



BALLOONS TO BALLISTICS
COLORADO AVIATION HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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Cover Photo: The GB1 GameBird aerobatics plane flies over the Front Range. Flown by Metropolitan State University students this aircraft is used to teach aerobatics to students enrolled in the MSU aviation program. (Photo by Shahn G. Sederberg)

Your article in Balloons to Ballistics

The Colorado Aviation Historical Society is soliciting articles that relate to Colorado and aviation from interested contributors. We're looking for submissions that speak to any subject that you would like to see in print (i.e. aeronautical memorabilia, airports, aviators, aviation businesses, astronauts, etc.). If you have something to offer please forward it at your earliest convenience.

Articles should be submitted in a Times New Roman (12 font) format, and have an unjustified right edge. Please do not insert photos into the article, but add them each as an additional jpg. attachment and include a caption for each.

Submit your article(s) or questions to:
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President's Report

A Very Close Call

Steve Kelly



On Friday, September 25th, the Wings over the Rockies Air & Space Museum experienced flooding in the building due to a violent downpour that occurred in east Denver and Aurora. Our office space and archives, along with all of the storage rooms on the west side of the building, and the north wall of the Colorado Aviation Hall of Fame were affected by the flooding which soaked the portion of our space nearest the second floor corridor.

Fortunately, our archive material, which includes artifacts, an extensive photo collection, and irreplaceable documents and ephemera from the earliest days of aviation were undamaged. Our computers, phone, a file cabinet, and several paintings by renowned Colorado aviation artist Rick Broome received water damage.

The Wings over the Rockies staff immediately stepped in to de-water the spaces and assess the next steps. A professional restoration company has been engaged to remove everything from the affected areas and begin the drying out and remediation process. Although a setback for us, we are confident that our electronics can be put back into operation and the damage to the paintings will be professionally restored. The office and archives will remain closed for an undetermined time.

We continue to move forward with our biggest event of the year-the Colorado Aviation Hall of Fame banquet, and we will continue our work to document and preserve Colorado's unique aviation history.

Projects for next year will include stepping up the effort to digitize more of the documents in the archives. This project was begun a number of years ago, but now we really need to accelerate its pace. We will be working with Wings over the Rockies Museum to insure that in the future the storage of our unique artifacts and ephemera is provided safety from damage do to environmental factors.

Mystery Quiz Spring 2026 (2Q26) Answer



The aircraft pictured is a Fokker F-8 "Super Universal" operated by Western Air Express. This aircraft, NC-123M, Cn. 864, was one of eight F-8s operated exclusively on the Cheyenne to El Paso route carrying airmail and passengers, between 1929 and 1933.

Built by Fokker Aircraft of America in Passaic, New Jersey, NC-123M was purchased by Mid-Continent Air Express in August 1929. Mid-Continent was later absorbed by Western Air Express (WAE) and all of the company's F-8s were put into service on the Cheyenne to El-Paso route.

The Super Universal was a conventional, high-wing cantilever monoplane with a fully enclosed flight deck and cabin and a fixed undercarriage. The wings were made almost entirely of wood with two main spars and light ribs covered in thin sheets of plywood. The fuselage was built up from welded steel tubes, cross-braced with wires and covered with doped fabric. Instead of a tail-wheel the design incorporated a fixed skid. A single Pratt & Whitney Wasp B air-cooled radial engine, producing 450 hp provided the aircraft with a maximum speed of 138 mph. It could carry either six passengers or 1,323 lbs. of cargo over a range of 680 miles, and had a service ceiling of 19,340 feet, making it ideal for service along the Front Range.

A total of 200 Super Universals were built. As of this writing, only three examples are known to remain. One is on display at the Royal Aviation Museum of Canada. Another is at the Pioneer Air Museum in Fairbanks, Alaska. (In 1983 AvAr 's Brian Richardson coordinated the recovery of Noel Wien's Super Universal from the tundra in Alaska, using a Sikorsky CH-54 "Skycrane". This is now on display in Fairbanks at the Pioneer Air Museum.) The most interesting of all, the F-8 used by Admiral Richard Byrd's Antarctic expedition, still remains in the wild awaiting salvage.

Bill Dunn (Hall of Fame Laureate-2024) was the winner for this issue's Mystery Quiz.

