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The Newsletter of the Helicopter Conservancy, Ltd.

FIVE BY FIVE

A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

In one European folktale, a hungry traveler stops in a village to rest from his journey. He sets up a cooking pot over an open fire and soon has water boiling. Dropping in a single stone, he tells an assembled group of curious onlookers that he is making stone soup. Several of them volunteer something to add to the pot—a vegetable, a cut of meat—reasoning that it needs a little flavor. At the end of the story a rich, robust soup is shared by all, thanks to a stone, a little imaginative thinking and a cooperative spirit. In some versions of this story, the stone is later forgotten, but in others, it has special significance. After all, it brought a community together.

The Helicopter Conservancy is in its own way a stone soup story. It was founded a few years ago for the purpose of restoring a time-worn, castaway UH-1D Huey hulk as a tribute to veterans. But through the many donations and hard work that followed, the Conservancy has since grown to become much more. We now have several helicopters, new programs and—most importantly—a community.

Yet restoration of that first helicopter never

seemed to grow closer to fulfillment: its advanced state of disrepair made any museum-quality restoration a daunting, long-term prospect. Meanwhile, we had a growing backlog of projects. This summer, our board voted to transfer this helicopter to a nearby VFW post, reasoning that it was the best opportunity to complete it during the lifetimes of its original crewmembers. VFW Post 8514 of Osseo, Wisconsin will be restoring this Huey over the next two to three years for aerial display.

Like the stone in the folktale, this helicopter is a special item. We are sad to see it go, but know that at its new home in Osseo's Stoddard Park, it will—like the stone—continue to bring a community together.

In this issue, we'll read about the first helicopter medevac mission and a Minnesota native's remarkable career in aviation. We close by looking at the aviation photography of another Minnesotan. Read on!

Kenneth Eward
President

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AROUND THE HANGAR

Our workshop activities are winding down for the winter after a productive year. The continuing pandemic was much less a factor for our in-person work than it had been in 2020 and our VR Huey

mission simulator project has made great strides. We completed the first phase of this project on September 15—installation and testing of the primary flight control systems and seat shakers—and took the simulator for

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AROUND THE HANGAR *(continued)*



Mitch Madison (left) and Brandon Montanye (right) complete the installation of a new instrument panel in the VR Huey mission simulator. The simulator will let visitors experience a range of realistic missions and also try their hand at flying. (Helicopter Conservancy)

Cover photo: a Bell Boeing MV-22 Osprey is refueled for a night mission in central Iraq during February 2008. The Osprey is the world's first production tiltrotor aircraft, entering operational service with the USMC in 2007 following a developmental period spanning two decades. The Osprey's rotor tip safety lights trace green halos in the darkness. (Adapted from a photo by Chief Mass Communication Specialist Joe Kane/USN)

The appearance of U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) visual information does not imply or constitute DoD endorsement.

a successful maiden "hop" with veteran Huey pilot Mitch Madison at the controls. Mechanical and electrical systems are working well and we're looking forward to pressing ahead in the spring. When finished, the simulator will give visitors a chance to fly a range of authentic missions as members of a flight crew, with the option of a veteran pilot doing the flying and acting as docent. The Huey's dual-control cockpit will allow the adventurous a chance to take the controls themselves.

Bell UH-1D 65-09584

Members of VFW Post 8514 of Osseo, Wisconsin arrived October 9 to transport UH-1D "584" to their workshop, where they will be restoring it for aerial display in Osseo's Stoddard Park. UH-1D 584 was built in 1965 and was the first ship of the serial block assigned to the 173rd Assault Helicopter Company "Robin Hoods," departing with them for Vietnam in March 1966. It saw action throughout the spring and summer, transporting troops of the 3rd Brigade, 1st Infantry Division on missions against the Cu Chi tunnel complexes and other hotspots around Saigon. After leading a charmed existence to that point, UH-1D 584 crashed during a combat lift on August 30 and was sent home for extensive repairs. (UH-1D 584's replacement is currently on display in the National Museum of American History in Washington, DC.) We wish Post

