CASTLE AIR MUSEUM

NEWSLETTER

Photographer: Mike Henniger

UPCOMING EVENTS

- **Bombs Away Car Show - Apr 25th**
  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.

- **Flicks of Flight - May 16**
  Featured Film: Amelia
  Bust out your lawn chairs and blankets then join us for a special featured film out among the airplanes.

- **Open Cockpit Day - May 23**
  Come see our newly restored B-52 Stratofortress on display at Castle Air Museum! This historic war-fighter is the plane that made Castle Air Force Base famous. Gates open at 8:30 AM.

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!

Part-time Landscaper - We have an opening for a paid part-time landscaper. There is always work that needs to be accomplished when the grass and weeds start growing. Pick your days; 35 hours a week. You can inquire with Jared. Of course, we also accept volunteers. There is plenty of work to go around. Help make our grounds beautiful!

FROM THE BOARD CHAIRMAN

MAJ GEN CLAY GARRISON USAF (RET)

Mark your calendars! Open Cockpit Day is May 23rd. This is the biggest fundraising event of the year for the museum. I encourage everyone to come out and see inside your favorite plane. We will have over 30 airplanes opened up for viewing. And come check out our newly repainted B-52! This aircraft is associated with Castle Air Force base more than any other and it was due for a refresh and corrosion control cycle. You are going to like it!

The pavilion project is moving right along. We've had several subcontractors on site this month for electrical, plumbing, and grading. I'm very excited by the offer from MID to remove all of our overhead electrical lines and underground our service as part of the project. Truly amazing. And I continue to be impressed by our partners at SPAN construction who are leading the design and build process. Please check out their display at Open Cockpit Day.

I want to close with a big thank you to all of our volunteers. Castle Air Museum is totally dependent on the work of our volunteers to succeed. From our docents, crew chiefs, landscapers, VC-9 tour guides, staff assistants, restoration teams, and many others. Plus, our youth from the Scouts, CAP, UC Merced, Pitman High School, etc. Thank you! We can't survive without you. If you want to join this great team, please contact our volunteer coordinator Bob Scoble. Until next month...

RESTORATION HANGAR

GREG STATHATOS, RESTORATION MANAGER

Another month has flown by, and it already feels like summer in Restoration. Our projects are heating up—and the progress is showing.

Pat has repaired the gaping hole in the TF-102, and it looks incredible. You'd never know there was damage thanks to the "magic" of Mr. Pickles. Pat lit the match, and Bill turned it into a roaring fire, completing nearly 90% of the fuselage and finishing the ailerons. Eesa continues work on the functional ordnance bays while I source the remaining parts.

Jeff and Barry continue making strong progress on the A-7 toward AirFest 2026. The vertical stabilizer and rudder are ready for installation, and all bodywork is complete. The fuselage is being sanded, with parts expected to be mounted before the next newsletter.

After more than 125 hours of sanding and over 5,000 sanding discs, the underside of the wings, engines, and fuel pods are ready for paint. Gabriel was a tremendous help while I was in Oregon for my son's wedding and has become a valuable addition to the team. Frank and Darrel have also contributed significantly to the B-52 project, including bringing out the Hound Dog missile and bomb loader. The top of the wings will be sanded before month's end, followed by black paint. With Open Cockpit 30 days away, the B-52 will be ready—and the star of the show.

Gilliene Nutt, our artist, has added a second piece of tail art to the SR-71—bringing back the iconic "Shark II" on 960 for the first time in decades. Around the same era that Jaws was making waves on Amity Island, 960 had its own "shark attack." This past weekend, Kim assisted her talented daughter while I focused on the equally important task of finding shade for a quick cat nap.

Darrel and Frank are keeping our equipment operational to maintain progress. Aaron has completed sanding his compressor project and is preparing it for primer and paint, creating another functional artifact for the team.

Amazon TCY2 out of Stockton has begun repainting the F-104 and is committed to finishing before Open Cockpit on May 23. Wednesday shifts (9:00 a.m.–12:00 p.m. and 3:00 p.m.–6:00 p.m.) bring in 6–10 volunteers, and they are already nearly 60% finished with sanding. Jesus and his team work tirelessly each shift.

There is a tremendous amount of work underway, and we have more projects than hands. If you have time and want to help preserve history, we would love to have you. No experience is necessary—we'll teach you everything you need to know. To become a Restoration volunteer, please contact Bob Scobel for more information.