13th Annual Aviation Archaeology and Wreck-Chasing Symposium

2026 Dayton *AvAr* Gathering A Resounding Success

By Brian Richardson

Over the week of 24-26 September, Colorado Aviation Historical Society (CAHS) hosted the 13th Annual Aviation Archaeology and Wreckchasing Symposium in Dayton, Ohio. Intended to attract aviation archaeologists, wreck-chasers, writers, historians, adventurers, and anyone interested in this pursuit, this year's gathering drew participants from all across the United States and Canada. Beginning on Thursday, attendees were offered the choice of exploring a unique Cold War B-50 crash site in Mason County, Ohio, just north of Cincinnati, or visiting the historic Wright Brothers Heritage Trail around Dayton. True to form, seventy-five percent chose slogging in the mud as opposed to staying out of the rain and taking in some very interesting museums. It should be noted that CAHS ***AvAr*** team member Ron Miller, was the first to locate artifacts at this historic site. CAHS members assisted the local history museum in identifying these artifacts.



Searching for artifacts in a Mason County, Ohio cornfield is CAHS Aviation Archaeology team member Larry Leibrecht (Photo: Larry Leibrecht)



Historian and researcher, Dave Trojen (left) looks over artifacts recovered from a B-50 crash site with local history author Sally Sherman Caudill, (right) at the Mason County Historical Museum. (Photo: Larry Leibrecht)

Friday's itinerary started at the National Museum of the United States Air Force (NMUSAF), just a short distance from the historic Bob Hope Hotel and Richard C. Holbrooke Conference Center. At noon, everyone met at the museum's cafeteria to dine and collaborate. With the opportunity to visit two more historic crash sites within a thirty-mile radius of the museum, most everyone elected to go on another adventure.

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The first stop, a WWII B-26 "Marauder" crash site proved fruitless; the owner wasn't home, and since ***AvAr*** never trespasses, everyone moved on to the next objective.



AvAr team member Ron Miller uncovered this artifact at a 1950s B-50 bomber crash site. This aircraft was carrying an atomic bomb. While the nuclear pay-load didn't go off, the high explosive charge used to detonate the weapon did, leaving a massive crater in the Ohio farm field. (Photo: Larry Liebrecht)

The crash site of an experimental F-51 with wingtip ramjets, was explored and artifacts were uncovered. ***AvAr***'s Larry Liebrecht, along with well known wreck-chaser David Trojan, continued until well after dark to uncover these historic artifacts.

Nine featured speakers, including CAHS ***AvAr***'s Larry Liebrecht, provided noteworthy presentations during Saturday's symposium. Topics included both civilian and military crash sites, abandoned airfield and navigational facility projects, as well as technical research tools offered by independent resources such as Paul Freeman and Michael Stowe.



AvAr team members standing in the Wright Brothers first hangar at Huffman Prairie. L to R: Larry Liebrecht, David Sinew, Ernie LeRoy, Mike Luers, Davis Trojan, David Kempa, John Meixel, and Ron Miller. Not shown is Brian Richardson. (Photo: Brian Richardson).



Dave Trojen presenting at the *AvAr* Symposium on Saturday. (Photo: Larry Liebrecht)

(Continued next page)

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Following Saturday's symposium, an evening buffet dinner with keynote speaker Dr. Colin Colbourn, Lead Historian for Project Recover, was held from 6 to 9 p.m. Dr. Colbourn captivated the audience with tales of exotic explorations around the globe, discovering long-lost aircraft and repatriating the remains of missing airmen.

Although this year's turnout was rather modest in comparison to previous years, the gathering still managed to attract twenty-seven attendees from across the United States and Canada.



Keynote speaker at the Saturday dinner was Dr. Colin Colbourn of Project Recovery who spoke on the use of technology in their explorations. (Photo: Larry Leibrecht)

Bent Wings 2027: The 14th Annual Aviation Archaeology and Wreckchasing Symposium will be held in Wendover, Utah, October 6-10, 2027. Besides the symposium schedule of renowned presenters, this gathering will include three days of historic crash site visitations around Wendover, as well as guided tours of the most extant World War II Army Air Force Base still in existence. More details will follow at coahs.org once the dedicated webpage is launched later this year.



Peter Merlin, aerospace historian, author, television celebrity and professor at Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, graciously provided two of his books for symposium attendees. (Photo: Dave Kempa)



AvAr team members at the Wright Brothers National Memorial, Dayton, OH. L to R Back: John Meixel, Mike Luers, David Kempa. L to R Front: Ron Miller, David Seniw, Larry Liebrecht, David Trojan, and Ernie LeRoy. Not pictured is Brian Richardson. (Photo: Brian Richardson)

Colorado 150th Celebration

The “Great War” Exhibit Opens at Weisbrod Aircraft Museum

The First World War, called the “Great War” prior to World War II, had a profound impact on the development of the 20th century.

