

HIGHFLIGHT

CENTEX



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The cutoff date for the newsletter is the 25<sup>th</sup> of each month

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The official newsletter of  
The Central Texas Wing  
Commemorative Air Force  
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(512) 396-1943  
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Centex Wing Staff 2009

Wing Leader	Billy Parker
Executive Officer	Clint Epley
Adjutant	Dan Stim
Operations Officer	Ron Iberg
Finance Officer	Mike Francis
PX Officer	Pat Moore
Maintenance Officer	Ray Ender
Assistant Maint Officer	Ray Clausen
Safety Officer	Mike Colaluca

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**Next Wing meeting May 12, 2009**

**From the Top:** Thanks to all the troops, things at the hangar are going well. R2 working 24/7 trying to get the ROSE finished. He's going to need a vacation when that's done.

The CONE RACING guys and gals were at the hangar on the 19th and I got a ride with last years national champ, Brieann. She's about 6ft tall and can she drive that WRX!! What a ride!! The only thing she didn't do was turn it upside down.

Ken Smith brought the new info signs on the 20th and they are great. They're made to stand the rigors of being outside and they are reflective, like street signs. A special thanks to PATHMARK TRAFFIC PRODUCTS OF TEXAS. The Kate and the Zero are leaving for Seymour Johnson AFB on the 22nd and we are hoping for better weather than we had going to Yuma.

We got an invite to bring the PX to the Kingsbury fly-in on May 8th. Check with Pat Moore if you want to help.

See ya'll May 12th.

Billy

**Minutes of the Centex Wing Meeting**

April 14, 2009

Meeting Called to order by Col. Billy Parker at 19:35

Pledge lead by Col. Billy Parker.

Prayer by Col. Ray Elder

Motion to accept minutes as published by Col. Jim Liles, seconded by Col. H.D. Butler, motion passed.

**Committee Reports**

**CO:** Col. Billy Parker - Signs for the hangar have been ordered. (Signs are hours of operation to be posted on the hangar door. Sign to be placed

in the hangar reminding people that this is a working hangar along with the hazards.) A special thanks to Ken Smith for pulling the PX trailer to Burnet for the air show.

**XO:** Report by Col. Grant Lannon - Staff approval of the storage of the Yellow T-6 in the hangar.

**Finance:**

Opening Balance	\$26,370.47
Deposits	\$ 2,938.60
Debits	\$ 4,622.19
Ending Balance	\$24,097.80

**Safety:** Col. Mike Colaluca - All members need to be aware of the exits, in case of emergencies.

**Maintenance:** Col. Ray Clausen - Kate & Zero are up & running, P-39 has a fuel leak. Yellow Rose still down, waiting for the wing

**Adjutant:** Col. Dan Stim - There are still a few members that have not paid their 2009 wing dues.

The Wing Directory should be out this week

**PX:** Col. Pat Moore - The Burnet Air Show Made \$1,256.00

The next show will be in Temple, May 2-3, 2009

Mazie Hill is under the weather.

Cub Scouts will tour the hangar Saturday.

**New Business**

Col. Clint Epley has picked up a load of books from the home of Col. Ed Liscomb, Gone West, We need to sort them out & place them in the library.

Motion to adjourn by Col. Dan Stim seconded by Col. Jim McKinley motion passed

**Operations** by Ron Iberg

May 2-3, 2009 Central Texas Airshow  
Temple, Tx.

May 9, 2009 Corsicana Air Show

A Gathering of Trainers

Corsicana Airfield, Tx.

**Mazie Hill** has stage 4 lung cancer. She started chemotherapy and is at home with her daughter. (For those newer CenTex/Yellow Rose friends who may not know Mazie, she is the widow of Tex Hill of the famed AVG Flying Tigers in China.) You can send a note or card to:

Mazie Hill  
317 Elizabeth Road  
San Antonio, TX 78209

Contact Lil Ayars for information.