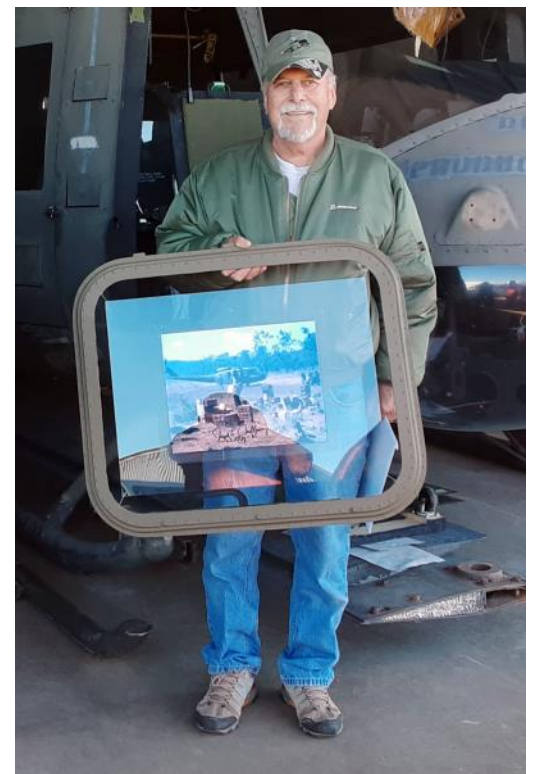
8514 the best in their restoration efforts and look forward to seeing UH-1D 584 on display.

VHPA

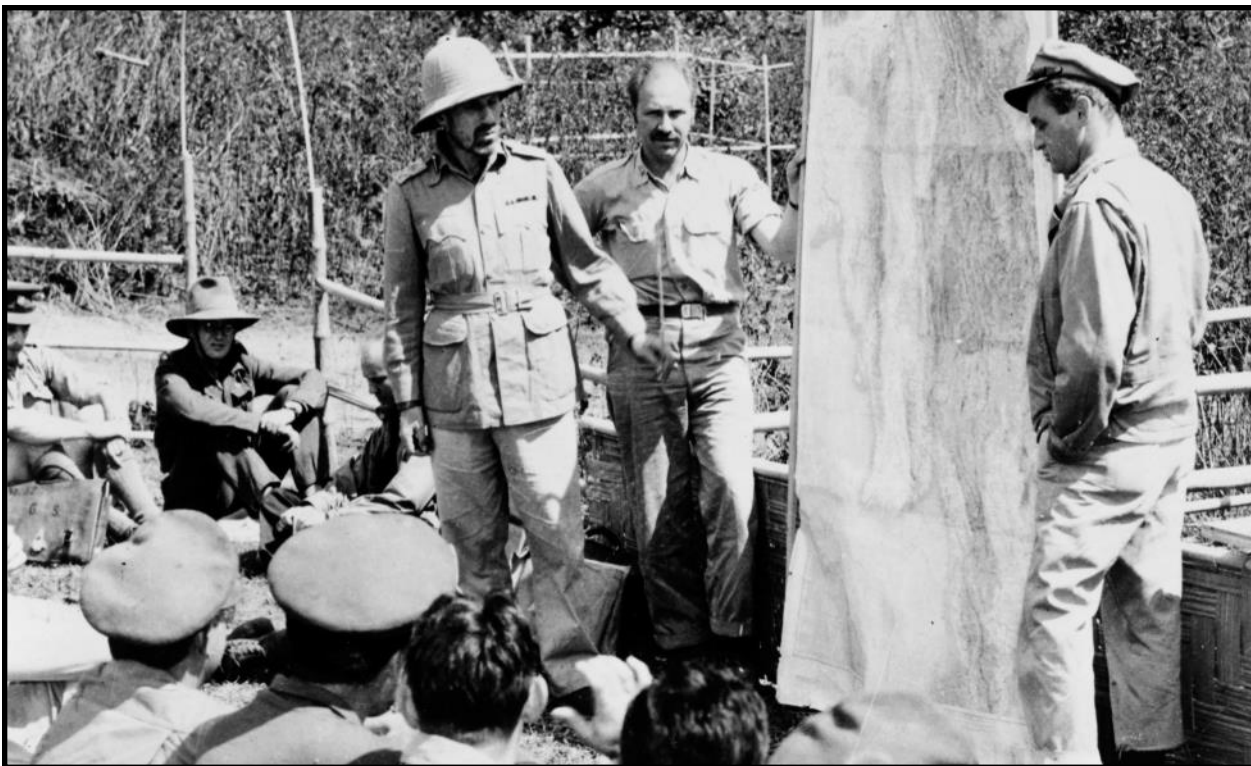
We were honored to host the September meeting of the Upper Midwest Chapter, Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association. It was a good opportunity to see old friends, hear stories and make new acquaintances. The wind was particularly gusty that day, threatening to send several pizzas aloft at the picnic lunch that followed. Hover check!