As the first total war, it required the mobilization of entire economies and the populations of the most powerful European countries, their colonial possessions, and from 1917, the United States. The war led to profound transformations in military strategy, tactics, weapons and logistics. The death and destruction caused by this conflict left bitterness and hostility that led to the rise of totalitarian regimes and an even more devastating conflict-World War II.



The Great War exhibit is located in Hangar 1 at Pueblo Weisbrod Aircraft Museum at the Pueblo Memorial Airport. (Photo: Steve Kelly)

Colorado citizens were involved in the conflict from the very start, some before the United States declared war on Germany in April, 1917 and 17 of these remarkable aviators made significant contributions to the war effort, later becoming some of the first laureates installed in the Colorado Aviation Hall of Fame.



A series of four large display panels with photos and maps provide the context for the “Great War”. (Photo: Steve Kelly)

However impacting the war was for the future of the 20th century, there is little knowledge of it among today’s citizens. Several years ago the Weisbrod Aircraft Museum in Pueblo had begun to convent a 161 square foot area in an empty corner of their main building to fill this gap in the aviation story. A weathered barnwood facade was constructed to look like a First World War aerodrome maintenance shed, and display cases containing model aircraft were placed on either side. Last year, the management of the museum asked if CAHS could take over this space and provide a design for an effective exhibit on the First World War.

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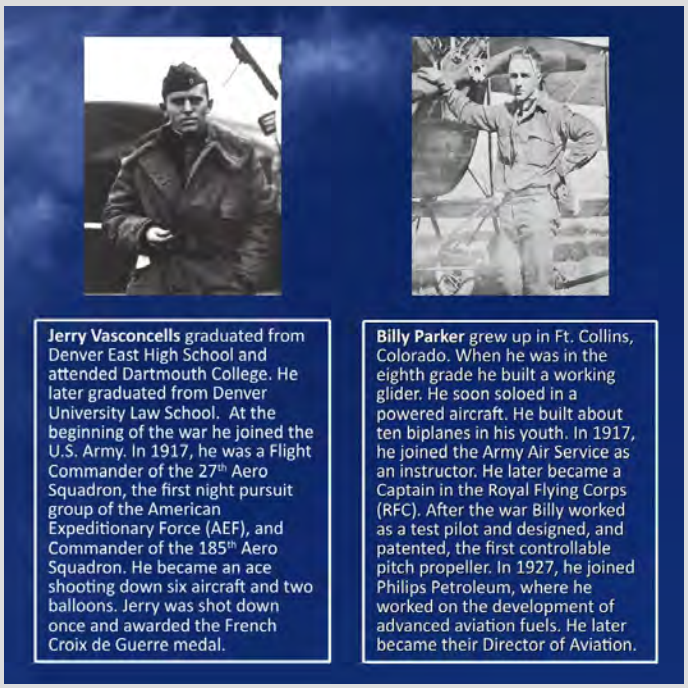
CAHS volunteers designed and worked with Weisbrod museum staff to install the new exhibit at the Weisbrod Aircraft Museum. (Photo: Steve Kelly)

Our purpose in creating this exhibit is to acquaint the museum visitor with the causes, progress, and results of this monumental conflict. As the founding aim of CAHS is to record and preserve the stories of the people who have made Colorado a major force in the development of aerospace activities worldwide, we decided to prominently display photos and biographies of Colorado’s Aviation Hall of Fame Laureates who served during WWI. We felt this would be a fitting addition for Colorado’s 150th year celebration.



Colorado Hall of Fame Laureates are highlighted on display panels in the exhibit. (Photo: Steve Kelly)



This display case contain artifacts from the CAHS and private collections. (Photo: Steve Kelly)

With a good amount of wall space available, we created a set of large graphic panels that explain the background and events that initiated the mobilization of European armies, the opening battles of the war, the failure of strategy resulting in four years of war of attrition, and the advent of American intervention. Another set of panels highlight Colorado’s Hall of Fame Laureates who served in the war. A set of panels illustrating the development of aircraft during the war has been placed on the outer facade.

Historic artifacts including leather flying helmets, flight suits, medals, and original maps from the CAHS and individual member collections have been placed in display cases in the space. A video presentation which introduces visitors to the drama of the First World War, created by Devin Lane of Colorado Springs, is shown on the flat screen TV in the space.