Randy and Teresa Smith received a special award from the Centex Wing for their special help in repairing the P-39 nose wheel. The wheel was found to have a crack in it and required some special welding expertise to weld the magnesium wheel. Billy Parker is seen here presenting a special plaque to Randy & Teresa at the last Wing meeting.

### Homeland Security committee chair calls for TSA to delay LASP

By Janice Wood · General Aviation News  
March 11, 2009

The Transportation Security Administration's Large Aircraft Security Program (LASP) is not suited to general aviation aircraft and should not go forward without industry input, said the chairman of the House Committee on Homeland Security, which has jurisdiction over the TSA.

In a March 2 letter to the TSA, Rep. Bennie Thompson of Mississippi called for the agency to delay implementation of the program, which would apply commercial airline security procedures to aircraft weighing more than 12,500 pounds, regardless of how they are used.

The proposal would require crewmember criminal record checks, watch list matching of passenger manifests, biennial third party audits of each aircraft operator, and new airport security measures.

Several critical elements in the Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRM) "appear to be problematic, unfeasible, or overly burdensome to industry," Thompson wrote. "The committee is also concerned that the formulation of the NPRM was not based on a threat and risk methodology process tailored to the general aviation environment."

"Chairman Thompson understands the negative impact the LASP would have on general aviation," said Andy Cebula, AOPA executive vice president of government affairs. "We hope the TSA will stop its plans for the program and address the grave concerns being expressed by the Committee on Homeland Security and so many others who have spoken out against LASP."

### Thunderbird Collides With Randolph T-1 Jet Mike Renck

Dan Stem and I took the U-11 to Victoria, TX, for an event on 4-5 April. Dan reported to me Friday that he had checked weather and it looked good, so when did I want to leave out? I had cleared it with the VCT airport manager to arrive early Saturday morning, instead of Friday evening, so we planned to meet at the Mockingbird's hangar at 0715, intending to have wheels in wells by 0730. That should have had us on the ground in Victoria by 0800. Gates opened at 0900. Given the thick fog I drove through on the way to San Marcos, I didn't think it was going to happen quite the way I planned.

We had to wait around a bit for things to improve. Finally the low layer of clouds was being reported as "few clouds at 500 feet", with "overcast 1900". A call was made to the FBO for fuel, the Mockingbird was pulled out of the hangar, fueled, and we climbed in and started engines. As we taxied out to runway 17, I checked the AWOS again. Now the ceiling was reported as 600 feet broken! Engines were run up, all checked fine and the Mockingbird was ready to go. Checked AWOS again, with hopes that it was just a temporary group of low scud passing by. Nope, still 600 broken. We taxied down the runway to the CAF hangar to wait for things to lift. About a half hour later, AWOS was reporting "few clouds at 600 feet, 2100 overcast". We climbed in and headed out again, having checked the ASOS at VCT and knowing they were high enough to get in VFR. Back to runway 17 we went, took off and headed south.

As we crossed I-10, the clouds at 600 got thicker, and lower! Not wanting to make the news, we did a 180 and returned to base. Finally, an hour later, things really looked like they were getting better, so we tried again. Third time being a charm, the clouds were much higher. Things were clearing, though, due to the wind increasing. REALLY increasing! The difference between the indicated airspeed and the GPS ground speed was 38 mph. Big headwind, right on our nose. And it was gusty too, which made for a real bumpy ride. The buzzards didn't seem to mind the winds. The

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sky was full of them. Dan remarked that at least we'd have a good tailwind coming home. I said with our luck, we'd probably have a front come through and get a head wind coming home Sunday too.

Landing at Victoria was fun! The crosswind was about 40 degrees to the runway, and 27 gusting to 41 knots! Somehow a respectful landing was pulled off, and we joined 10 other old inventory warbirds, and 8 current aircraft. Dan and I wiped the Mockingbird down and started telling people about the plane, giving kids the chance to climb into the pilot's seat.

