

## Edwards change of command signals warning on China

by Dennis Anderson special to Aerotech News

EDWARDS AIR FORCE BASE, Calif. — It is not often that a change of command ceremony includes award of the Humanitarian Service Award, but this ceremony at the "Center Of the Aerospace Testing Universe" did exactly that.

When the ceremonial guidon pennant for the 412th Test Wing passed from the command of Brig. Gen. Matthew W. Higer on Aug. 18, 2023, to Col. Douglas P. "Beaker" Wickert, it happened minutes after the presiding officer in charge, Maj. Gen. Evan C. Dertien, commander of the Air Force Test Center, awarded the humanitarian decoration to Higer.

The medal was awarded for keeping the nation's premier test flight base "a green dot in a sea of red dots" during the two-year-plus COVID-19 pandemic that encompassed most of the time that Higer served as commander at Edwards.

Higer's command of 412th TW commenced in Feb. 20, scarce weeks before a "lock it down" order closed the base to ordinary traffic because of COVID, and continued for 1,290 days, finishing out only as the threat of COVID receded. Meanwhile, Dertien noted, Higer's leadership set the pace for the rest of the nation's military with Edwards leading the way in vaccination and protective measures to keep the base secure and operational.

Along with leadership of Edwards, Higer, Dertien said, "Assumed the role of de facto public health officer" whose actions resulted in "saving thousands of lives and livelihoods."

During that period, Higer's command oversaw developmental test and evaluation of the F-35 fighter, tanker aircraft including KC-46, KC-



The 412th Test Wing's new commander, Col. Douglas Wickert, assumes command of the Wing by receiving the wing's guidon from Maj. Gen. Evan Dertien, Air Force Test Center commander, during the wing's change of command ceremony at Edwards Air Force Base, Calif., Aug. 18. 2023.



Maj. Gen. Evan Dertien, Air Force Test Center commander, gives remarks during the 412th Test Wing Change of Command Ceremony between outgoing commander, Brig. Gen. Matthew Higer and incoming commander, Col. Douglas Wickert, at Edwards Air Force Base, Calif., Aug.18., 2023.

135, KC-10, more fighters, the F-22 and F-16, a trainer, the T-7A, and bombers, B-1, B-2, and preparation for the B-21 Raider, the nation's newest strategic bomber.

Additionally the base hosts a Space Force element and is conducting development on hypersonic technologies.

Edwards is the second largest base in the Air Force, and the command includes Air Force Plant 42 in Palmdale, Calif. Among the dignitaries attending the Aug. 18 ceremony was Rep. Mike Garcia, a Navy fighter pilot veteran who flew missions during the Iraq War. The ranking civilian visitor, Garcia attended with scores of public officials and community leaders, including the Edwards Civilian-Military Support Group.

In changing the command, both Higer and Wickert cited the emerging strategic threat of China with a growing "sophisticated military that threatens the rule of law in the world for the first time in 80 years since World War II.<sup>3</sup>

Citing an enduring theme of his period of command, Higer said the competitive advantages held by the United States include "freedom of religion, freedom of speech, the right to vote, diversity of thought ... and the relentless pursuit to leave it better than you found it." To that he

added, "Resilience."

He lauded the men and women of Edwards as demonstrative of resilience.

"These are vital competitive advantages grounded in our Constitution as we compete on every combat front and warfighting arena," Higer said

"Thank you for the trust and confidence you have placed in me this past 2 1/2 years," Higer said. "I am honored to be a member of this topclass team of servants, and servant leaders.'

Higer thanked the medical team that vaccinated multitudes, and protected the health of the 19,500 active duty, reserve, civil service and civilian contractors at Edwards. He also thanked the medical team that helped him meet an existential health crisis, whom he credited for saving his life. The commander said he relished that he was handing command to one of his "oldest friends in the Air Force," Wickert.

"I know you're going to crush it," Higer said. Wickert's first words as commander were "Wow!" and "Wow!" again. He referred to his excitement at the prospect of leading the team of the "Center of the Aerospace Testing Universe."

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## Aircraft arrives for X-66A modification

PALMDALE, Calif.—Boeing has ferried an MD-90 airplane to the site where it will be modified to test the Transonic Truss-Braced Wing configuration as part of NASA's Sustainable Flight Demonstrator project.

As Boeing, NASA and community leaders gathered at the company's facility Aug. 17, 2023, to recognize the milestone in development of the experimental X-66A aircraft, Boeing released photos of the jet's journey from Victorville, Calif., to Palmdale. Calif.

The X-66A is NASA's first experimental plane focused on helping the U.S. achieve its goal of net-zero aviation greenhouse gas emissions. Modification will begin soon and ground and flight testing is expected to begin in 2028.

"This marks an important step in the Sustainable Flight Demonstrator project, advances Boeing's commitment to sustainability and brings us closer to testing and validating the TTBW design," said Boeing Chief Technology Officer Todd Citron.

With ultrathin wings braced by struts with larger spans and higher-aspect ratios, the TTBW design and other expected technological advances could lead to reductions in fuel use and emissions by up to 30 percent. Boeing and NASA have collaborated for more than a decade on the concept through the Subsonic Ultra Green Aircraft Research (SUGAR) Program.

"We at NASA are excited to be working with Boeing on the X-66A Sustainable Flight Demonstrator making critical contributions to accelerate aviation towards its 2050 net-zero greenhouse gas emission goal," said Ed Waggoner, deputy associate administrator for programs in the NASA Aeronautics Research Mission Directorate.

"Aerospace Valley has a long and distinguished history as the cradle of aerospace innovation, and this unveiling is a continuation of that critical work. Palmdale's talented workforce and infrastructure make it the perfect location for this important project," said Congressman Mike Garcia, R-California's 27th District.

### **TEST WING, from 1**

A command pilot and distinguished graduate of the Air Force Academy, Wickert was also a distinguished graduate of the U.S. Naval Test Pilot School. With combat time included, most recently he was head of the Department of Aeronautics at the Air Force Academy.

Every generation of fighter plane, and every bomber since World War II has been tested and developed at Edwards, Wickert said.

"To the men and women of the 412th Test Wing, I am incredibly excited to serve as your commander," Wickert said.

In like mind with Higer, Wickert cited the strategic peril of an emergent militarily aggressive China.

