DECEMBER 31, 2025

www.castleairmuseum.org

CASTLE AIR MUSEUM

NEWSLETTER

Photo by Rusty Wynn

UPCOMING EVENTS

- **Bombs Away Car Show - Apr 25**
  The Annual BOMBS AWAY Car Show, onsite among the airplanes at Castle Air Museum, will be held April 25th, 2026 from 8:00 AM to 3:00 PM. Online registration and more information coming soon!

- **Spring Open Cockpit Day - May 30**
  Castle Air Museum's Spring Open Cockpit Day will be on May 30th, 2026. This is your opportunity to see our historical aircraft up-close and explore the rich history of military aviation. Gates open at 8:30am. More information coming soon!

CASTLE'S MOST WANTED

This is the section of the newsletter where we post the job most in need of a special volunteer. Hence, our most wanted! If you have the desire and ability to fill this need or know someone who can, please contact our Volunteer Coordinator to start a journey to help make Castle the most desired destination in Central California!

SPECIAL EVENTS COORDINATOR - Organize vendors, food, and guest services for the Bombs Away Car Show, Spring Open Cockpit Day, and Fall Open Cockpit Day. Estimate 2-4 hours a week starting in January. We have a good checklist and template to get started. Requires phone and computer skills.

FROM THE BOARD CHAIRMAN

MAJ GEN CLAY GARRISON USAF (RET)

Happy New Year! The Pavilion Project is quickly moving forward. We are going to start moving dirt and erecting structures this year! Director Jeff Stopper this month submitted our first set of plans to the City of Atwater for permitting and continues to answer the call as the plans move through the system. All good!

We completed a large renovation project this month. Through a very generous donation from our partners at Home Depot new flooring was installed in the giftshop and Copper Wings dining area. We also did a little painting to freshen up the space. It looks fantastic and really spruced up our store. Come by and check it out.

Once again, we placed a new aircraft on display, the Bell UH-1. You can read the details in Greg's column, but we are thrilled to finally have this combat veteran on display. It looks great and filled in our vertical lift circle. Tell your friends. It's worth a visit!

And finally, our Year End Fundraiser is in full swing! This is our only direct appeal for donations. If you are a member or past donor, you received a letter from me via US Mail requesting your support. But if you only follow us online, please go to our website and donate. Our $8 million pavilion is only possible with you generous support. Thank you in advance!

RESTORATION HANGAR

GREG STATHATOS, RESTORATION MANAGER

December was a busy and productive month in the Restoration Hangar, the Storage Hangar, and the Boneyard.

We welcomed two additional aircraft into the hangar alongside our TF-102. Our MiG-17 and A-7 are now positioned next to the TF-102, and all three aircraft are currently under restoration. Each will require complete assembly, metal repairs, sanding, and painting. In early January, our team will be heading to China Lake to retrieve the wing removed from the donor A-7.

The Storage Hangar—also known as the Hidden Collection—has been completely refreshed to better showcase our engines, ordnance, and drones in a more cohesive and engaging presentation. To accommodate these changes, the PT-22, PT-23, and the Bamboo Bomber were relocated to make room for a very special addition. Yes—the F-117 is now proudly positioned at the center of the Hidden Collection, awaiting her final completion. With these updates, the Hidden Collection is now ready for display.

We invite you to come visit and check out the new look in both hangars—we love showing off our collection.

Finally, on December 12th, the Huey was officially moved onto display alongside the rest of our vertical-lift aircraft.

The newly organized Storage Hangar - “Hidden Collection”

The Bell UH-1 Iroquois “Huey” on display

As fire tanker/bomber “E61” with Fast-Way Air Service, Long Beach, CA in 1959.

CURATOR'S CORNER

RUSTY WYNN, CURATOR

When flying into Merced–Castle Airport, KT Aero manages the FBO and has partnered with Castle Air Museum to provide shuttle service to and from the museum. Additionally, Castle Air Museum has two display cases located in the FBO that were recently refreshed. The first highlights the museum and encourages visitors to explore the aircraft on display, while the second offers a glimpse into the history of Merced Army Air Field and its transformation into Castle Air Force Base.

Castle Air Museum has also loaned several framed photographs and prints of aviation art to be displayed at the FBO. We are fortunate to have this art donated to the museum and are happy to now have a place where it can be shared and appreciated by others.