The Pueblo Weisbrod Aircraft Museum is located at the Pueblo Memorial Airport, 31001 Magnuson Avenue. Hours, admission fees, and other details are found on the website: https://pwam.org

Women Taking Flight at MSU Denver:

Dagmar Kress and the Rise of a New Generation of Aviators

Article compiled by Melissa Berg



Dagmar Kress Lecturer and Aerobatics Coach at MSU (Photo: MSU)

At Metropolitan State University of Denver, a growing movement is helping reshape the future of aviation. One of the leading forces behind that movement is Dagmar Kress, an internationally recognized aerobatic pilot, educator, and mentor who continues to inspire a new generation of women entering the cockpit.

Kress serves as a lecturer in the university's Aviation and Aerospace Science Department, where she teaches Theory of Flight and Aviation Fundamentals. She is also the head coach of the MSU Denver Aerobatic Team, leading students to multiple national collegiate championships. A certified flight instructor with more than 30 years in aviation, Kress has competed internationally in world aerobatic competitions representing both the United States and her native Germany. She also serves on the board of directors for Wings Over the Rockies Air & Space Museum. [1]

Her story is especially meaningful because she entered aviation during a time when women were often discouraged from pursuing technical careers. In a 2023 interview,[2] Kress recalled being told as a young woman that flying "wasn't something women did." Rather than accepting those limitations, she pursued aviation anyway and built a career that now helps open doors for others.

Today, MSU Denver's aviation program is becoming recognized for its efforts to support women in aviation careers. According to reporting by 9NEWS and Chalkbeat Colorado, women make up approximately 20% of the program's enrollment, notably higher than the national average for collegiate aviation programs[3].

The university's Women in Aviation chapter has also become a powerful support network for students. Founded in 2019, the chapter provides mentorship, scholarships, networking opportunities, and industry exposure for aspiring female aviators. Students regularly attend the Women in Aviation International conference and connect with professionals across the aerospace industry.[4]



Dagmar Kress, team coach and a lecturer in MSU Denver's Aviation and Aerospace Science Department, and student Braeden Gilitnan in the GameBird aerobatics plane. (Photo by Josh Geurink)

MSU Denver President Janine Davidson, herself a former pilot, has also helped champion the aviation program and expand opportunities for students entering the field.[5]

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(“Dagmar Kress” from page 8)

The timing could not be more important. Aviation industries across the country are facing significant pilot shortages due to retirements and increasing demand. Programs like MSU Denver’s are helping prepare the next generation of pilots, instructors, air traffic controllers, and aviation leaders while also expanding representation within a historically male dominated profession.[6]

Colorado itself has a rich legacy of women in aviation. Trailblazers such as Marion Carlstrom, the first Colorado woman to join the Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP), helped pave the way decades ago. Today, educators and mentors like Dagmar Kress continue that legacy by proving that the sky truly is open to everyone willing to pursue the dream of flight.[7]

For the Colorado aviation community, the work being done at MSU Denver represents more than education. It represents progress, mentorship, and the continued evolution of aviation itself.

Sources:

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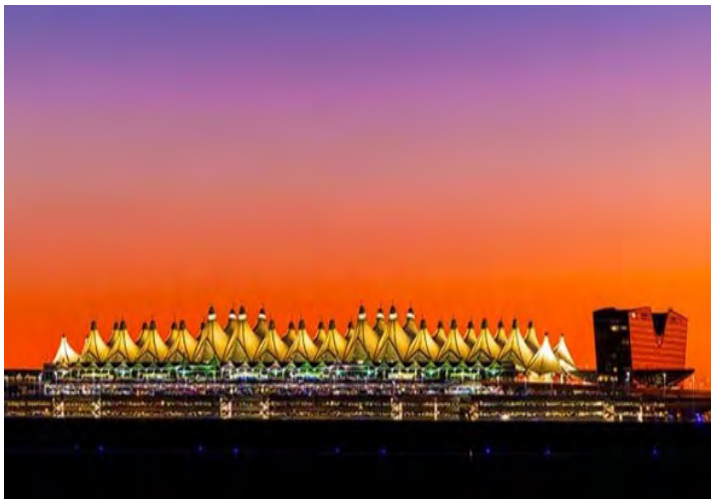

Mystery Quiz Summer 2026

In each issue of the Journal we will present a photograph from the Society archives and challenge you, the reader, to provide information about the subject. Anyone who responds with the correct answer will be mentioned in the following issue, and the first person to answer will win a CAHS commemorative challenge coin. Send your response to aviator_b@outlook.com at your earliest convenience to ensure your submittal is included in the next Journal. Please make certain to include a mailing address where you'd like to receive the coin.