"A war between the United States and China would be devastating, potentially civilization ending," Wickert said. "The best hope we have to avoid a catastrophic war is to be so overwhelmingly powerful that China decides it is not worth a war.

He added, "The Air Force we are building at Edwards is the 21st century Air Force that is so good that your sons and daughters won't have to fight. Let's do it, teammates."

Both leaders thanked their spouses, Lesley Higer and Jody Wickert, for their unending support of work that is difficult and demanding. Both hailed the successes of their children, grown, and nearly grown, some following their path into service.

With that, the command changed after 1,290 days of pandemic challenges and demands of leadership. One thing Higer said was that he would "dearly like a nap."



NASA photograph

Boeing will modify this MD-90 to test the Transonic Truss-Braced Wing configuration as part of NASA's Sustainable Flight Demonstrator project.



The MD-90 that will become the X-66A pictured at Boeing's Palmdale, Calif., site, where it will be modified to test the Transonic Truss-Braced Wing configuration as part of NASA's Sustainable Flight Demonstrator project.



Air Force photograph by Adam Bov

The 412th Test Wing's new commander, Col. Douglas Wickert, and his wife Jody Wickert, prepare to greet Team Edwards after the wing's change of command ceremony at Edwards Air Force Base, Calif., Aug. 18, 2023.

Aerotech News and Review

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Prior to assuming command of the 412th TW, Wickert was the Permanent Professor and Head of the Department of Aeronautics at the Air Force Academy. He served as the chair of the Engineering Division overseeing six engineering departments while leading the largest engineering department at the Academy with more than 60 faculty and researchers supporting education and research in aerodynamics, flight mechanics, propulsion, hypersonic, aircraft structures, and experimental methods. The Department of Aeronautics hosts three DOD research centers and the world-renowned Aeronautics Laboratory.



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## Boom Supersonic advances flight preparations for XB-1

Boom Supersonic, the company building the world's fastest airliner, Overture, announced Aug. 24 that it has completed several key milestones for XB-1, Boom's technology demonstrator aircraft.

XB-1 leverages 60 years of progress in airplane technologies like carbon fiber composites, advanced avionics, and digitally-optimized aerodynamics to enable sustainable supersonic travel.

Earlier this year, XB-1 was moved from the company's hangar in Centennial, Colo., to the Mojave Air and Space Port in Mojave, Calif., to continue preparations for flight. The aircraft has undergone extensive ground testing since arriving, including taxi testing this week.

"The recent progress made towards XB-1's first flight reflects the team's collective efforts to build and safely fly the world's first independently developed supersonic jet," said Blake Scholl, Boom Supersonic's founder and CEO

In addition to the ongoing testing, XB-1 recently received an experimental airworthiness certificate from the Federal Aviation Administration, following a detailed aircraft inspection. Boom has also secured letters of authorization to allow Chief Test Pilot Bill "Doc" Shoemaker and test pilot Tristan "Gepetto" Brandenburg to fly XB-1.

Additionally, letters of agreement with airspace authorities are in place allowing for flights of the aircraft over the Mojave Desert. XB-1's historic

first flight will occur in the same airspace where Chuck Yeager first broke the sound barrier in the Bell X-1 and the Mach 3+, strategic reconnaissance SR-71 "Blackbird" first flew in 1964.

XB-1 has provided the company with valuable learnings, including the development of a robust safety culture. In preparation for flight, Boom's aircraft, the same aircraft that will be test pilots have completed hundreds of hours in the simulator for aircraft evaluation, operations development, training, and human factors assessments to achieve the highest levels of safety. The test pilots also maintain flight proficiency in a T-38 trainer

used as a chase plane for all flight tests of XB-1. To further increase safety, the test pilots will use the T-38 to practice formation flying.

than 50 first flights and other signifi-

cant aviation events," said Shoemaker,

chief test pilot for Boom Supersonic.

"I'm looking forward to flying XB-1

here, building on the achievements

of other talented engineers and pilots

who inspire us every day to make su-

and titanium fuselage measuring 71

feet in length. Its ogive (modified del-

ta) wing enables safe operation at take-

off and landing as well as supersonic

speeds. The three General Electric J85

engines that power XB-1 produce a

combined maximum thrust of 12,300

The supersonic demonstrator air-

craft rolled out of Boom's hangar

in Centennial, Colo., in October 2020.

Since then, rigorous testing of all of

XB-1's internal subsystems has been

completed. Upgraded landing gear

and supersonic engine intakes were

also installed on XB-1, both of which

Across its development, XB-1 has

validated Boom's approach to airplane

design and enabled engineers to lever-

age advanced tools like computational

fluid dynamics which are critical com-

ponents of Overture's development.

Overture is the sustainable supersonic

airliner from Boom that will fly at

Mach 1.7. or about twice the speed

of today's fastest airliners, and is de-

signed to run on 100 percent sustain-

able aviation fuel.

increase performance and safety.

XB-1 features a carbon composite

personic travel mainstream."

pounds of force.

"It's fitting that XB-1 is now progressing toward first flight at the Mojave Air and Space Port, home to more



B-1 has undergone extensive ground testing since arriving, including taxi testing this week at the Mojave Air and Space Port in Moiave. Calif

## NASA bringing aeronautics into local classrooms

### by Sarah Mann NASA Armstrong

For the third year, NASA employees stepped into classrooms to teach the next generation about aeronautics during Aero Fair.

During Aero Fair, which takes place during the Spring semester, students are educated on concepts such as Newton's Laws, Bernoulli's Principle, the Four Forces of Flight, and the Mars helicopter, Ingenuity. Each student is given a NASA bag containing all the necessary materials for engaging in basic experiments and activities related to these subjects.

NASA employees from Armstrong Flight Research Center in Edwards, Calif., and Ames Research Center in Silicon Valley, Calif., noticed a lack of diversity in the applicant pool for several job openings. After assessing the surrounding communities, the group concluded that there was a lack of opportunity and inspiration for underrepresented and underprivileged children at the formative stages of their education. Enter NASA's Aero Fair.



The Aero Fair team collaborated with the California Office of STEM Engagement to develop a three-part STEM engagement activity to introduce middle-school students to the basics of aeronautics and inspire them to further science and math education as they progressed to high-school and beyond. The team leveraged contacts from California Office of STEM Engagement to reach out to educators who were willing to incorporate Aero Fair into their classes.