Ongoing Curator Projects

- Accessioning new artifacts into the Castle Air Museum collection
- Accessioning and inventorying existing artifacts in the collection
- Relocating magazines and periodicals out of the curator's office
- Moving aircraft technical manuals into the curator's office

MEMBERSHIP SERVICES

JOHN SUNDGREN - MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE

Renewals: Go online to complete the form or contact Janie Sundgren at: membership@castleairmuseum.org

Membership Credentials: Stop by or contact the Gift Shop at 209-723-2182

Guided Tours: Stop by the Gift Shop or contact our retail sales manager, Lucy Silva at 209-723-2182. Email at: giftshopmanager@castleairmuseum.org

VOLUNTEER SERVICES

BOB SCOBLE, VOLUNTEER COORDINATOR

2025 Top 10 Volunteers at Castle Air Museum

Recognizing Outstanding Commitment and Service

Castle Air Museum recently celebrated the dedication and contributions of its volunteers during the annual membership dinner held at the Merced Elks Club. Major General Clay Garrison recognized both the Top 10 Volunteers for 2025 and the Top 10 Active Lifetime Volunteers, honoring individuals whose service has made a lasting impact on the museum.

The museum's continued success is made possible by more than 100 active volunteers who generously donate their time, skills, and personal resources to support daily operations, preservation efforts, and public programs.

2025 Top 10 Volunteers

1. Jeff Heyer
2. Bill Walls
3. Rusty Wynn
4. Janie Sundgren
5. Frank Burroughs
6. Bruce Cleaver
7. Eric Olseon
8. Richard Walker
9. Pat Patton
10. Darrell Moss

Top 10 Active Lifetime Volunteers

1. Jeff Heyer
2. Janie Sundgren.
3. Pat Patton
4. John Stanton.
5. John Hogrefe.
6. Larry McFarland
7. Mike Rosado
8. Reggie Hill
9. Carl Knoch
10. Marcell Paz

Castle Air Museum extends its sincere thanks and admiration to these outstanding individuals. Their dedication and selfless service are essential to the museum's mission and its ability to educate, inspire, and serve the community.

GIFT SHOP

LUCY SILVA, RETAIL SALES MANAGER

Have you ever thought about having a birthday party or family reunion at the museum? How about a special event for your church group, 4-H club, or Scout troop? How about your car club? Or maybe an exclusive tour of a particular aircraft? All of this is possible. Copper Wings can also cater your event and set up the venue. Special rates and tour guides are available for groups. Call the Gift Shop for details. 209-782-2182

AIRCRAFT OF THE MONTH

RUSTY WYNN, CURATOR

Plane of the Month: Boeing B-17G Flying Fortress, BuNo 43-38635

With Christmas right around the corner, it is fitting to highlight our B-17G Flying Fortress in remembrance of Brigadier General Frederick Walker Castle, who made the ultimate sacrifice on Christmas Eve, December 24, 1944. General Castle was flying his 30th combat mission while leading an air division of more than 2,000 B-17 Flying Fortresses when he was killed in action.

Boeing B-17G Flying Fortress, serial number 43-38635, was manufactured by the Boeing Airplane Company in Seattle, Washington, on August 30, 1944, and immediately delivered to the United States Army Air Corps. One month later, it was assigned to the 1454th Base Unit in Minneapolis, Minnesota. In 1947, the aircraft served with base units at Clinton Field and Patterson Field, Ohio, before being modified into a TB-17G for training.

In 1949, 43-38635 was assigned to Air Materiel Command units at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Ohio, and Griffiss Air Force Base, New York. Transferred to the 3171st Electronic Research Squadron, she was converted to an ETB-17G "Experimental Test" aircraft. Nicknamed Stardust, the aircraft logged thousands of flight hours supporting MIT's Lincoln Laboratory and the "Cape Cod" experimental air defense system while assigned to Hanscom Air Force Base, Massachusetts.

In 1954, the aircraft was sent to Davis-Monthan Air Force Base for storage and, in 1959, was removed from Air Force inventory and sold into civilian ownership as N3703G. After passing through several owners, she entered service as air tanker "E-61," later known as Tanker 61, flying fire suppression missions for many years.

In 1978, Tanker 61 was traded to Aero Union and soon after transferred to the National Air Force Museum's loan program. The aircraft was selected for display at Castle Air Force Base in Atwater, where mechanics removed the retardant tanks, reinstalled bomb bay doors, and repainted her in the markings of the 94th Bomb Group, commanded during World War II by Brigadier General Castle. On November 26, 1979, B-17G 43-38635 made her final flight to Castle.

In 2023, the aircraft was repainted and continues to proudly wear the colors and tail number 44-8444, "Treble Four," honoring the aircraft General Castle flew on his final mission.

Photographer: Steve Williams
In 1961, 43-38635 was sold to TBM Inc., repainted and served as an air tanker until 1978.

Photo by Bill Gabbert
As a tanker with TBM

43-38635 as she looked when flown to Castle Air Force Base on November 26, 1979.

Photographer: Adam Estes
43-38635 as she looks today at Castle Air Museum.