Daly Award Honoree

Mitch Madison was awarded our first Christopher J. Daly Award in recognition of efforts above and beyond as a volunteer. Mitch is a retired army helicopter pilot and Vietnam veteran who joined us in 2019. This year's award was accompanied by a signed photo taken at the 1965 battle at LZ X-Ray by the late newspaper correspondent and columnist Joseph Galloway. Thank you, Mitch, for your outstanding dedication and work.



2021 Daly Award recipient Mitch Madison (Helicopter Conservancy)



THE FIRST BATTLEFIELD MEDEVAC— BURMA, 1944

By Christopher L. Kolakowski

Visitors to the National Museum of the US Army in Fort Belvoir, Virginia, will see a helicopter displayed in a jungle setting as it rescues wounded men. This may be unremarkable on the surface, except the scene is in the World War II gallery: it depicts the first helicopter medevac in military history. This event was part of the winged invasion of Burma, codenamed Operation THURSDAY, the largest airborne operation mounted to that point in history. In addition to being an important and dramatic contribution to the Allied war effort in Burma, the operation also made military history in its battlefield use of helicopters. This is its story.

Background—Operation THURSDAY

Operation THURSDAY originated in the mind of British Major General Orde C. Wingate. He advocated inserting infantry into the enemy rear to create havoc and disruption, calling it “long-range penetration.” He dubbed his force the *Chindits*, a corruption of *chintse*, the Bur-

mese word for lion. In 1943 the brigade-sized Chindits moved overland into Burma from Imphal in India, spending three months harassing Japanese rear areas before exfiltrating in scattered groups. The Chindit expedition provided a tonic of victory, but with a significant cost: the men had left a third of their number behind as casualties, including a large number of wounded who could not be evacuated.

General Wingate was one of the most unorthodox personalities ever encountered by the American military. He achieved both infamy and fame fighting Arabs in Palestine in the late 1930s and Italians in 1941. He had created the Chindits and directed their 1943 expedition into Burma, known as Operation LONGCLOTH. Wingate drove himself and his men hard with a single-minded determination to win that infused his Chindits with a very high esprit de corps. He was also deeply eccentric in appearance, wearing an old pith helmet and an alarm clock in place of a wristwatch. Wingate also

Above: British commander Maj. General Orde Wingate, wearing his characteristic pith helmet, and US Colonels John Alison and Philip Cochran of the 1st Air Commando Group (standing, at middle and right, respectively) conduct a briefing before a raid behind enemy lines in Burma. Their teamwork during Operation THURSDAY set the stage for the first helicopter medevac mission in history. (USAF)

would receive visitors naked, ate onions because of their supposed curative properties, and ordered his officers to always move at a run.

At the First Quebec Conference in August 1943, Wingate recounted his experiences during LONGCLOTH, advocating for a larger force to do more for longer in the Japanese rear areas. He wore his unwashed battle uniform in meetings, which contrasted with the senior leaders in their polished dress uniforms. Wingate's forceful words and appearance made a deep impression. "You took one look at that face," recalled General Henry H. "Hap" Arnold, Chief of the US Army Air Forces, "like the face of a pale Indian chieftain, topping the uniform still smelling of jungle and sweat and war, and you thought: 'Hell, this man is serious.'"

Hap Arnold left Quebec impressed with Wingate and determined to help him. Wingate's presentation had dwelt on the fraught necessity of leaving wounded behind for lack of medical transport. In Quebec Arnold had offered up to three hundred light planes for the Chindits to use in their next expedition, but upon returning to Washington he determined that he could do yet more to help the Chindits move and fight.

Arnold sent for two of his best young officers, Lieutenant Colonels Philip Cochran and John Alison. The two were good friends who had seen considerable fighting: Cochran in North Africa and Alison in Asia. Unable to choose between them, Arnold decided to make them co-commanders of a new force, officially designated as 5318th Provisional Air Unit but informally named 1st Air Commando Group. The two decided among themselves that the extroverted and plainspoken Cochran would be in charge, with Alison as his second in command. Arnold told Cochran and Alison to "draw up a list of what you want," and the 1st Air Commando left for India with a miniature air force that included fighters, bombers, transports and liaison aircraft, plus six prototype Sikorsky YR-4B helicopters.

