

Fort Rucker Army Aviation Museum

Visit Report



Left to right: Sam Givhan (199th), Dick Baker (219th), Sam Dawson (IBDA), Daryl V. Wesley (220th), Bill Owen (220th), Charles Finch (220th), Curt Perry (220th), Norman MacPhee (220th), Michael K. Medlen (184th), and behind the camera, Don Ricks (220th).

A group of army aviators met at 11 am at “Larry’s BBQ” in Daleville, Alabama. The lunch preceded a scheduled 1 pm meeting with the curator of the Ft. Rucker Army Aviation Museum, Steve Lasham. Above is list of attendees and their affiliation. Norman MacPhee, making a point in the right photo, presented an overview of the day’s agenda and what we might expect during our visit

The meeting was initially envisioned by the 220th Catkillers for two purposes:

- To establish a Birddog (or Fixed Wing) presence in the museum for Vietnam (VN) era units.
- To discuss (with others present) the advisability of having an “All Birddog Unit” reunion in the future.

First, the easy part. There was general agreement that it might be a good idea to have an “all Birddog” or “all Birddog unit” reunion, but it was obvious that no one was going to step up to lead such an effort. Unit reunions are already planned, and it seemed to be more of a challenge than anyone was interested to actually pursue such an event. There was an IBDA member present who stated that they wished to support ANY reunion with having Birddogs present. He also mentioned that the IBDA has a building full of memorabilia of past Birddog exploits.

Museum Visit

Norm MacPhee arrived a day early and met for 1.5 hours with the museum curator, Steve Lasham (334-255-1078, robert.s.lasham.civ@mail.mil).

He learned the following: One, a substantial reduction in active museums likely nation-wide—like, down to 14, based upon “Branch.” Ft. Rucker’s museum will be the location of the Aviation Branch, it appears. Two, army museums are on a temporary hold for accepting new items, but they are violating this on a case by case basis. They do accept “art,” and Norm took three nicely framed art works—the picture of the VN wall, the 220th Crest in large size, and the “Cleared Hot” print by Patrick Webster. These were accepted.

Steve also accepted the minor items Norm brought, including “junk fleet wings,” a marine helmet donated by Walt Strain, sample leaflets dropped in 1966, a blood chit, survival maps, and some other items. These were accompanied with the following information: the donor was 220th, the donor was identified, and the place and time used in VN, etc. . Steve related that they have a LOT of “stuff.”

Norm had warning going into the meeting that it might be difficult to get a display set aside for either “Birddog Units” or “Fixed Wing Units.” The Caribou—Otter group has worked four years on a project to do so, without success. From what we learned at the meeting, it might be more productive to “give up” on this approach and work with the museum on what they ARE doing.



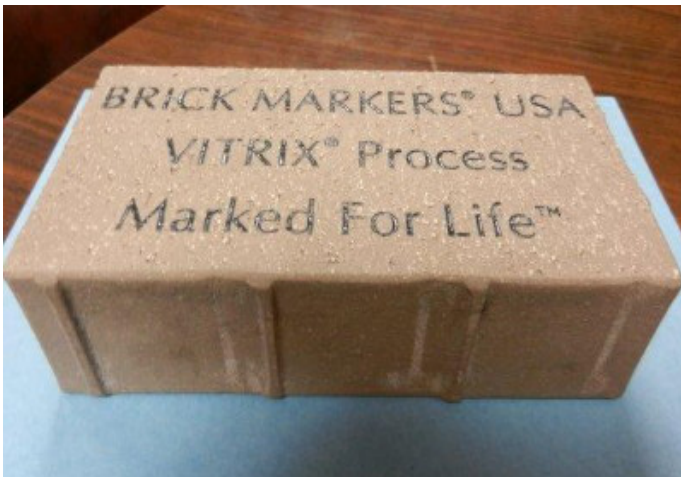
The aircraft are all displayed within or just outside the museum. The Birddog is hung very high on the museum ceiling and tough to see well. The Caribou and Mohawk are nicely displayed outside the building. They have the full story on display, concerning the Birddog, and it is an interesting one. I had heard that there “everything is rotary wing.” While true for Fort Rucker, it’s not true at the museum. Fixed wing is well represented by aircraft, art and displays.