As the day was winding down, and looking forward to the free beer at the old Foster Field O'Club, we watched the classic cars, which were displayed on the apron of a hangar, depart for the gate. One car had stopped, and a security person was talking to him, when another decided to go around. He gave that car plenty of room and was watching what was going on as he passed, instead of where he was going. The 1963 Ford Thunderbird ran into the trailing edge of the red-tailed Randolph AFB T-1. The Thunderbird suffered a broken antenna, busted out windshield, and bruised ego of the driver. The T-1 had some wingtip damage, and a trim tab was bent up. No telling what internal damage there might be. I'm sure the driver is going to have to repeat himself two or three times when he reports that to his insurance company!

About midnight, the wind shifted, and was just as strong on Sunday, but from 180 degrees of Saturday. Now, at least, our planes were pointed into the wind! The crowd was lighter on Sunday, probably due to it being Palm Sunday, and the high winds again. Not a lot of rides were sold by those who do that, but the heavy planes did seem to do well with the cockpit tours. About 2pm the modern warbirds started departing. The Highland Lakes Squadron, and the U-11, were the last planes to depart Victoria.

The show was a success for Foster Field. It brought a lot of the community out to the airport to remind them what an asset they have. The hospitality shown the aircrews was wonderful! Plans are being made for a larger event next year, and possibly working up to an airshow in the near future. Hopefully the winds won't be so strong for the next event!

For those who do not already know about it, the local chapter of Sports Car Club of America holds an autocross on the ramp in front of the hangar once a month. This month was the second in what they hope is a long standing event on the airfield. This past Sunday our

illustrious Wing Leader hopped a ride with a reportedly lovely young thing and took a spin around the course (note all the cones that are down). His reaction was "Wow, that was fun". Anyone who is interested should make it out for the event and my understanding is that they are willing to provide rides to interested people.



**The Cornfield Bomber** from an anonymous contributor, but traced to website [aafocomm.com](http://aafocomm.com) and its *HangerTalk* page

F-106 (58-0787) is the famous "Cornfield Bomber". In 1970, while assigned to the 71st FIS at Maelstrom AFB, Montana, its pilot ejected during an in-flight emergency. The pilot somehow got himself into a flat spin -- this is generally considered unrecoverable in an F-106 and the book says to get out. After the pilot did just that, 58-0787 recovered itself from this unrecoverable position. In a vain attempt to recover, the pilot had trimmed it to takeoff trim and engine throttle back. After it recovered itself, it flew wings-level to the ground and made a near-perfect belly landing in a farmer's snow-covered field.



When the local sheriff arrived on the scene, the engine was still running. On a slight incline, the F-106 would move slightly as the snow under it melted which got the sheriff quite energized.

A depot team from McClellan AFB recovered the aircraft and it was eventually returned to service. When the 71st FIS was disbanded in

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1971, 58-0787 went to the 49th FIS, my first squadron. Some considered it a lucky ship, others a jinx ship. We all referred to it as the "Cornfield Bomber".

We would occasionally run into ex-71st FIS guys at William Tell and ragged them unmercifully about the "emergency" so dire the plane landed itself. 58-0787 is in its 49th FIS markings at the USAF Museum and I have been to see this old friend several times. As pleased as I am to see the 49th FIS Eagle immortalized for millions to see, a part of me wishes they would paint one side in 71st FIS markings to ensure visitors know it wasn't the 49th that abandoned this perfectly good airplane.

### **Fridays Are Special**

By Joseph L. Galloway  
McClatchy Newspapers

Over the last 12 months, 1,042 Soldiers, Marines, sailors and Air Force personnel have given their lives in the terrible duty that is war. Thousands more have come home on stretchers, horribly wounded and facing months or years in military hospitals.

This week, I'm turning my space over to a good friend and former roommate, Army Lt. Col. Robert Bateman, who recently completed a yearlong tour of duty in Iraq and is now back at the Pentagon.

Here's Lt. Col. Bateman's account of a little-known ceremony that fills the halls of the Army corridor of the Pentagon with cheers, applause and many tears every Friday morning. It first appeared on May 17 on the Web log of media critic and pundit Eric Alterman at the Media Matters for America Web site.