The 2023 Aero Fair reached over 3,400 students, the majority being in California; however, the program was also taught virtually in Santa Fe, N.M., Tucson, Ariz., Queens, N Y and Plainfield N J

Aero Fair is well received and highly requested by the teachers and schools visited each year. Although the impact of the program will not be seen for years to come, the connections, relationships, and interactions the volunteers are having with the students in each of the classes create lifechanging moments which are at the core of Aero Fair. Showing these underrepresented students there is more to reach for in their life and they are not limited in anything they can do or become

> Aero Fair will continue expand its reach to students around NASA Armstrong and NASA Ames, as well as the other aeronautics-focused NASA centers. More Aero Fair content is being developed and updated as NASA's aeronautics work continue to grow.

Left: NASAArmstrong's Operations Engineer, Joe C. Piotrowski leads students at Mendez Fundamental Intermediate School in Santa Ana, Calif., during a lesson in aeronautics during the recent Aero Fair. Right: NASA Armstrong's Operations Engineer, Joe C. Piotrowski signs NASA bags at Mendez Fundamental Intermediate School in Santa Ana, Calif., during the recent Aero Fair.



September 1, 2023

## NASA Armstrong supports wind study with Alta-X

by Jay Levine NASA Armstrong

Wind affects all aircraft, particularly during takeoff and landing, and that's especially critical for new types of transportation.

A new NASA flight campaign studying wind aims to gather information to enhance air taxi safety.

Researchers measured wind at altitudes below 2,000 feet using drones, sensors, weather balloons, and other technology during the Advanced Exploration of Reliable Operation at Low

and Technology campaign, based at NASA's Armstrong Flight Research Center at Edwards, Calif.

The goal of this campaign is to fill knowledge gaps to resolve wind and weather unknowns that could hinder Advanced Air Mobility flights. Armstrong is partnered with NASA's Langley Research Center in Hampton, Va., on the work, which began July 20 and will run through August

"Advanced conceptual planning for AAM vertiports require data collection tools to ensure safe operations,"

Altitudes: Meteorology, Simulation said Grady Koch, the project's principal investigator. "It would be great if weather input and the models could do everything, but there are unexpected variables. We have a unique opportunity to make those measurements for weather forecasting."

The campaign's first flight was also the first mission for NASA Armstrong's Alta-X quad rotor, remotely piloted drone. The Alta-X flew to predetermined altitudes and hovered while mounted sensors obtained data on temperature, pressure, relative humidity, and three-dimensional wind data. To simplify use of the sensors on Alta-X, the ground station is the same one meteorologists use.

"This multipurpose experiment tests new sensor technologies and makes a detailed study of wind flow around buildings" Koch said. "The groundbased support sensors include the cutting-edge 'virtual tower concept' where we have two lidar units that use lasers to measure airflow from the ground level to 2,000 feet."

Six NASA Armstrong meteorologists were required to prepare and deploy the equipment, and complete weather forecasting, to make the field experiment possible

"It was full force for 11 weeks prior to the start of the experiment," said coinvestigator Luke Bard. "Preparation has been ongoing since about October 2022, when the weather team received some of the new equipment.'



NASA photographs by Ca

The Alta-X aircraft flies at NASA's Armstrong Flight Research Center at Edwards, Calif., as part of the Advanced Exploration of Reliable Operation at Low Altitudes: Meteorology, Simulation and Technology campaign. The campaign was at NASAArmstrong to study wind from the ground to 2,000 feet to provide data to assist future drones to safely land on rooftop hubs called vertiports and to potentially improve weather prediction.

A NASA Armstrong 140-foot tower outfitted with ultrasonic wind sensors and several smaller 10-foot weather stations sample the wind flows through the area for the data-gathering. Upwind of the test area, a sensor measures winds aloft by emitting sound pulses.

The researchers plan to use wind data to validate and improve new modeling techniques

"Computational fluid dynamics is used for determining airflow on pretty small features like wings on airplanes, but for this work we are using it for a meteorological problem where you have very large complex structures," Koch said. "The sensors are used to compare and validate those models."

The wind campaign is part of NA-SA's Convergent Aeronautics Solutions project under the Transformative Aeronautical Concepts Program, which invests in ideas leading to solutions for aviation and that impact safety, environmental and community impact, and the global growth in air traffic.



Tegan French and Rocky Garcia are at a weather balloon system's ground

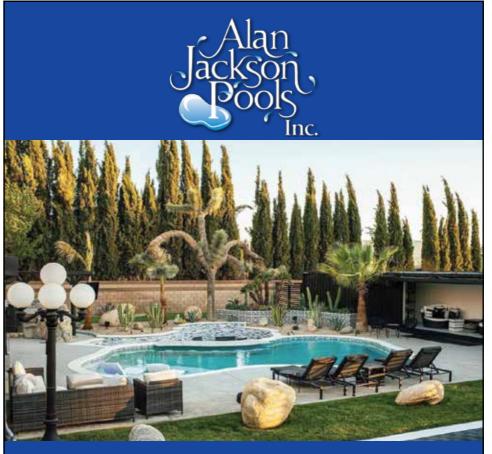
station monitoring temperature, humidity, pressure, and winds transmitted from

an instrument package on the balloon as it ascends at NASA's Armstrong Flight

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## Mobile Vietnam Memorial Wall coming to Rosamond

### by Cathy Hansen

special to Aerotech News

Recently, I was asked if I could help raise funds to bring the Mobile Vietnam Memorial Wall to Kern County.

I was totally unaware that the AV Wall Board had voted to retire the mobile wall in 2025. This might be an opportunity for another organization to continue this important work that was started by the AV Wall volunteers. Visit https://avwall.org for more information. They are an all-volunteer organization dedicated to helping veterans through community service.

The AV Wall is a half-scale replica of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall in Washington, D.C., and was first established 18 years ago, according to Mike Bertell, president of the AV Wall Board.

Please join me in supporting the Southern Kern Unified School District and community of Rosamond, as they host the Mobile Vietnam Memorial Wall — AV Wall in Kern County. This is the first time the AV Wall has ever been displayed in Kern County.