CURATOR'S CORNER

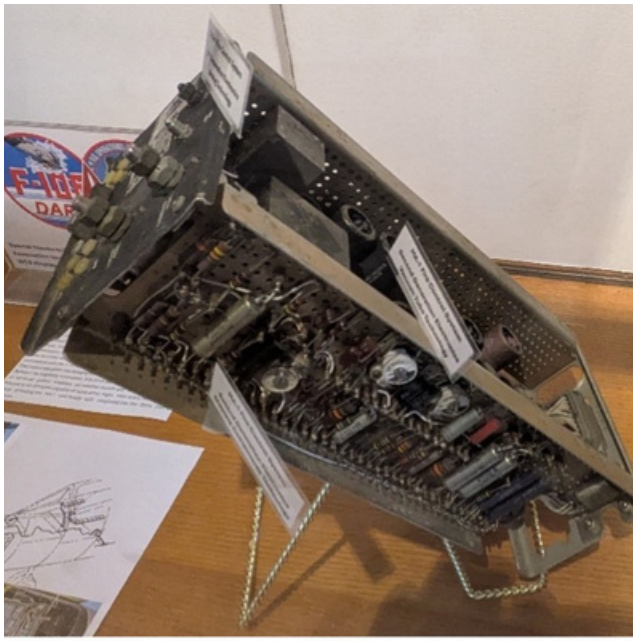
RUSTY WYNN, CURATOR

April has been largely focused on the National Museum of the Air Force inventory. While not as intensive as the five-year inventories, I am taking a thorough approach since this is my first and am also gathering the data needed to enter artifacts into our PastPerfect database. The goal is to complete the inventory by the end of the month.

While opening many of the indoor display cases for the inventory, I took the opportunity to refresh several exhibits. Artifacts have been reorganized and consolidated to better tell their stories.

A new display has been completed featuring the donated F-106 "black box," highlighting its role as the Hughes MA-1 Fire Control System, its advanced technology, integration with the F-106 weapons system, and its connection to SAGE, the real-time automated command and control system. Special thanks to the F-106 Association, Bob Kwiecinkski, and Dave Kuntz for the donation.

The display also recognizes the three F-106 units stationed at Castle Air Force Base between 1959 and 1981 that provided air defense for the western United States: the 456th Fighter-Interceptor Squadron (1959–1968), the 84th Fighter-Interceptor Squadron (1973–1981), and the 318th Figter-Interceptor Squadron, Detachment 1 (1981–1983)



VOLUNTEER SERVICES

BOB SCOBLE, VOLUNTEER COORDINATOR

The online application process remains our primary method for recruiting volunteers. In March, eight individuals applied; six became Crew Chiefs or Assistant Crew Chiefs, supporting aircraft that had gone without dedicated care, and one joined the Restoration team. Their enthusiasm is already making an impact.

With major events like the Bombs Away Car Show and Spring Open Cockpit approaching, volunteer support is critical. On Open Cockpit Day, Crew Chiefs showcase their aircraft while Restoration volunteers prepare planes, hangars, and "The Hidden Collection" for public display. Special Events volunteers play a key role as well, handling cashiering, gate operations, vendor coordination, and food service. We are also grateful for the continued support from the Sheriff's Cadets, who assist with parking, and the Civil Air Patrol Cadets, who help manage the museum grounds.

Efforts to grow our volunteer base continue through community outreach. I recently met with Steven Montgomery and his students at Pitman High School in Turlock to discuss student volunteer opportunities, with plans for a follow-up visit. A conversation with Brett Nicolson from the Merced Union High School District also opened the door to additional partnerships.

Volunteers Reggie Hill, his wife Cheryl, and I met with Maria Dietz at Joe Stefani Elementary School to coordinate participation in their Career Day, "Reading Can Give You Wings." Thanks to their efforts—and our mobile F-16 golf cart—we are expanding outreach through "Road Trips around town." The Restoration Team has upgraded the F-16, secured a larger trailer, and made it road-ready for upcoming events.

We are always looking for more volunteers to support these efforts and help us continue connecting with our community.

AIRCRAFT OF THE MONTH

RUSTY WYNN, CURATOR

Aircraft of the Month: Boeing B-52D, 56-0612

May 23, 2026, marks Castle Air Museum's Open Cockpit Event, and this year's featured aircraft is the museum's B-52D Stratofortress.

Since becoming operational in 1955, the B-52 Stratofortress has served as the primary long-range heavy bomber of the Strategic Air Command. It first flew on April 15, 1952, and a total of 750 aircraft were built before production ended in October 1963, including 170 D models. The D variants were modified to carry conventional bombs externally, and later upgrades allowed them to carry Hound Dog air-to-surface missiles and Quail decoy missiles. The B-52 has set numerous records. On January 18, 1957, three B-52Bs completed the first nonstop, round-the-world flight by a jet aircraft, lasting 45 hours and 19 minutes with only three aerial refuelings en route. A B-52 also conducted the first airborne hydrogen bomb drop over Bikini Atoll on May 21, 1956. In June 1965, B-52s entered combat, flying conventional bombing missions in support of operations in Southeast Asia. By August 1973, they had flown 126,615 combat sorties, with 17 aircraft lost to enemy action.