"It is 110 yards from the "E" ring to the "A" ring of the Pentagon. This section of the Pentagon is newly renovated; the floors shine, the hallway is broad, and the lighting is bright. At this instant the entire length of the corridor is packed with officers, a few sergeants and some civilians, all crammed tightly three and four deep against the walls. There are thousands here. This hallway, more than any other, is the 'Army' hallway. The G3 offices line one side, G 2 the other, G8 is around the corner. All Army. Moderate conversations flow in a low buzz. Friends, who may not have seen each other for a few weeks, or a few years, spot each other, cross the way and renew. Everyone shifts to ensure an open path remains down the center. The air conditioning system was not designed for this press of bodies in this area. The temperature is rising already. Nobody cares.

"10:36 hours: The clapping starts at the E-Ring. That is the outer most of the five rings of the

Pentagon and it is closest to the entrance to the building. This clapping is low, sustained, and hearty. It is applause with a deep emotion behind it as it moves forward in a wave down the length of the hallway.

"A steady rolling wave of sound it is, moving at the pace of the soldier in the wheelchair who marks the forward edge with his presence. He is the first. He is missing the greater part of one leg, and some of his wounds are still suppurating. By his age I expect that he is a private, or perhaps a private first class.

"Captains, majors, lieutenant colonels and colonels meet his gaze and nod as they applaud, soldier to soldier. Three years ago when I described one of these events, those lining the hallways were somewhat different. The applause a little wilder, perhaps in private guilt for not having shared in the burden yet.

"Now almost everyone lining the hallway is, like the man in the wheelchair, also a combat veteran. This steadies the applause, but I think deepens the sentiment. We have all been there now. The soldier's chair is pushed by, I believe, a full colonel.

"Behind him, and stretching the length from Rings E to A, come more of his peers, each private, corporal, or sergeant assisted as need be by a field grade officer.

"11:00 hours: Twenty-four minutes of steady applause. My hands hurt, and I laugh to myself at how stupid that sounds in my own head. My hands hurt. Please! Shut up and clap. For twenty-four minutes, soldier after soldier has come down this hallway - 20, 25, 30. Fifty-three legs come with them, and perhaps only 52 hands or arms, but down this hall came 30 solid hearts. They pass down this corridor of officers and applause, and then meet for a private lunch, at which they are the guests of honor, hosted by the generals. Some are wheeled along. Some insist upon getting out of their chairs, to march as best they can with their chin held up, down this hallway, through this most unique audience. Some are catching handshakes and smiling like a politician at a Fourth of July parade. More than a couple of them seem amazed and are smiling shyly.

"There are families with them as well: the 18-year-old war-bride pushing her 19-year-old husband's wheelchair and not quite understanding why her husband is so affected by this, the boy she grew up with, now a man, who had never shed a tear is crying; the older immigrant Latino parents who have, perhaps more than their wounded mid-20s son, an appreciation for the emotion given on their son's behalf. No man in that hallway, walking or

clapping, is ashamed by the silent tears on more than a few cheeks. An Airborne Ranger wipes his eyes only to better see. A couple of the officers in this crowd have themselves been a part of this parade in the past. These are our men, broken in body they may be, but they are our brothers, and we welcome them home. This parade has gone on, every single Friday, all year long, for more than four years.

Did you know that?

The media hasn't yet told the story. Perhaps they will now

**Naval Ops in Afghanistan** from a Naval aviator

Hello everyone, I just wanted to send out another update to everyone to let you know how things are going out here on the good ship Eisenhower.

We're in our seventh week of deployment and have 108 days to go. We began combat operations on March 21st and have been flying over the beach almost everyday since then. This is the most flying that I've done in all my 17 years. Naval Aviators are limited by instruction to 30 flight hours a month and to go over that you must have a written waiver by the Flight Surgeon. As of today I have 65 hours in the last 29 days.

Our missions are regularly 6 hours long. It's an hour transit to and from the ship just to get on station in southern Afghanistan. All the air traffic travels up a common air route that we call the boulevard that traverses Pakistan and crosses the border into Afghanistan. All the traffic on the boulevard is either Naval aircraft from our ship or Air Force tankers coming from Qatar.

