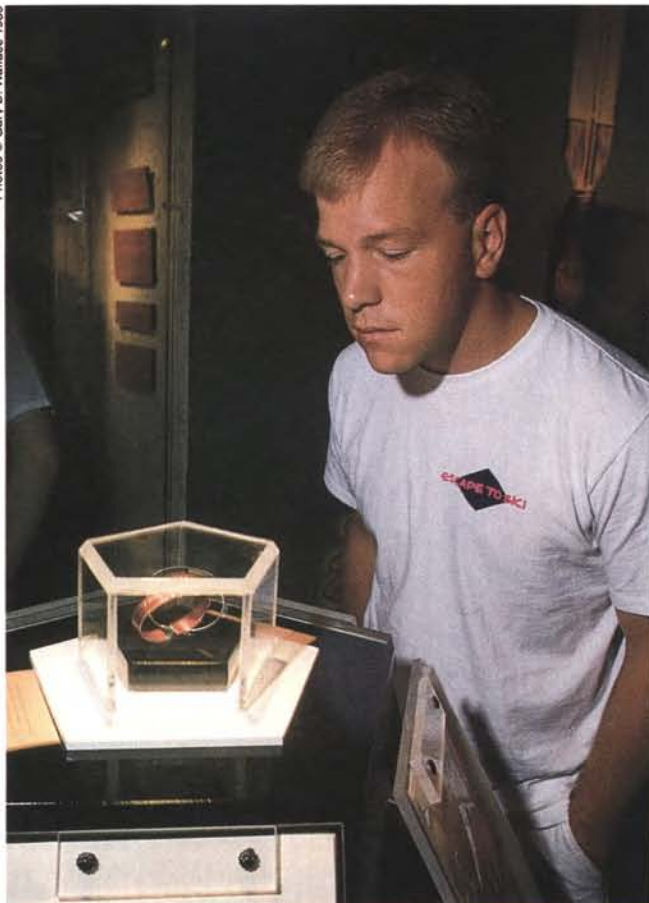
Ground and air uniforms and accessories depict the roles of airmen and women in Vietnam. A pararescue jumper mannequin, complete with scuba gear, parachute, and maroon beret, is on display. There's also a model of a combat controller ready to set up a drop zone. He is outfitted with a small oxygen bottle, al-



timer, and parachute. There are mannequins of an AC-130 gunship crew member and of an Air Force woman wearing green fatigues and combat gear. Assorted memorabilia of the era include ID cards, liberty passes, a driver's license, and photos of Jolly Green Giant rescue teams.

Among the more popular exhibits is a replica of a Vietnamese prisoner of war cell. Photographs of pictures drawn by a former POW line the exterior and depict the agony that prisoners endured. Inside the cell,

Photos © Gary D. Wallace 1989



**A student inspects a POW/MIA bracelet display. On the display column is a list of Air Force enlisted personnel still missing in action in Southeast Asia. Nearby are several artifacts brought back from Hanoi's POW cells.**

there's a mannequin clad in a POW uniform. The outfit was donated by retired CMSgt. Gary Morgan, shot down during a Linebacker II B-52 strike on Hanoi. Many former POWs have visited this display. "We ask them to sign the walls inside the cell," says Chief Hines. More than a dozen have done so.

Next to the cell are artifacts brought back from Hanoi's cells: POW shorts, cigarettes, memos, notes, candy, and a bar of Russian lye soap so caustic that it's dissolving a razor blade resting on it. There's also a POW/MIA bracelet display and a list of all the Air Force enlisted personnel still missing in action in Southeast Asia.

### Enlisted Honors and Traditions

Five original paintings, donated by the Illinois Air National Guard, depict the heroic actions of the five enlisted US Army Air Forces and USAF Medal of



**In the Vietnam War section of Heritage Hall, students examine a model of a combat controller ready to set up a drop zone. The exhibit behind the students honors the nineteen enlisted recipients of the Air Force Cross.**

Honor recipients. SSgt. Henry "Red" Erwin, SSgt. Archibald Mathies, Sgt. Maynard H. Smith, and TSgt. Forrest L. Vosler received the Medal of Honor for their actions in World War II. The only enlisted person to receive the Air Force Medal of Honor from the Vietnam era was A1C John L. Levitow.

Another exhibit honors the nineteen enlisted recipients of the Air Force Cross. "We have two Air Force Crosses on display—A1C William Robinson's and now CMSgt. Duane Hackney's," says Chief Hines.

Visitors are ushered through a white archway to the Chief Master Sergeants of the Air Force Room and to the Order of the Sword Room.

The first room honors the nine men who have risen to the top of the enlisted corps. Plans are under way to install a bronze statue of the first CMSAF, Paul W. Airey.

The Order of the Sword is an honor bestowed by the enlisted force on its most devoted leaders or advocates. The tradition has its roots in the thirteenth century and was revived by the Air Force in 1967. A huge broadsword, handmade by a young staff sergeant, is displayed in a showcase. Panels list the names of all known recipients. Former CMSAF Donald L. Harlow is the only enlisted person ever to receive the Order of the Sword, and his award is part of the exhibit.

The "Wall of Achievers" salutes former enlisted men and women who wore stripes and later became general officers or well-known figures. Included are singer Johnny Cash, actor Charlton Heston, test pilot Chuck Yeager, astronaut Dick Scobee, and USAF Chief of Staff Gen. Larry Welch.

About half of the items on display at the USAF Enlisted Heritage Hall were donated by individuals. Students at the Senior NCO Academy often donate artifacts, and each class passes the hat for contributions to the Hall. "We rely almost entirely on contributions and fundraisers," says Chief Hines.

The Hall is now in Phase II of a three-phase growth program. The goal of Phase III is to raise several million dollars to fund a new and permanent Heritage Hall facility, including a static display park for enlisted career field-related aircraft and equipment. ■