On March 5, 1944 Wingate prepared to kick off Operation THURSDAY with a massive airlift of men, mules and materiel into Burma from his base at Lalaghat airfield in India. The 1st

Air Commando Group would airlift this force by glider to three forward airfields cleared in the jungle, codenamed Broadway, Piccadilly, and Chowringhee. The operation had the objective of aiding the advance of US Lieutenant General Joseph Stilwell's Sino-US forces toward Myitkyina and movement of a separate Chinese command across the Salween River. It was also intended to sow chaos and confusion among the opposing Japanese troops.

The same week the Chindits flew into Burma, Japanese Lt. General Mutaguchi Renya's Fifteenth Army launched an invasion of India by attacking toward Imphal and Kohima. British forces under General William Slim pulled back toward the Imphal Plain, where fighting would last until Mutaguchi ordered a retreat in early July.

Meanwhile, Wingate set the Chindits to work. Brigadier Mike Calvert's 77th Brigade moved south toward Indaw while 111th Brigade fanned out north and east of Chowringhee, which closed down on March 11. Wingate flew in two of his reserve brigades, 3d West African and 14th, while 23d Brigade was kept back by Slim and eventually saw action at Kohima. Wingate set up two more strongholds: White City near Mawlu (so called because of the parachutes that festooned the surrounding jungle), and Aberdeen northwest of Indaw. These efforts cut the railroad and panicked the Japanese rear area troops, drawing reserves that Mutaguchi needed in India. However, efforts to take Indaw itself failed in the face of stiff Japanese resistance.

On the evening of March 24, just as Operation THURSDAY was poised to develop further, General Wingate's B-25 crashed in the hills west of Imphal on the return flight from a series of visits to his commanders; there were no survivors. At a stroke, all Chindit plans were thrown into the air. "Wingate's death," recalled Tulloch, "could not have come at a worse time." On March 27, Slim appointed Brigadier WDA Lentaigne to take his place.

The Helicopter Rescue

The American pilots supporting the Chindits kept them supplied with food and ammunition, while light planes took casualties out, ensuring evacuation within same day or 72

Cochran's 1st Air Commando Group included a novelty for its day: six prototype Sikorsky helicopters.



Lt. Carter Harman stands (at left) in front of his Sikorsky YR-4B with five other members of the 1st Air Commando Group shortly after his historic mission. On April 25-26, 1944, Harman had made the first helicopter battlefield medevac rescue in history. (USAF)

hours after being wounded in the jungle. They also made military history. On April 21, 1944, a light plane carrying three British casualties and an American pilot went down 15 miles west of White City. The distress call was heard, and Calvert's staff quickly pinpointed their location. Because of where the crash occurred, planes could not get in to rescue the men, and the men could not move to another location. Calvert sent an overland rescue expedition from White City. But it was race against time whether the rescuers or the Japanese would reach these effectively-defenseless men first.

Cochran saw an opportunity to use helicopters to save them, but found that only one was available because of maintenance issues and crashes. "Send the eggbeater in," he commanded. The Commandos' lone operational

Sikorsky YR-4B helicopter flew from its base in Lalaghat, India, over 500 miles away, to Aberdeen in stages, arriving April 25. Its pilot, Lieutenant Carter Harman, learned that Chindits had secured an airstrip in a riverbed ten miles away from the stranded men. He flew to the riverbed, landed and refueled, got his bearings, and took off immediately for the clearing where they waited.

Harman knew the Sikorsky would struggle to carry himself and only one passenger, but as he arrived at the jungle clearing where the crash survivors awaited him, another thought preyed on his mind. The heat and humidity of Burma's climate had reduced the lifting capacity of the little Sikorsky, powered by a radial engine rated at only 185 horsepower. Taking off again from the confined clearing with a

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casualty aboard could prove difficult, if not impossible. With no alternatives, he used a trick involving some risk: revving the engine to maximum RPM, he popped up into the air, relying on the momentum of the spinning blades to hold the helo aloft just long enough to build the forward speed needed to fly.