Most of our missions thus far have been in southern Afghanistan near the city of Kandahar. That is where a lot of the poppy harvest is taking place right now and that is where a lot of the enemy forces have dug in. On a typical mission we check in with a JTAC (Joint Tactical Air Controller) on the ground who is part of a ground unit. The JTAC is trained to be able to communicate with aircraft and if necessary call in for air support in case some shooting starts. They used to be called Forward Air Controllers.

Thus far I have worked with American Special Forces, British Forces, Australian and Danish Forces. It is very interesting to see the mix of troops on the ground. But it's nice to see that all the procedures are very standardized no matter what nationality that you are supporting.

On most of our missions we provide Armed Reconnaissance, which has us watching over a friendly ground patrol, in vehicle or on foot, and looking ahead of their route of travel to try and find enemy fighters or potential spotting

positions. A few days ago I was watching over an Army Special Forces unit that were about 15 to 20 guys all riding four wheelers in the hills overlooking a small village. We do most of our searching using our FLIR camera, which is an infrared camera that has the ability to zoom in pretty close.

The JTACS on the ground can also link up with our FLIR camera and see what we are seeing on their laptop computer. We look for bad guys in groups digging or potentially placing roadside bombs. A lot of times the JTACS give us coordinates of known bad guy locations and have us watch for movement or activity. A few nights ago I was talking to a JTAC and I could hear the gunfire over the radio and he calmly said they were taking fire from unknown locations and wanted us to scan the hills surrounding them for any activity. On average our Airwing drops four or five bombs a day or conducts a few strafing runs on enemy positions. We also do a lot of Shows of Force, which is simply a high-speed low altitude pass over an enemy position to get them to stop shooting or even run. Although I haven't yet gotten a chance to drop a bomb I can say that I'm not in a rush. My time will come. I did have a wingman that conducted a strafing run on two individuals who were digging at a roadside intersection. It was at night so the complexity of shooting bullets from an aircraft moving 500mph at a small moving target in the dark is absolutely amazing.

I enjoy working with the guys on the ground. I think it's a comforting feeling for them to know that we are overhead and can deliver a devastatingly accurate blow within seconds of asking for it. Even if we don't find bad guys I feel a lot of job satisfaction just being up there and talking to the guys on the ground. These guys are pretty amazing. I will hear them say something like, "We are taking fire from an unknown location so we are going to get out of our vehicles and move into the open so that we can try to locate where the fire is coming from." Amazing bravery. Our team is killing a lot of bad guys right now.

Some of the most harrowing parts of our mission is refueling. Particularly in the dark or in bad weather. On a typical 6-hour mission we refuel off of big wing Air Force tankers three times. There is a point on the boulevard that once I cross it I know that if I have a problem with my tanker, that I do not have enough fuel to get back to the carrier and would have to divert to one of the three occupied airfields in the country. The tankers all hold at specific points and altitudes around the country. I know before I

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launch what my tanker's call sign is, what point he will be at, what time I'm supposed to be there, what altitude he will be at and what frequency I will talk to him on. There is an overarching control agency that runs the tanker plan and it is constantly changing usually based on the fight that is going on the ground. A lot of times tankers get pushed over an area where there is fighting so that the airborne assets don't waste time trying to get to their tanker and back to the fight. Once one tanker moves, it starts a domino effect that affects almost everyone. It's like a shell game. They are constantly shuffling tankers around. I don't think I've launched on a single mission and hit all my tankers that I was originally scheduled for. I have tanked off American and British Air Force tankers. Two days ago I was on a tanker and two French Rafael fighters were waiting in line with me at 22000 feet for their gas.

When the mission is over we hit the tanker one last time before exiting the country and fly the boulevard south and the hour flight back to the carrier. When it's all done then I get to look forward to that night carrier landing. Luckily the North Arabian Sea is calm and the weather has been good. No pitching deck out here so far. By the end of the mission I'm usually starving. I try to take food and water with me in the cockpit and typically I get a chance to eat and drink something on the trip back to the carrier at the end of the mission. But you don't want to drink too much because that presents a whole new problem for a single seat cockpit.