There is considerable expense in moving, setting up, tearing down, security costs during the six-days of display and your donations are greatly appreciated.

You may contact Robert Irving at 661-256-5000, Ext. 1125 for more detailed information. For the six day display expenses will be more than \$10,000.

Please give what you can, and make checks payable to "Southern Kern Unified School District." Donations are tax deductible, and can be mailed to: Southern Kern Unified, c/o Business Dept., 2601 Rosamond Blvd., Rosamond, CA 93560.

The Mobile Vietnam Memorial Wall will be on display Nov. 7-12, 2023, at Westpark Elementary School, 3600 Imperial Avenue, in Rosamond. A Veterans Day Ceremony will be held in front of the wall

on Nov. 11.



The Mobile Vietnam Memorial Wall — AV wall is a grassroots effort conceived, funded, and built by the citizens of the Antelope Valley and was dedicated in 2009.

The AV Wall is maintained and traveled by an allvolunteer organization. It is one of only five traveling walls in the United States and the only one based on the West Coast.

The AV Wall is engraved with the names of more than 58,300 men and women who gave their lives or remain missing.





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### STANLEY SANDERS

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## Piazza knows how to manage the heat structures

#### by Jay Levine NASA Armstrong

Whether it's a hot re-entry or just the California desert in summer, some people handle the heat better.

That describes Anthony Piazza when it comes to high-temperature strain sensors that can take up to about 1,800 degrees Fahrenheit.

Piazza is a researcher at NASA's Armstrong Flight Research Center at Edwards, Calif., who is developing advanced high-temperature strain sensors as part of NASA's Hypersonic Technology project. These sensors will test new materials and structures and prove them safe for future re-entry vehicles and civilian hypersonic transports that could drastically decrease travel times.

"NASA wants these new hot structures for a vehicle they can use again and again to assess the risks and health of a future civilian hypersonic vehicle," Piazza said. "To do that will mean a change in the materials the vehicles are made from, and require similar, but more advanced sensing systems."

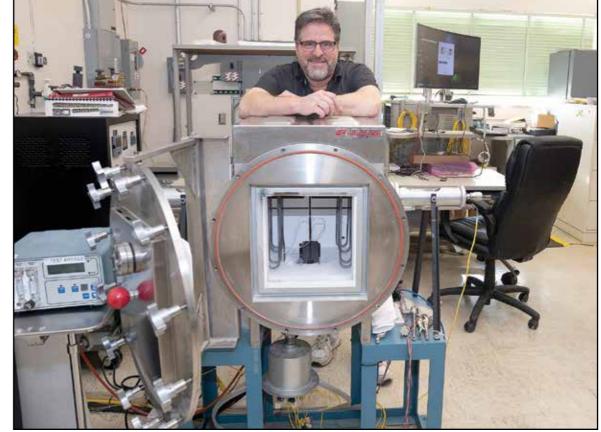
Two approaches could meet these emerging needs to measure higher and higher temperatures. The first is a NASA Armstrong developed advanced FOSS (Fiber Optic Sensing System) that includes silica fiber optic fibers about the thickness of a human hair, and the other is a sapphire high strain and temperature sensor.

FOSS was successful in providing temperature data on the LOFTID (Low-Earth Orbit Flight Test of an Inflatable Decelerator) mission on Nov. 10, 2022. That system included 1,400 sensors on three optic fibers temperatures, providing temperature, strain, and other information critical mission safety, Piazza said. A more advanced flight system is in



Courtesy photograph

Anthony Piazza installs temperature sensors on the carbon-carbon X-37 advanced technology demonstrator flaperon qualification unit using a thermal spray technique at NASA's Armstrong Flight Research Center at Edwards, Calif.. Piazza's favorite and most challenging project was the X-37.



Photograph by Genaro Vavuris

Anthony Piazza, a researcher at NASA's Armstrong Flight Research center at Edwards, Calif., works with high-temperature strain sensors. This test article is a bending load bar, which enables high-temperature optical strain sensor research up to 1,800 degrees Fahrenheit.

development.

The other approach is a sapphire high-temperature sensor that could function in temperatures up to 3,200 degrees. The greatest challenge applying the sapphire sensor may be in developing a way to attach it to withstand such temperatures.

Piazza's favorite project, and most challenging because of its size and complexity, was testing elements of the X-37 at the center from 2003 to 2005. The X-37 was a robotic spaceplane initially developed by NASA and later transferred to the U.S. Department of Defense. Advancements on that project is the basis for the current work for NASA's Hypersonic Technology project.

"We were the first to use on a large-scale project the EFPI (Extrinsic Fabry-Perot Interferometers) fiber optic high-temperature strain sensors," Piazza said. "This sensor provided a more accurate strain measurement. We are advancing the EFPI work to obtain multiple readings on a single fiber, where the EFPI is one sensor, one measurement, one fiber on a system. We now make multiple high-temperature measurements on a single fiber, on a single channel using high temperature written fiber Bragg gratings (sensors)."

High-temperature sensors and work with new materials and structures may provide the information that one day will lead to civilian hypersonic travel. Piazza will continue his work to handle the heat.

# Next PACT Act deadline: Health care enrollment for veterans who deployed to combat zones

The Department of Veterans Affairs is reminding veterans that, if they deployed to combat zones, they can enroll in VA healthcare.

Veterans who deployed to a combat zone, never enrolled in VA health care, and left active duty between Sept. 11, 2001 and Oct. 1, 2013 are eligible to enroll directly in VA health care until 11:59 p.m., local time, Sept. 30, 2023.

This special enrollment period gives Veterans who served in Iraq, Afghanistan, and other combat zones an opportunity to enroll directly in VA health care without first applying for VA benefits.

VA encourages all of these veterans to visit VA.gov/PACT or call 1-800-MYVA411 to learn more and sign up for VA health care before the deadline. Veterans who are enrolled in VA health care are proven to have better health outcomes than non-enrolled veterans, and VA hospitals have dramatically outperformed non-VA hospitals in overall quality ratings and patient satisfaction ratings. Additionally, VA health care is often more affordable than non-VA health care for veterans.

This special enrollment period is a part of the PACT Act, the largest expansion of VA health care and benefits in generations. Since President Biden signed the PACT Act into law on Aug. 10, 2022, more than 344,000 veterans have enrolled in VA health care and more than 4.2 million enrolled veterans have been screened for toxic exposures.