Castle Air Museum's B-52D Stratofortress was constructed in 1957 at Boeing's Plant II in Seattle, Washington, as a B-52D-80-BO. It was assigned serial number 56-0612 by the United States Air Force. On September 27, 1957, 56-0612 received its first assignment with the 28th Bomb Wing, Strategic Air Command (SAC), at Ellsworth Air Force Base, South Dakota. On April 24, 1960, it was transferred to the 494th Bomb Wing (SAC) at Sheppard Air Force Base, Texas, where it remained until April 1, 1966, when it was reassigned to the 509th Bomb Wing at Pease Air Force Base, New Hampshire.

On December 29, 1965, 56-0612 was sent to the San Antonio Air Materiel Area (AFLC) at Kelly Air Force Base, Texas, most likely to undergo "Big Belly" modifications. These upgrades increased its conventional bomb capacity from 27 to 84 internally (500-lb) and 24 externally, or from 27 to 42 internally (750-lb) with 24 externally.

During the Vietnam War, 56-0612 participated in both strategic and tactical bombing campaigns known as Operation Arc Light and Operation Linebacker II. Operation Arc Light was a long-running campaign from June 18, 1965, through August 15, 1973, involving B-52 operations from Andersen Air Force Base, Guam, and U-Tapao Royal Thai Navy Airfield in Thailand.

Photograph by Brian Lockett

On June 10, 1967, 56-0612 was assigned to the 92nd Strategic Aerospace Wing (SAC) at Fairchild Air Force Base, Washington. From November 22, 1967, through August 7, 1972, it was deployed overseas, operating from Andersen Air Force Base, Guam; U-Tapao Royal Thai Air Base, Thailand; and Kadena Air Base, Okinawa, while assigned to multiple units, including the 99th Bomb Wing and the 92nd Strategic Aerospace Wing.

Between 1970 and 1972, 56-0612 served with several bombardment wings. In 1970, it was assigned to the 96th Strategic Aerospace Wing and later to the 28th Bomb Wing (SAC) at Andersen Air Force Base, Guam. In 1971, it served with the 7th Bomb Wing (SAC) at U-Tapao Royal Thai Air Base, Thailand.

(Continued on page 5)

Photographer: Unknown Unidentified B-52

AIRCRAFT OF THE MONTH

RUSTY WYNN, CURATOR

(Continued from page 4)

In 1972, 56-0612 was reassigned to the 93rd Bomb Wing (SAC) at Castle Air Force Base, California. That same year, it again served with the 7th Bomb Wing and was deployed to Andersen Air Force Base, Guam, and U-Tapao Royal Thai Air Base, Thailand.

From December 18 to December 29, 1972, Operation Linebacker II—also known as the "Christmas Bombings" or the "11-Day War"—was conducted. This intensive bombing campaign played a key role in bringing North Vietnam back to peace negotiations and ultimately to the signing of the Paris Peace Accords.

In 1974, 56-0612 was assigned to the 43rd Strategic Wing (SAC) at Andersen Air Force Base, Guam, and later to the 307th Strategic Wing (SAC) at U-Tapao Royal Thai Air Base, Thailand. On September 26, 1974, it was reassigned to the 96th Strategic Aerospace Wing at Dyess Air Force Base, Texas.

On December 20, 1974, 56-0612 was transferred to the 22nd Bomb Wing (SAC) at March Air Force Base, California, where it remained until April 23, 1978. It was then reassigned to the 43rd Strategic Wing (SAC) at Andersen Air Force Base, Guam.

On July 2, 1979, 56-0612 returned to March Air Force Base, California, once again serving with the 22nd Bomb Wing.

By October 25, 1982, 56-0612 was assigned to the 93rd Bomb Wing (SAC) at Castle Air Force Base, California.

In 1985, 56-0612 was loaned to Castle Air Museum by the National Museum of the United States Air Force.

June 29, 1985, 56-0612 being placed at Castle Air Museum

Photographer: Unknown Unidentified B-52

Photographer: Tony Moniz

GIFT SHOP

LUCY SILVA, RETAIL SALES MANAGER

The gift shop is the central hub for anyone making contact with the museum. Membership credentials, tours, RV park reservations, mail, phone inquiries, donations...They do it all! And they sell tickets, greet guests, and keep the gift shop clean and ready, too. They are the face of the museum and a vital part of the operation. Come by and meet the team.

MEMBERSHIP SERVICES

JANIE 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