The cockpit gets pretty crowded with all of our extra gear. We have our standard issue gear for going in country which includes our pistol and two magazine clips, our blood chit which is basically a piece a paper that we use in case we find ourselves on the ground that is written in several different native languages and basically says "I'm an American and you will be paid if you help me return to friendly American forces." We carry a camel back full of water that is sewn into our flight vest. On every mission we go on, we have a stack of papers that have coordinates and radio frequencies. I also have my new helmet mounted targeting system, which is a new visor that clips to the regular helmet and projects vital information on my visor. It looks like a Martian helmet, but it is honestly the best piece of gear that I carry with me. I can type in the coordinates for a friendly unit on the ground and then look outside the cockpit and a diamond will be projected on my visor directly over the position of that unit on the ground. It's very useful in locating things on the ground, but it also helps me find things in the air. Yesterday I

saw my tanker from 28 miles away because my helmet puts a box around the radar contact that I have locked up so I know exactly where to look. Pretty cool.

I also take a pair of NVGs on every flight. Night vision goggles are absolutely necessary once the sun goes down. The ground units use a lot of infrared lights to help mark their positions or the positions of enemy units and I can see all of that from 20000 feet with my NVG's on.

Well I've written way more than I should have. I hope I haven't bored you. I know many of you have asked what I'm doing over here. This e-mail was to try to help you understand what I've been doing. It in no way is meant to be tooting my own horn. The guys on the ground are the real heroes. I'm simply a supporting element to the fight.

I want to say thank you to all of you that have sent care packages. They were very much appreciated by me and all my ready room. Keep watching the news. If you hear about airstrikes in Southern Afghanistan there is a good chance it came from my air wing.



### Flying Truths

A check ride ought to be like a skirt, short enough to be interesting but still be long enough to cover everything.

Don't drop the aircraft in order to fly the microphone. An airplane flies because of a principle discovered by Bernoulli, not Marconi.

If you push the stick forward, the houses get bigger; if you pull the stick back, they get smaller. (Unless you keep pulling the stick back - then they get bigger again.)

Flying is not dangerous; crashing is dangerous.

There are three simple rules for making a smooth landing. Unfortunately, no one knows what they are, but it's always a good landing if you can still get the doors open.



### Ed W. "Too Tall" Freeman

(November 20, 1927 - August 20, 2008) was a United States Army helicopter pilot who received the U.S. military's highest decoration, the Medal of Honor, for his actions in the Battle of Ia Drang during the Vietnam War. During the battle, he flew through gunfire numerous times, bringing supplies to a trapped American battalion and flying dozens of wounded soldiers to safety. Freeman was a wingman for Major Bruce Crandall who also received the Medal of Honor for the same missions.

Freeman was born in Neely, Perry County, Mississippi, the sixth of nine children. He grew up in nearby McLain and graduated from Washington High School. He served in World

War II and reached the rank of master sergeant by the time of the Korean War. Although he was in the Corps of Engineers, he fought as an infantry soldier in Korea. He participated in the Battle of Pork Chop Hill and received a battlefield commission. The commission made him eligible to become a pilot, a childhood dream of his. However, when he applied for pilot training he was told that, at six feet four inches, he was "too tall" for pilot duty. The phrase stuck, and he was known by the nickname of "Too Tall" for the rest of his career.

In 1955, the height limit for pilots was raised and Freeman was accepted into flying school. He first flew airplanes before switching to helicopters. By the time he was sent to Vietnam in 1965, he was an experienced helicopter pilot and was placed second-in-command of his sixteen-craft unit. He served as a captain in Company A, 229th Assault Helicopter Battalion, 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile).

On November 14, 1965, Freeman and his unit transported a battalion of American soldiers to the Ia Drang Valley. Later, after arriving back at base, they learned that the soldiers had come under intense fire and had taken heavy casualties. Enemy fire around the landing zones was so heavy that the medical evacuation helicopters refused to enter the area. Freeman and his commander, Major Bruce Crandall, volunteered to fly their unarmed, lightly armored helicopters in support of the embattled troops. Freeman made a total of fourteen trips to the battlefield, bringing in water and ammunition and taking out wounded soldiers.