"Are you a veteran who deployed to a combat zone but never enrolled in VA health care? If you left active duty between Sept. 11, 2001, and Oct. 1, 2013, you should sign up now," said VA Secretary Denis McDonough. "Even if you don't need this care now, you may need it in the future – and once you're in, you have access for life. But don't wait — the deadline is Sept. 30 — so go to VA.gov/PACT and apply today."

Although this deadline is written into law for this specific group of veterans, many other groups of veterans are able to enroll directly in VA health care without first applying for VA benefits including many Vietnam veterans, Gulf War veterans, veterans who deployed to a combat zone and transitioned out of the service less than 10 years ago, and more. Veterans who do not meet any of the above criteria can often still access VA health care by filing for VA benefits or based on income. If a veteran is granted service connection for any health condition, they become eligible for VA care.

President Joe Biden has made supporting veterans a core element of his Unity Agenda for the nation. When the president signed the PACT Act into law, he extended the standard eligibility window for veterans who deployed to combat zones to enroll in VA health care from five years to 10 years. The PACT Act also expanded VA benefits for millions of veterans, making more than 300 health conditions "presumptive" for service connection. This means that if an eligible veteran has one of these health conditions, VA automatically assumes that the condition was caused by the veteran's service and provides compensation and care accordingly. Since the PACT Act was signed into law, VA has delivered more than \$1.85 billion in PACT Act benefits to veterans and their survivors. VA encourages veterans and their survivors to apply for these benefits now at VA.gov/PACT.

More information on eligibility for the special enrollment period can be found at VA.gov/PACT. The period applies to veterans who deployed to a combat zone, never enrolled in VA health care, and left active duty between Sept. 11, 2001, and October 1, 2013 — specifically those who served in a theater of combat operations during a period of war after the Persian Gulf War or in combat against a hostile force during a period of hostilities after Nov. 11, 1998.

VA is executing a nationwide campaign to ensure that as many veterans as possible enroll before Sept. 30. To date, VA's PACT Act outreach campaign has included more than 2,000 events nationwide, \$13 million in paid media, 60,000 earned media clips, more than 400 million emails and letters to veterans, the creation of a one-stop-shop PACT Act website, and more. This is the largest outreach campaign in VA history, which has one goal in mind: ensure that all veterans — and their survivors — get the health care and benefits they deserve under the PACT Act.

For more information about how the PACT Act is helping veterans and their survivors, visit VA's PACT Act Dashboard. To apply for care or benefits today, visit VA.gov/PACT or call 1-800-MYVA.



Sept. 4, 1984: The B-1B Lancer is rolled out at the Rockwell International facility at Air Force Plant 42 in Palmdale, Calif.



Sept. 5, 1984: Space Shuttle Discovery, OV-103, completed its first space flight, STS-41-D, when it landed at Edwards Air Force Base, Calif., at 6:37 a.m., PDT. It had completed 97 orbits of the Earth. The total duration of its flight was 6 days, 56 minutes, 4 seconds. The purpose of the mission was to place three communications satellites into orbit, and to deploy an experimental solar panel array.



Sept. 7, 1961: As a consultant to Northrop Corporation, Jackie Cochran flew a T-38 Talon to a Fédération Aéronautique Internationale World Record for Speed Over a Closed Circuit of 500-kilometers, flying from Edwards Air Force Base, Calif., to Beatty, Nev., Lone Pine, Calif., and back to Edwards. Her speed averaged 680.749 mph. During August and September 1961, Cochran set series of speed, altitude and distance records with the T-38.



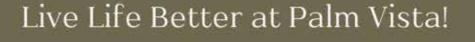
Sept. 5, 1944: The Douglas C-74 Globemaster made its first flight at Long Beach, Calif., with Ben O. Howard at the controls. The flight lasted 79 minutes. The Globemaster was a U.S. heavy-lift cargo aircraft, and was developed after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor.



Sept. 6, 1943: Northrop's experimental fighter, the XP-56 Black Bullet was trucked to the Muroc lakebed and made its first flight, flown by company test pilot John Myers. The XP-56 was a near-tailless design with a pusher engine driving contra-rotating propellers. It was the first aircraft to be constructed entirely of magnesium.



Sept. 8, 1999: The Helios Prototype flew for the first time at the Dryden (now Armstrong) Flight Research Center, Edwards, Calif. The Helios Prototype was the fourth and final aircraft developed as part of an evolutionary series of solar- and fuelcell-system-powered unmanned aerial vehicles. AeroVironment developed the vehicles under NASA's Environmental Research Aircraft and Sensor Technology program.



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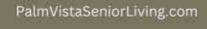
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## Currahee! Three miles up, and 1,300 feet down

### **by Dennis Anderson** special to Aerotech News

**TOCCOA, Ga.** — Most people round the world are familiar with the word "Currahee!" first heard it during an airing of the Steven Spielberg and Tom Hanks-produced historic miniseries *Band of Brothers* about an iconic company of 101st Airborne paratroopers who jumped on D-Day.

"Currahee! Three miles up! Three miles down!" formed the gasping war cry from the original aspiring paratroopers of World War II, and the actors who portrayed them more than 50 years after history's greatest war. They chorused together as they ran up a Georgia mountain to toughen up for the ordeal that lay ahead.

Hard to believe it is more than 20 years since *Band of Brothers* first aired in the week following the terror attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, and that the series continues to air, having become a kind of "It's a Wonderful Life" enduring cinematic tribute to the U.S. military. The series, based on the Stephen Ambrose book of the same name, exerts its hold in streaming and gift sets as D-Day 80th anniversary looms.

On a recent summer Sunday, I joined dozens of my veteran comrades — we call each other brothers and sisters — and grunted it out, some of us running the "Three Miles Up" that was the Band of Brothers daily training task. Others of us, many past 50 years, were content to hike. Which is what I did.

We were not aging Baby Boomer hikers and weekend joggers. We still "Stand Alone, Together," as veteran paratroopers. We jump together too. Even now.

A day earlier, we parachuted, hurling ourselves in "stick formations" from the open door of a C-47 troop carrier aircraft, a flying museum piece that dropped paratroopers on June 6, the Day of Days, in 1944.