Harman picked up the most severe casualties first, but the engine overheated and needed a rest. After spending a long night at the improvised airstrip, he flew out the final casualty, leaving the pilot alone in the jungle. Harman returned for the pilot, who scrambled aboard, reporting unidentified troops nearby. Harman put on the power, lifting off just as those troops swarmed the landing zone. The relieved Americans saw they were Chindits, not Japanese. Harman flew back to Aberdeen, having accomplished the first battle-field helicopter rescue in military history.

For six more weeks the Chindits and Japanese battled in North Burma with neither side

gaining complete advantage. In August the remaining exhausted men flew back to India, ending the campaign.

Conclusion

This would not be the last helicopter rescue in World War II. Air Commando helicopters operating in Burma and China would save a total of 22 men according to Alison, while helicopters in the Philippines evacuated many more. Another decade would pass before the helicopter emerged as a fully capable aircraft, but what happened in the lonely Burma jungle in April 1944 foreshadowed the helicopter's important role as a medical evacuation vehicle in all that has followed since.

Christopher Kolakowski is Director of the Wisconsin Veterans Museum. His forthcoming book, Nations in the Balance: The India-Burma Campaigns, December 1943-August 1944, will be published next May by Casemate Publishers. 

PROFILE

2022 Minnesota Aviation Hall of Fame Inductee Tim Callister

Thoughtful and reticent by nature, Tim Callister is not one to talk about himself: he would much rather turn the conversation to the accomplishments of his protégés. Yet throughout a remarkable career, Callister has done much worth talking about.

Growing up on a family farm in West Concord, Minnesota in the 1950s, Callister learned integrity and the value of hard work from his parents, who taught him to never cut corners. He credits his father with teaching him how to solve problems creatively, which served him well in operating and repairing farm machinery as a teen. This skill would become even more important during the challenges he would face as an adult.

Callister's introduction to aviation came in the form of a plane ticket, purchased for him by his parents as a special present on his seventh

birthday. Passenger air travel was a novelty to a Midwestern boy growing up in that day, and Callister took full advantage of the opportunity to buttonhole the pilot after the flight, peppering him with questions about what it was like to fly. Callister's brother later encouraged him to become a helicopter pilot, setting him on a path that would lead to graduation from army flight school at Ft. Rucker, Alabama in 1969, at the height of the Vietnam War.

Arriving in Vietnam after receiving his wings, Callister discovered that despite his intensive training, there was still much to learn. He flew as an attack helicopter pilot with the 189th Assault Helicopter Company "Ghostriders" in Vietnam's Central Highlands, earning a Distinguished Flying Cross for his part in a daring extraction of a long-range reconnaissance patrol near Duc Co. As the transport helicopter assigned to retrieve the patrol arrived at the

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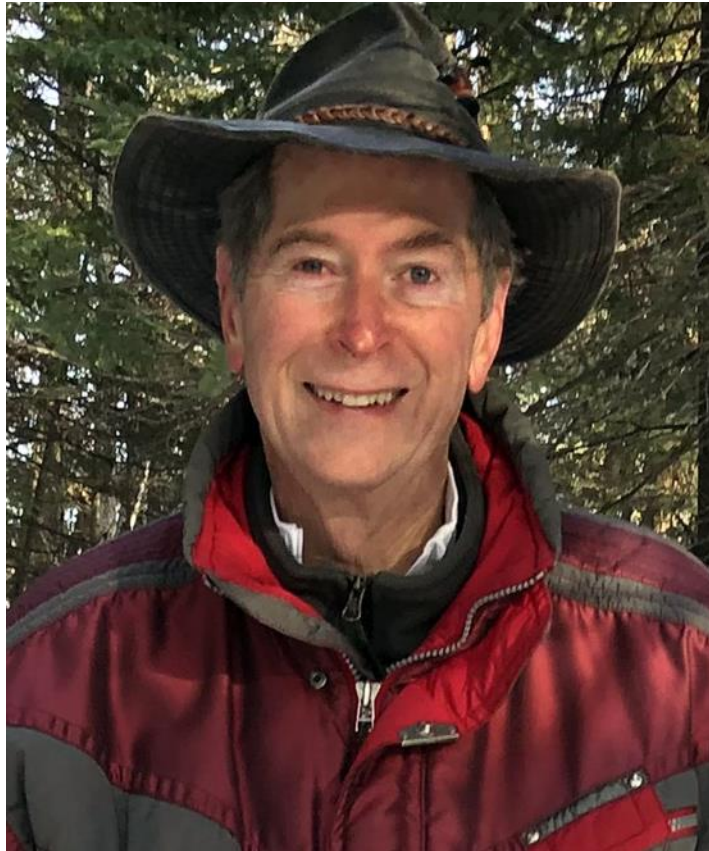
HeloMuseum.org

