



Doug Smith, left, and his son, Marshall, right, led the daunting project of turning the late Harold "Red" Smith's massive collection of vintage drones and parts into a museum.



the U.S. Air Force, who was tragically killed by a driver in 2017 before his dream of opening a museum could be realized. Red Smith was born in Sioux Falls, Iowa, and during his retirement moved to Parkersburg, where he remained until his passing.

Red's son, Doug Smith, owns R&D Aeronautical Engineering, which is located at the Caddo Mills Airport, adjacent to the AUVM museum.

After Red's passing, his children and grandchildren took on the daunting task of organizing and conducting research on the drones, other vehicles and thousands of parts dating back to the late '30s

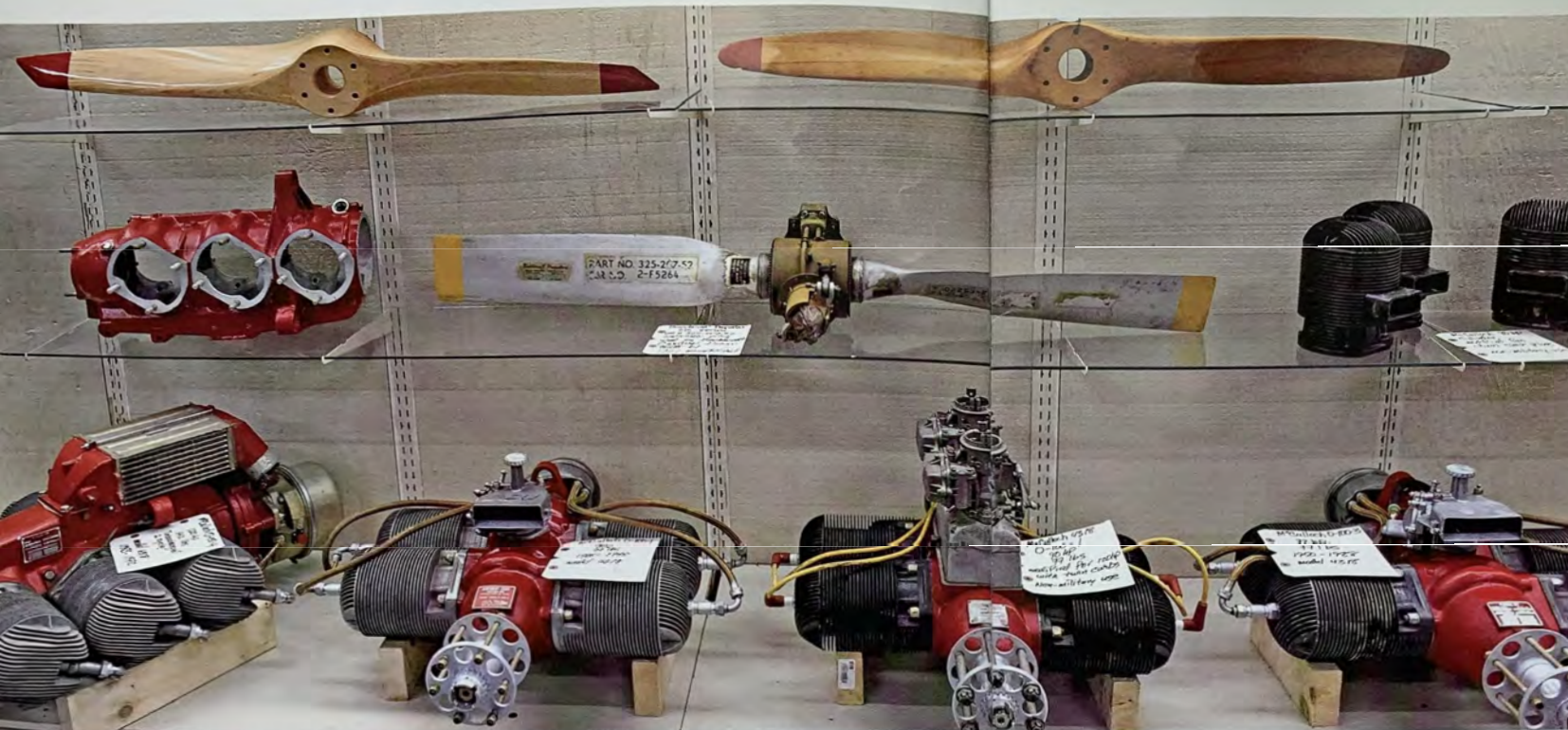
First-ever drone museum to open in Hunt County