We prepared for our jump as the *Band of Brothers* did. The atmosphere in a "ready room" before a jump is less the case of being tense, than of being intense.

In the ready room adjoining the airfield, the check list is everything.

Every belt, strap, hook, buckle, fastener and pin must be connected to the satisfaction of a Jumpmaster, the commander in the aircraft. If it is not right, it can be fatal. The check list, and attention to the detail that goes with it, is life.

"What do you think about this seal?" Staff Sgt. Jordan Whittington, an active Army soldier, asked the senior Jumpmaster, a retired Green Be-



Preparing to board the C-47 Skytrain.

ret officer, about a thread that seals the reserve parachute.

The Green Beret veteran officer's first name is same as mine, and he decided we were "Team Dennis." During the final check this is an extraordinary relief, because Lt. Col. Dennis Harrison knows so much more about the gear than I do, and I am reasonably experienced, with 111 jumps in my logbooks.

"The seal is OK," Jumpmaster Dennis ruled. "It's a little different than I would do it, but it's OK."

With that, the two men sealed the Velcro flap



Dennis Anderson lands following his jump.

Photograph courtesy of Scott Freund

on my reserve parachute. The rest of my gear was almost ready, the MC-1D Army-issue parachute strapped to my back, and legs, chest strap hooked, and Reserve in place, with quick release strap. Jumpmaster Dennis grins at me like he's smiling at a rookie trooper.

"What is it about you and kit bags, Anderson?" he asked.

The kit bag that rides between the leg straps was loose. I tightened them until the fit was snug. Lt. Col. Dennis nodded, and it was time to board for our jump.

"The aircraft will be flying at 100 mph, with jumpers out at 1,300 feet," Darren Cinatl, the senior Airborne Operations commander said. "Has anyone got a problem with that?" No one had a problem.

We listened, our ears perked toward the sky for the C-47, which moments before put 15 paratrooper veterans out over the greenbelt and tarmac of Toccoa Airport.

Nicknamed the Skytrain, this D-Day vintage aircraft flown by pilots of the Liberty Foundation, is dubbed "Chalk 30." It swooped in for a smooth landing, its engines sputtering, propellers feathering. It came to a stop, and we prepared to board.

We boarded much as the *Band of Brothers* did on the night of June 5, 1944, before becoming some of the first of 13,000 American paratroopers to drop into the exploding night skies of France before dawn on D-Day. One difference: we were not carrying rifles, ammunition, explosives and about 100 pounds of extra gear.

On the other hand, many of us in the six commemorative teams that jumped at Toccoa Airport on July 8, 2023, were an average of 40 years older than the troops of Easy Company, 506th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 101st Airborne.

Many of us passed through the rigors of Army

jump school 40 or 50 years ago. A few of the team jumpers are active military, like Staff Sgt. Whittington and Master Sgt. Adam Barfield. They choose to jump with us from love of history and veterans. A few civilians jump, too, most from police and fire agencies.

We had come to this rural airport, adjacent to the small northeast Georgia city of Toccoa on a mission conceived by a veteran paratrooper recently retired from the 82nd Airborne Division, Capt. Cinatl, who breathes, eats, and sleeps the historic Airborne legacy begun in 1940 before America's entry into World War II.

Operation Currahee was Capt. Cinatl's project, six years in planning.

The mission of our teams was to rechristen the airfield where a young lieutenant earned his jump wings more than 80 years earlier at the dawn of U.S. military parachute operations.

Richard "Dick" Winters led Easy Company from D-Day all the way to capture of Hitler's redoubt, the "Eagles Nest" in the Bavarian Alps. By the time 101st Airborne arrived at Berchtesgaden in the first week of May 1945, Hitler was dead by suicide in the ruins of Berlin. World War II in Europe was over.

Winters, played by actor Damien Lewis in the epic *Band of Brothers* miniseries was an exemplary leader, awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for his actions on D-Day. Winters ascended to cultural icon status when his exploits, and those of his paratroopers, became known worldwide after the series aired in 2001.

"Our mission is a sacred one," Cinatl said. "We are dedicating this as the Richard Winters Drop Zone, and we are honoring the men who trained for World War II at Camp Toccoa."

With a Jumpmaster pulling us into the aircraft, we settled into bench seats the same way D-Day jumpers did, in reverse order of when we exit the aircraft. Were we, the aging veterans, ready to jump? We have worked to stay ready for decades, some through decades of war in Airborne units.

Our pilot reassured us, "I have been flying DC-3s and C-47s since 1966," he said.

The C-47 dubbed "Chalk 30" roared off the tarmac and swung over the dense Georgia greenery, much as another aircraft did that carried Dick Winters and other aspiring paratroopers in 1942.

"Dick Winters!" shouted Col. Chris Farrell, Ret., Airborne vet of Afghanistan and some other 21st century wars.

"Dick Winters!" we shouted back. I wonder, could the man hear us across time?

Our jump commands are catechism. "Get ready!" We shout the words back. "Stand up!" We echo that, too. "Hook up!" Then, "Sound off for equipment check!" We make a final check, and tap the buddy in front. "All OK, Jumpmaster!"

The next moment is the World War II troopers called the "Rendezvous With Destiny."

"Stand in the door!" And, "Go!" In one-second intervals, we leap into the wind.

At 100 mph, and 1,000 feet above the Drop Zone you have all the air conditioning you will ever want. There's green earth below, trees, and dense forest. And runway. Landing on grass is best. After that, tarmac, hard, but flat. Stay away from the trees.

Our canopies snap open. We look up, and check to ensure they are trim, without holes or tears. We slip away from our friends in the air to avoid collisions and entanglements. It goes pretty fast, and "Crunch!" Boots on ground, chasing the billowing canopy. We are "All OK!" and almost ready to walk in.

Across Normandy on the morning of June 6, thousands of canopies were abandoned as para-

See JUMP, Page 10



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### JUMP, from 8

troopers scrambled for their weapons and moved off to engage the enemy. Thousands of those yards of canopy silk became bridal gowns for the liberated in the years after D-Day.

On our summer morning, easier than any morning Easy Company experienced we pull our rigs into that kit bag that rides between the leg straps and throw it on our backs. The reserve chute hooks to the bag to make an improvised backpack. The ruck is not 150 D-Day pounds, but it's more than 50, and most of us were more than 50 years. So, good.

