

# CENTENNIAL COUNTDOWN

DECEMBER 17, 2003, MARKS THE 100TH ANNIVERSARY OF POWERED FLIGHT. EACH MONTH OF THIS YEAR, *PLANE & PILOT* WILL FEATURE A REMARKABLE MOMENT IN THE HISTORY OF AVIATION.

## In Their Own Words

*Lost And Found Aviation Sounds dedicates itself to preserving aviation's aural legacy*

By Melissa Brandzel

In the 100 years since the Wright brothers took their first flight at Kitty Hawk, many efforts have been made to restore and display our rich aviation heritage. Museums all over the world, from the National Air and Space Museum in Washington, D.C., to the American Air Museum in Cambridgeshire, England, contain numerous records of our flight achievements as well as our missions in space and war. Photographs, film clips and written transcripts abound. Little has been done to support our audio records of aviation history, however.

Enter Chris Butterfield, curator of Lost And Found Aviation Sounds (LAFAS). A radio producer and aviation enthusiast, Butterfield established LAFAS to "rescue and preserve any audio recordings related to aviation and space flight."

The project began not long ago when Butterfield received a copy of some old wire recordings from his friend Ken McDaniel, a former sound engineer. Uncovered in a Washington, D.C., basement, the four hours of recordings contained interviews with the team that broke the sound barrier in 1947. For Butterfield, it was an incredible find. "What makes these recordings special is that they include not only Chuck Yeager, but other people intimately involved with the X-1 test program. These tapes allow their voices to describe the events while they're still 'raw' in their own minds."



**Captain (later Major General) Charles "Chuck" Yeager, the first pilot to break the sound barrier.**

Now, Butterfield, McDaniel and a third partner, Liz Fawden, donate their labor to preserve such recordings. The process is arduous: One hour of tape can involve a minimum of four to five hours to restore and often more. The material is checked for nicks, slices and other defects, then carefully wound onto a reel-to-reel player. Next, the recording is played into a com-

puter, where more glitches are removed, and then it gets de-crackled and de-hummed. Some tapes require even more TLC, such as a special 16-hour heat-treatment process. In addition, the team must play detective at times, solving the puzzles of when and where some of these unlabeled tapes were recorded, and by whom, so they can be properly identified.