Caddo Mills is now home to a unique museum, one devoted to the history of unmanned aircraft, or drones.

The Aviation Unmanned Vehicle Museum (AUVM) – which contains more than 40 historic drones – held a soft opening in January and expects to celebrate with a grand opening in May, just in time for Armed Forces Day or Memorial Day.

The world's first drone museum was built from the personal collection of drones that belonged to the late Harold "Red" Smith, a retired lieutenant colonel with

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o having more than 40 historic unmanned aircraft on display, the AUVM also contains several exhibits featuring engines and other drone parts.



Smith, left, and his father, Doug Smith, rummage through the warehouse portion of the AUVM that is filled with hundreds of painstakingly identified and organized parts for other military vehicles that date back to as far as

come into his possession.

"Grandpa always wanted to open a drone museum," Red's grandson Marshall Smith said. "I was his personal assistant when he was working on drones."

"There was one time when he couldn't find this special wrench that he had made for working on the drones and he was walking around blaming me and my dad, asking 'Where'd ya' put it?', then he turned around, and it had been in his back pocket the whole time," Marshall Smith said with a laugh.

"He was a bona fide lieutenant colonel who gave us our orders and expected them to be followed, but drones were his passion," Marshall Smith added.

Throughout his military career, when Red was working in Strategic Air Command, he was central to the development of drones. In 1971, during the Vietnam War, he designed the BGM-34A, the first strike drone.

The BGM-34A was designed to be launched by a piloted plane that was already in the air, and then the pilot would operate the drone remotely, using a camera built into the nose of the drone to navigate, and carry a bomb to the target area and drop it.

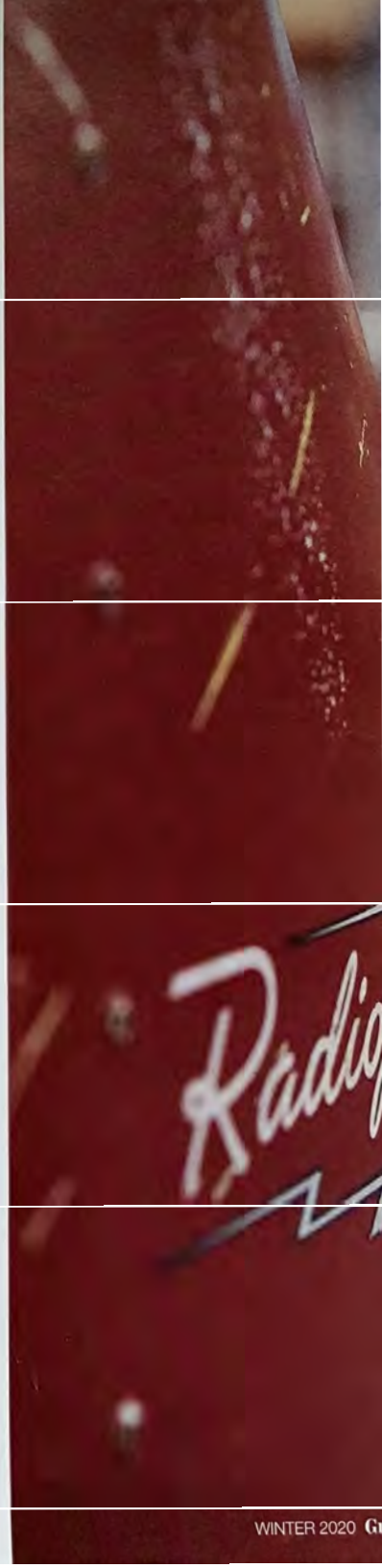
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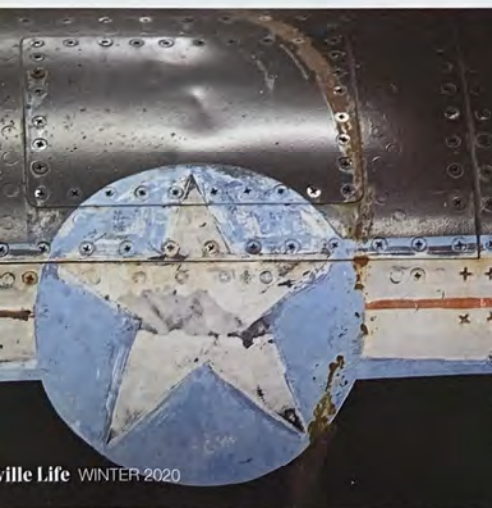
air missiles, and we were losing a lot of pilots to them," Red's son, Doug Smith, told Greenville Life. "The use of the drone saved a lot of pilots' lives and its radar-jamming technology proved very critical toward the end of the war."