That evening, our six teams gathered, hosted by city leaders at a World War II Big Band Dance. Beers were hoisted, speeches, a few, and a toast to Cpl. Lloyd Harvey, a World War II Screaming Eagle veteran nearing his century birthday who flew with us. "To Lloyd Harvey!" the glasses raise. "Currahee!"

A half dozen teams celebrated christening Toccoa Airport's green grass as the "Richard Winters Drop Zone." The teams of jumpers led by Liberty Jump Team, included W & R Vets, All Airborne Battalion, Round Canopy Parachute Team, Phantom Airborne Brigade, and Parachute Group Holland. Dutch Marine commandos who jump annually at Normandy and the "Bridge Too Far" battle sites traveled from the Netherlands.

The Dutch Marine veterans visit America to jump in respect for what the American paratroopers and the Allies did to liberate the Netherlands from the Nazi Occupation. Marine Michael Heezen lives in Arnhem, where the British Airborne fought and failed to take the bridge that could have put the Allies across the Rhine. Jens Jansen, also a Dutch Marine, at 62 had served 44 years in the military, mostly in peacekeeping missions.

"On May 5 we celebrate the day the Netherlands was liberated after five years of war," Jensen said, noting that his father was displaced, and his mother, like so many in Holland was hungry and malnourished from the occupation.

In September 1944, more than 20,000 American, British, Canadian and Polish paratroopers and glider troops swept into Holland in the pyrrhic "Operation Market Garden." The effort fell short, "a bridge too far," but the Dutch people never forgot, and still observe ceremonies annually at the Allied drop zones.

Speaking at the hangar dance, Jensen told his friends and the people of Toccoa, "It is very special to be here where it began for those young paratroopers."

"To those I never knew, but to whom our country owes so much, we will never forget you," Jensen said. "Fortunately, I got to meet some of you, old people, beautiful people with a history."

He wondered about the Allied soldiers "who gave cigarettes to my father, and biscuits to my mother. She always has linked the taste of biscuits to the feeling of her liberation."



Dennis Anderson walks away at the Dick Winters Drop Zone.

So, everyone lifted a glass and rose to applaud Cpl. Lloyd Harvey, one of the last surviving members of the 506th Parachute Infantry Regiment from which Easy Company, the "Band of Brothers" originated.

With the toasts done, the end of our Georgia pilgrimage was to summit Currahee Mountain, like those kids who volunteered for the paratroopers more than 80 years ago.

Have to say, the three miles up made me gasp, the way I think any Baby Boomer would who wasn't training for marathons and Iron Man competitions. The 90-degree temperatures of July, and 53 percent humidity complicated the effort.

The word Currahee, according to the lore, is Cherokee for "Stand Alone!"Currahee is more than a hill, and less than Everest, but in its corner of north Georgia, it dominates the landscape, rising above the forests of the piedmont.

Departing from the 506th rebuilt barracks, runners and hikers

were age-grouped in their 40s and 50s among the more recently served, ascending the peak with parachutists in their 60s and 70s, one reliably past 80. The three-mile trail to the top of the 1,739-foot peak ascends at a steep incline until you're on top and can see all the way to Tennessee. You tap the U.S.G.S. service marker, like the troops.

Summiting Currahee was ritualistic, a completion of the commemorative operation in planning since 2017, according to Dave Krasner of W & R Vets.

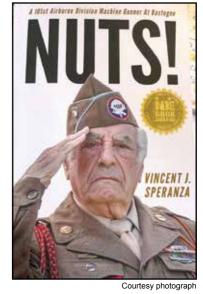
"Our mission is to honor the heritage of the World War II veterans, the ones who came before us, and to honor what they achieved," said project organizer Cinatl, who fought in Afghanistan and recently retired from the 82nd Airborne Division.

In the more than 20 years since *Band of Brothers* first broadcast, Easy Company's oldest veterans have died, along with most of the 16 million Americans who served in World War II. Even

the youngest are nearing the century mark, with about 120,000 still with us, according to Department of Veterans Affairs.

Addressing Cpl. Harvey, that rare surviving World War II veteran, Jansen of Parachute Group Holland said, "Let us never forget your sacrifice and bravery. We have to pass this on to the generation that will never know you."

Less than a month after our jump, our Airborne community lost another hero. Vincent Speranza, a 101st Airborne Division hero of the Battle of the Bulge, died Aug. 2, 2023. Spe-



Vincent J. Speranza's Nuts!

ranza's exploits include carrying beer in his helmet to wounded buddies in Bastogne that led to the brewing of "Airborne Beer" in Belgium and publication of his autobiography, *Nuts!* a reference to Brig. Gen. Anthony McAuliffe's retort to a Nazi demand of surrender.

Speranza, Bronze Star, Purple Heart, made his last parachute jump, exiting a C-47 in tandem, on March 27, 2023, his 98th birthday.



Dennis Anderson, left, Col. Stuart Watkins, center, with Dutch Marine veterans Michel Heezen and Jens Jansen.



The marker atop Currahee Mountain, Toccoa, Ga.

Photograph courtesy of Scott Freund



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## High Desert Hangar Stories The day Baby Ruth candy bars rained down from heaven

### by Bob Alvis special to Aerotech News

When World War I came to an end, one thing the GI's from America brought back from the battlefields of Europe was the love of chocolate.

Before the war chocolate was not as popular as many would think, but several aspects came together to make the early 1920s the launching platform for the candy industry to literally "take off" in America.

One of the major players early on was the Curtiss Candy Company in Chicago, Ill., which was looking to overtake Hershey's stranglehold on the candy bar market. As always, it comes down to promotion and how to get national attention for launching a new candy bar set to become the number one candy bar in the country.

Combining the name of a famous baseball player and the love of

devil outfits, the Doug Davis Flying Circus, merged and formed the Baby Ruth Flying Circus in 1924, sponsored by Otto Schnering. Schnering was the founder of the Curtiss Candy Company, which manufactured the Baby Ruth candy bar. Davis had previously worked for Schnering, and between the two of them the idea of bombing big cities with Baby Ruth candy bars from three WACO biplanes was born.