Freeman was sent home from Vietnam in 1966 and retired from the military the next year. He settled in the Treasure Valley area of Idaho, his wife Barbara's home state, and continued to work as a pilot. He used his helicopter to fight wildfires, perform animal censuses, and herd wild horses for the Department of the Interior until his final retirement in 1991.

Freeman's commanding officer nominated him for the Medal of Honor for his actions at Ia Drang, but not in time to meet a two-year deadline then in place. He was instead awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross. The Medal of Honor nomination was disregarded until 1995, when the two-year deadline was removed. He was formally presented with the medal on July 16, 2001, by President George W. Bush.

Freeman died on August 20, 2008 due to complications from Parkinson's disease. He was buried in the Idaho State Veterans Cemetery in Boise.

In the 2002 film *We Were Soldiers*, which depicted the Battle of Ia Drang, Freeman was portrayed by Mark McCracken. The post office in Freeman's hometown of McLain, Mississippi, was renamed the "Major Ed W. Freeman Post Office" in March 2009.

**No-Tail B-52** The story that goes with this month's cover photo

January 10, 1964, a cool morning even by January standards, started out as a typical day for the flight test group at Boeing's Wichita plant. Test Pilot Chuck Fisher took off in a B-52H with a three-man Boeing crew, flying a low-level profile to obtain structural data.

Over Colorado, cruising 500 feet above the mountainous terrain, the B-52 encountered some turbulence. Fisher climbed to 14,300 feet looking for smoother air. At this point the typical day ended. The heavy bomber flew into clear-air turbulence. It felt as if the plane had been placed in a giant high-speed elevator, shoved up and down, and hit by a heavy blow on its right side.

Fisher told the crew to prepare to abandon the plane. He slowed the aircraft and dropped to about 5,000 feet to make it easier to bail out. But then Fisher regained some control. He climbed slowly to 16,000 feet to put some safety room between the plane and the ground. He informed Wichita about what was happening. Although control was difficult, Fisher said he believed he could get the plane back in one piece.

Response to the situation at Wichita, and elsewhere, was immediate. A makeshift emergency control center was set up in the office of Wichita's director of flight-testing. Key Boeing engineers and other specialists were summoned to provide their expertise. Federal Aviation Administration air traffic control centers at Denver and Kansas City cleared the air around the troubled plane. A Strategic Air Command B-52 in the area maintained radio contact with the crew of the Wichita B-52.

As Fisher got closer to Wichita, a Boeing chase plane flew up to meet him and to visually report the damage. When Dale Felix, flying an F-100 fighter, came alongside Fisher's B-52, he couldn't believe what he saw: The B-52's vertical section of the tail was gone. Felix broke the news to Fisher and those gathered in the control center. There was no panic. Everyone on the plane and in the control center knew they could be called upon at any time for just such a situation. In the emergency control center, the engineers began making calculations and suggesting the best way to get the plane down safely. The Air Force was also lending assistance.

Another B-52, just taking off for a routine flight, was used to test the various flight configurations suggested by the specialists before Fisher had to try them.

As high gusty winds rolled into Wichita, the decision was made to divert the B-52 to Blytheville Air Force Base in Northeastern Arkansas. Boeing specialists from the emergency control center took off in a KC-135 and accompanied Fisher to Blytheville, serving as an airborne control center.

Six hours after the incident first occurred, using just his throttles to control direction, Fisher and his crew brought in the damaged B-52 for a safe landing.

"I'm very proud of this crew and this airplane," Fisher said. "Also we had a lot of people helping us, and we're very thankful for that. The B-52," Fisher said, "is the finest airplane I ever flew."

For some really good photos taken at the last three Midland air shows, click on

<http://www.richard-seaman.com/Aircraft/AirShows/Midland2007/Highlights/index.html>. Tip from Maynard Kolb