Because of Red's role in the development of the first strike drone, it's fitting that the world's last known surviving Vietnam-era BGM-34A sits at the entrance that separates the museum's warehouse from the museum proper, greeting guests with its sinisterly grinning nose art.

"Late, during Vietnam, dogfight tests were done between the drone and a Phantom F-4 fighter-bomber," Marshall said. "The pilot of the Phantom had a hard time locking on target to hit the drone, and in fact, since the drone could pivot on a much tighter radius, it was able to get behind the Phantom into the attack position."

"Even though the drone performed well, the Air Force mostly remained pretty resistant to the idea of using unmanned aircraft – maybe because pilots felt like it took something away from them – so after Vietnam, the funding was pulled from the research and development of drones and went into fighters," Marshall Smith





explained. "It wasn't until about the time of the first Gulf War that interest in drones really returned."

While many attendees may be surprised to learn that the first strike drones were used in the Vietnam War, soon after passing through the door behind the BGM-34A is the first drone to receive a U.S. military contract, the OQ-2A Radioplane, which first went into production in 1941.

Designed by famous British silent film actor, boxer, inventor and all-around modern-era Renaissance man Reginald Denny, the OQ-2A was used for "target tugging," where the drone would fly by, pulling a banner with round targets on it for soldiers to practice shooting at.

During the museum's soft opening in January, Denny's granddaughter, Kim Pucci, explained much of the early history of drones.

"During World War II, when manned aircraft were used to pull targets for training purposes, it was of course dangerous for the pilot, because they could get hit and crash," Pucci said. "So, with a remote controlled plane, it was much safer and a parachute system was added to it so that if it did get shot, it didn't have to crash and could still be salvageable."

"But, my grandfather was also very forward thinking with drones and pitched to military contractors that they could also be used as air torpedoes or for reconnaissance, but the contractors were skeptical about unmanned aircraft at the time," Pucci continued.

"He also had trouble pitching drones because he wasn't a business man. He was an actor, an artist, an inventor ... he didn't even patent his designs."

"My grandfather would be very pleased to see this museum, though, and now I know that both Red and Reg are looking down smiling at this," Pucci said with a grin.

Even though the AUMM has yet to have its official opening, appointments can be made for private tours by calling 903-914-2200. The museum is at 4246 N FM 1565, adjacent to the Caddo Mills Municipal Airport.

To learn more about the drones in the AUMM's collection, visit the museum's website at www.aumm.net.



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