Now for what it appears might be doable at the Museum: 1. There is a park next to the museum proper, where they allow erection of monuments by units. There are a few there now. Most are carved granite and quite nice. We discussed having one monument for all birddog units from VN. For example, the multi-sided stone or metal structure could have etched metal plates attached, one per side for each unit, displaying “Unit Name,” dates in VN, location in VN, and a list of lost members. We must raise the funds for this project from each unit. We met with the chair of the committee which allows such monuments, Deborah Seimer (Director of Human Resources), 334-255-0580, deborah.l.seimer.cuv@mail.mil Getting approval is not a difficult process.



2. The museum is obviously going digital, rather than having many items on display. They have four LARGE touchscreens (more to come), with various information sections: one for “Attack,” one for “Transport,” one for “Medevac,” and one for “Scout.” There is a minimal Birddog presence in the “Scout” arena, and we hope to impact on that. Don Ricks presented copies of our web site to the curator, and we were assured that items from it would appear on the touch screen. The curator appeared to like the idea of having a touch item of “Birddog Units-Viet Nam” where all of us would appear. They have a lot of storage capacity, so our entire web site history and photos file could appear there.





3. We also met briefly with the head of the Army Aviation Museum Foundation: Dianne Nowicki, 334-598-2508, AVNMUSEUM@ALA.NET. They have a fundraiser program to sell “brick size pavers,” and there is a location set aside on the museum floor for the display of units’ and individual’s bricks. I have the form to use to purchase one or more bricks, and they allow three lines per brick, 20 characters per line. Each brick costs \$125, and if we also want our crest on the brick—it would be \$75 more. I have the layout to help us decide the best possible design. These could be purchased as stand-alone monument bricks, or in addition to a stand-up monument for display outside.

CONCLUSION: We recommend that we purchase the bricks, maybe one for each member we lost. We recommend that we also pursue the memorial project. We recommend continuing with the digital approach to a greater fixed-wing presence in the museum. We recommend that we try to get Steve to accept and hang our KIA/MIA Memorial built by Al Paulsen as “Art,” as they have many of these—all much smaller than the high-quality design Al produced.

Some Additional Photos and Captions



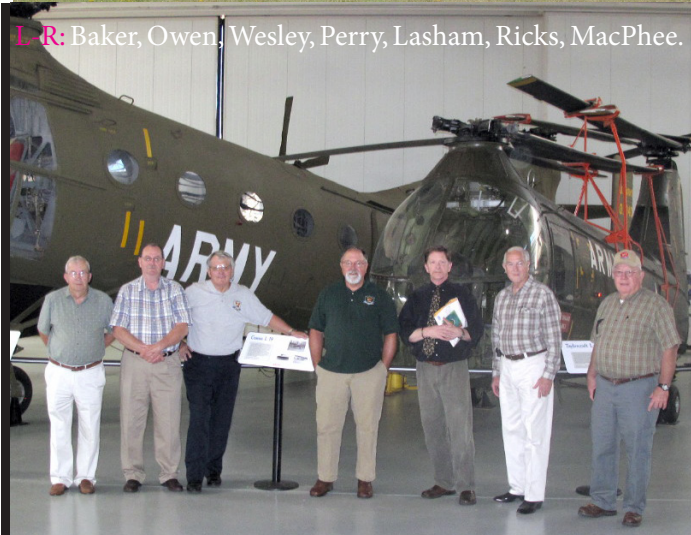
Left: A view of the digital initiative displays at the Fort Rucker Aviation Museum. These are touch-activated access portals to museum information. Right: A view of the front of the museum, with additional fixed-wing assets located on the opposite side of the building.