Manufacturers of the candy bar Curtiss/Baby Ruth announced their specially decorated biplane would fling out hundreds of candy bars and chewing gum to groups of kids in cities from Riverside, Calif., to Pasadena, Calif., and beyond.

One writer called it the Baby Ruth Flying Circus, a massive publicity stunt over six years that promoted Curtiss Candy Co. products. Touring cities all over the country, Curtiss would announce the time and day



America's new passion of flying, a nationwide promotion was hatched that would definitely get the new candy much-needed front page coverage that would have people buzzing from coast to coast.

One of the early air show dare-

for its scheduled candy drop and encourage kids to gather in open areas, each hopeful of collecting their own "manna from heaven." Kicking off in Chicago, Doug

Davis started dropping the candy bars, attached to paper parachutes,



oouncoy photogre

The campaign was new across the nation.



from his airplanes. In 1923, he created a national uproar by flying low between buildings in the business district of Pittsburgh distributing candy. On the Fourth of July weekend in 1926, he did the same promotion over Coney Island. In Miami in 1927, a candy distributor got Davis to let his 12-year-old son, Paul Tibbets, drop the candy bars from Davis's Waco 9 to the crowd at the Hialeah Park Race Track. It made a big impression on the boy: he later said, "From that day on, I knew I had to fly." Tibbets would go on to pilot the Boeing B-29 Superfortress that dropped the first atomic bomb on Hiroshima, Japan, in World War II.

The amount of candy that dropped from the skies may never be known, but one thing that will never be disputed is that the good old Baby Ruth candy bar along with the Flying Circus promotion forever tied the two together as one of the greatest aviation advertising programs in history. As the promotion began to wind down, one of the very last drops came to us here in Southern California, and from some folks' reflection who were there, we can get feel of what it was like to be there as a kid.

During the end of February and much of March 1929, the Curtiss candy plane dropped its products to kids from the Inland Empire to Whittier, Pasadena, San Pedro, Ventura and Escondido.

"Pomona Will Witness the Greatest Candy and Gum Party Ever Held in the State!" said a Curtiss advertisement in the *Pomona Progress-Bulletin* on Feb. 25. Of course, that exaggerated wording was also in newspaper ads in other cities.

"There were kids everywhere in a big open field — we had big fields everywhere then," one young man said, sharing his story about how he and his brother walked the four miles from Norco to Corona for the Feb. 28 candy drop.

The kids impatiently searched for the first signs of the biplane flown by World War I aviator Dallas M. Speer that left the Norconian Air Field for the Corona "bombing run." "Finally, we heard it first, then it circled and then came in low and parachutes started falling. I don't think they worked too well, but it was a lot of fun scrambling to get the candy!"

In the man's memories, he also shared that the candy drop was augmented by the arrival of a Curtiss truck that provided even more of the goodies. "We just stuffed our pockets because they were free. I don't think any of them made it home: I mean that was a long walk and kids get hungry."

In Riverside three days later, kids were promised candy would be dropped as well as free tickets to a matinee at the Riverside Theater. But sometimes a little patience was needed.

One young girl on Grand Avenue called the *Riverside Daily Press* to complain the plane never came to her neighborhood on March 2. "She was further about to declare herself when she cut-off shouting, 'Here he comes, here he comes.' After the receiver slammed to the ground, it was followed by the sound of tiny feet rushing off to the distance,' according to an article of that day.

The California candy drops were apparently the last for the Baby Ruth

Flying Circus, the program likely doomed that year by the arrival of the Great Depression.

Today we can read these stories and shake our heads as we can't even imagine anything like this happening in our lifetime, or what it would have been like chasing Baby Ruth Candy Bars parachuting from the skies but oh man, does that sure sound like a fun thing to do as a kid, and at my age I'm not embarrassed to say I would probably be out there with them chasing a sweet treat as a BIG kid LOL!

To finish up this story I just want to share that tonight as I went into the local convenience store to purchase a couple of those classic old favorite Baby Ruth Bars that I realized I was becoming the part of a candy bar that has been around for over one hundred years and that had its start with the first major aviation promotion in history. I have always liked those Baby Ruths and now that I know the rest of the story, they will be just a little bit sweeter!

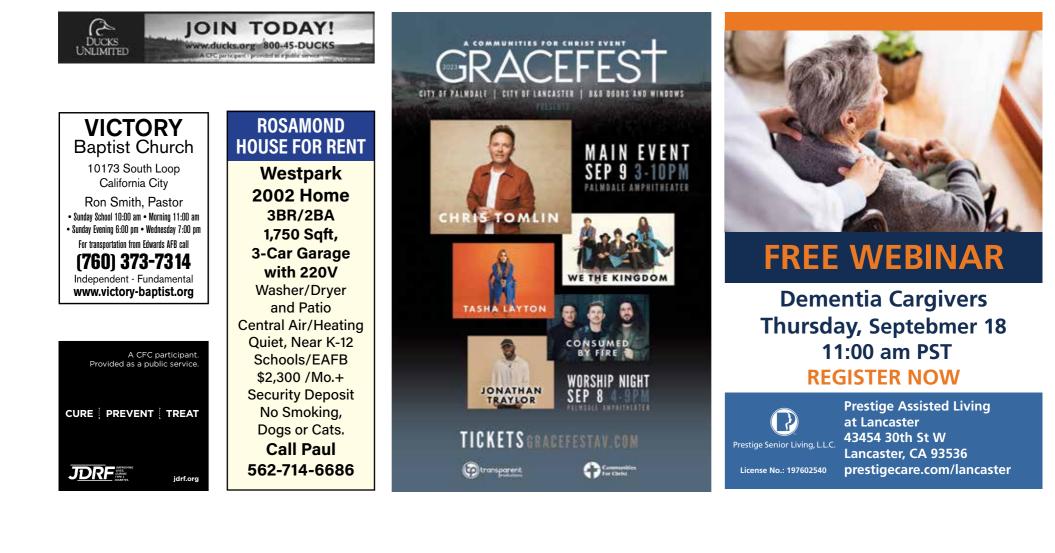
Funny of all the articles I have written over the year this is the only one I can eat when I'm done! With that being said, it's Bob out for now, and let me peel back that wrapper!

Baby Ruth the airman's candy bar!



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