The challenge for this issue: *Name this Golden Era airliner using only the cockpit picture provided here. (Hint: It was one of the most ubiquitous aircraft used by passenger and freight haulers from the 1930s through the 1950s.)*

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The Loss of B-24E 42-7066 and the Crew of 2nd Lt. Eugene Ravera

By Mark Milliken - Friends of the Wyoming Veterans Memorial Museum

On March 2, 1944, B-24E 42-7066 took off from Casper Army Air Base (CAAB) on a routine training flight to the bombing ranges located northeast of Casper. Student pilot 2nd Lt. Eugene Ravera was in command of seven other crewmen. In the right seat was instructor pilot Capt. Charles Bley. a highly decorated combat veteran of B-24s in the Mediterranean theater. Bley received the Distinguished Flying Cross for successfully bringing his crew and aircraft home after the mission on August 1, 1943 to bomb oil refineries in Ploiesti, Romania. The mission resulted in about half of the fighting force being lost, with about 100 air-crewmen not returning. It is considered one of the most dangerous missions of the war.

Shortly into its flight, 42-7066, had to return to base because three crewmen became ill. The aircraft took off a second time and encountered unknown problems 16 minutes later about 20 miles northeast of the base. According to witnesses in other aircraft, the airplane spun into the ground killing all on board instantaneously. Nobody bailed out, and no cause for the accident could be determined.

Since 2017, *Friends* (Friends of the Wyoming Veterans Museum) had been on a mission to discover, document, and memorialize lost CAAB-related fatal training crash sites in central Wyoming. With the help of organizations including the Colorado Aviation Historical Society (CAHS, Brian Richardson and his crew of experts), and the Experimental Aviation Association, a total of six sites have been re-discovered. In 2024, with encouragement from the Wyoming Veterans Memorial Museum and CAHS, we embarked upon a mission to locate the Ravera crash site and other sites near the northeastern bombing ranges. The Ravera site was of great interest due to the loss of Ploiesti combat veteran Capt. Bley.

As with other crash sites, *Friends* embarked upon a two-pronged approach to the investigation. First, property owners were researched and contacted. Second, once *Friends* was reasonably certain of the crash site location, attempts were made to contact living relatives of the crews using ancestry software. This has resulted in many contacts over the years, and several relatives have attended memorial services at crash sites. In many cases, they didn't even realize they had a relative lost in WWII.

The locations listed in official documents for these accident sites are very poor and typically many miles in error. The landowner in the general area in the AAF report is a rancher who owns several thousand acres. Fortunately, he was very pleased to work with *Friends*, something that is not always the case. He thought he knew where the Ravera crash site was but wasn't sure.



Family of Capt. Bley stand before the plaque installed on August 22, 2026 (Photo: Mark Miliken)

On November 5, 2025, the landowner escorted *Friends* to the area where he thought the crash site was. After foot traverses covering about a mile or more over a period of two hours or so, the debris field was found. Only small pieces were apparent, and a GPS survey showed the area to be about 1.4 acres.

(Continued on next page)

("B-24E" from page 11)

Two interesting circular debris collections spaced eleven feet apart consist primarily of engine debris, suggesting two engines hit the ground and burned. Some aero archeologists suggest if engines had hit the ground they would have been buried to some degree. The presence of buried engines remains to be determined.

With the site found, *Friends* set about planning and installing a granite plaque engraved with the crew names. Rocky Mountain Power worked with their Foundation on a donation to *Friends* for the granite plaque. On June 22, 2026, *Friends* placed the plaque in the ground at a location recommended by the landowner. Attempts were made through ancestry software to contact crew relatives. Nieces of Capt. Bley in California responded with a wish to attend a memorial service. They were the only crew relatives to respond. A memorial service was then planned for the site on August 22, 2026.

The landowner kindly allowed access to his ranch for several vehicles. The Wyoming Army National Guard agreed to conduct a military funeral on the site. Bagpipers representing "Wyoming for Heroes" performed at the service. The sound of bagpipes attracted a host of nearby cattle. A firing team from the local American Legion honored the crew with a ceremonial salute.

Capt. Bley's family was deeply touched by the service. That evening, everyone involved in the service was invited to attend a group dinner at a local Casper steakhouse. Several *Friends* supporters, including CAHS, donated funds to help offset the cost of the service and dinner. Capt. Bley's family members returned to California with a great appreciation for the work of *Friends* in memorializing their uncle, a great war hero.

The landowner has requested that *Friends* conduct another service for the 2nd Lt. Stanley Betak crew of seven lost in a B-24 crash on his land. That site is about twelve miles NE of the Ravera site. *Friends* has located and documented the site, and planning will begin soon on the service.

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