pickup zone, it was taken under heavy enemy ground fire and radioed for support. Callister was pilot in command of one of two helicopter gunships responding to the call for help. Together, the two helicopter crews provided accurate suppressing fire long enough for the reconnaissance patrol to be extracted safely. According to the award citation, Callister's courage and dedication were "in keeping with the highest traditions of the military service and reflect great credit upon himself, his unit and the United States Army." Callister's other decorations include the Bronze Star and Air Medal.

Callister's college studies had been interrupted by the war, but on his return home he completed a bachelor's degree in transportation & urban planning at St. Cloud State College. He continued to fly helicopters, now as an instructor pilot in the Minnesota Army National Guard. Meanwhile, a feasibility study that he had undertaken as a college student for the Metropolitan Airports Commission led to a job there in 1974 as an administrative aide.

In the years that followed, Callister was active in industry advocacy, becoming an involved member of the American Association of Airport Executives (AAAE), where he held many national positions. In 1983, he helped cofound the Minnesota Council of Airports. Meanwhile, he advanced through a number of management and director positions at the Metropolitan Airports Commission, assuming responsibility for the six general aviation airports under its authority. Callister became director of Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport (MSP) in 1996, helping to oversee a \$3.1 billion transformation of the airport that began in that year. He was working in this position on September 11, 2001 during the terror attacks in New York and at the Pentagon. Yet despite the tragedy of that day and the shockwaves it sent through the nation's airports, he found a silver lining: "You realize just how much people in the aviation community help each other. The airlines, FBOs [fixed-base operators], hotels and other related industries all banded together to help each other get through the crisis."


Since 2005, Callister has been a senior aviation planner with the firm Mead & Hunt and now



Minnesota Aviation Hall of Fame inductee Tim Callister (Courtesy T. Callister)

considers himself semi-retired. He has more time available for hobbies and outdoor pursuits, often accompanied by his wife Barbara and their daughter Jill, a neonatal nurse. Callister is also active in the Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association and served as president of the Upper Midwest Chapter in 2019-20.

Of all his achievements to date, Callister is most proud of two: earning his wings and taking the helm of St. Paul Downtown Airport in his first job as an airport director. His advice to younger people planning to enter the aviation field? "Get a good education first, then either volunteer or get a part-time job at an airport. People in aviation will always reach out to help younger people get started."

On August 1, 2021, Timothy C. Callister became one of seven 2022 inductees to the Minnesota Aviation Hall of Fame in recognition of his lifetime of achievement. 

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Preserving helicopter history

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SHORT FINAL



An MH-60S Knighthawk photographed aboard the USS *Independence* (LCS-2) while in port at Pensacola, Florida in April 2015. (Brandon Montanye)

Retired naval aviator and historian Brandon Montanye began taking pictures of aircraft at a young age. His interest in photography was kindled by an uncle who was himself an aviation photographer and by the striking images appearing in *The Cutting Edge*, the classic 1986 photo book by F-14 pilot C.J. Heatley III. "[Heatley] would throw his camera in his helmet bag and snap a photo when he had the opportunity," observes Montanye. "When I started flying, I did the same."

Montanye began his own naval career in 1997 as a surface warfare officer, later transferring into aviation. Unlike Heatley, who flew fighter jets, Montanye chose helicopters, piloting Sikorsky MH-60S Knighthawks on six deployments before retiring as a lieutenant commander in 2017. While a naval officer, Mon-

tanye attended the US Army Command and General Staff College at Ft. Leavenworth, Kan., earning a master's degree in military history.

Now back in his home state of Minnesota, Montanye is a high school substitute teacher and serves on the boards of the Navy League of Minnesota and the Minnesota Aviation Hall of Fame. But he has never lost his love of flying and remains an avid shutterbug: "I take pictures of subjects I find interesting and not necessarily just aircraft," says Montanye. "As a historian, I think photographs are an excellent way to document history. As the saying goes, 'A picture is worth a thousand words.'"

Brandon Montanye lives in Franconia, Minn. with his wife Deborah and children Amelia, Charlie and Cordero. He can be reached at: brandon_montanye@hotmail.com.

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