L-R: Don Ricks,
Curt Perry,
Norman MacPhee,
Daryl Wesley, and
Bill Owen standing
outside
Larry's
BBQ,
Daleville.





L-R: Baker, Owen, Wesley, Perry, Lasham, Ricks, MacPhee.



Upper left: Aviation Museum. Upper right: Norman MacPhee listens as Steve Lasham briefs representatives shown at lower left. Lower right: Benny Hardman, representing the Mohawks, likes the informative display.

“On a bright sunny day in September of 1951, Jack E. Swayze was proclaimed the winner of the Cessna L-19 naming contest. His winning entry was emblazoned on the nose of the L-19 that shared the podium with Jack, General Mark Clark, Duane Wallace and a host of other dignitaries that came together to celebrate the naming of the BIRDDOG. Jack received \$200 in cash and a one-week paid vacation for his winning entry. A company pilot flew Jack and his wife Alice in a Cessna 195 to Chicago for a visit with family and friends. A week later they were picked up at the airport and flown back to Wichita. Jack retired from Cessna almost forty years later as a photographer. His love of photography carried over into a professional photography business in the Wichita area. Jack suffer a debilitating stroke in the mid 1990’s and was confined to a walking board and a wheel chair. Jack honored the attending members of the Birddog’s 50th Anniversary celebration, during July 2000, with a visit at the Cessna sponsored luncheon. On May 24, 2001, Jack A. Swayze passed away at the age of 73. His wife Alice; sons Jack, Allen and Mark; daughter Sharon; his sister Joyce; and six grandchildren survive him. During the research portion for my book I had the privilege of interviewing Jack and Alice at their home in Wichita. Jack related a story to me that held special meaning for him over the years. Jack’s job at Cessna took him all over the factory and during his walks from one place to another he would pass his friends working on another Cessna airplane, and they would call out to him, “Hi Birddog.” Jack’s face would break out in a big smile as he returned the greeting and this quiet unassuming, almost bashful man would fondly remember how he got his nickname. Life on earth passes all to quickly for all of us, and part of our history with the Birddog passed on this week. The next time you go out and fly your Birddog spend a couple minutes thinking about how your L-19 got its name and the kind, gentle, man who gave our favorite aircraft its name: BIRDDOG. God bless you Jack.

Minard Thompson”

Birddog, versus “Bird Dog”



CAPTAIN JACK AND #327

On the 30th of June in 1950 CPT Jack Upham went to Korea. He was in command of the Headquarters Company Aviation Section in the 24th Division, and flew liaison duties from Taejon to the Naktong River, up the Yalu River and back again in the early period of the War. In February of 1951 he rotated back to Yokahama, Japan to the Air Section of the Japan Logistical Command. There he was given the task to accept delivery, oversee the assembly, and ferry flight the Army's new fixed wing aircraft, the L-19, into the war zone of Korea.

The first shipment arrived at Kisserazoo Naval Station and was promptly assembled. CPT Upham and several other pilots checked themselves out on the operation and procedures and began training and transitioning the remaining pilots in the detachment. After a brief period of familiarization, the process of ferrying the aircraft to Korea began. The pattern was first a hop-flight to Brady Field near Hakata on Kyushu Island for a layover, then flying over to Korea a day or two later.

Part of the story is on the right photo, but the rest is an interesting historical read about the first Birddogs placed in service in Korea. Yep, there was a mishaps and an emergency beach landing. More on the wall....



Above right: At the entrance to the museum is a circle of past and present aviators and crewmembers standing guard and representing how important *all* team members are to the success of army aviation. This reality was always a true and necessary part of any successful aviation endeavor.

Below right: Norm MacPhee, of the 220th Aviation Company, and Dick Baker, of the 219th Headhunters, pause for a photo with Deborah L. Seimer, Director of Human Resources, Soldier Service Center, Fort Rucker. We received positive feedback and reception of the Fort Rucker family. At lower left is a representative "post view" of how the modern army views its aircraft fleet.

