



Vol. 1, No. 1
Spring 2021

The Newsletter of the Helicopter Conservancy, Ltd.

FIVE BY FIVE

A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

I grew up in a family deeply rooted in aviation history. From the muddy forward airfields of World War I France to the present day, many a cousin or an uncle has strapped into the cockpit of a fighter plane in service to his country. One received our nation’s highest military honor; two never returned home. Other relations have been active in civil aviation. My parents were private pilots for that matter, and I’m told I flew before I could walk.

But helicopters never figured in the dinner conversation. It was not until I was much older that I was properly introduced to these remarkable aircraft and began to appreciate their finer qualities. And although the helicopter is often upstaged in the public perception by flashier fixed-wing cousins, no other kind of aircraft comes close in versatility, nor has any other been tasked with such a wide range of responsibilities.

The Helicopter Conservancy was created by helicopter enthusiasts to preserve and promote helicopter history: preserving the machines themselves and—just as importantly—bringing to light the accomplishments of those who fly them. At present, we have five

historically significant helicopter types undergoing restoration for museum display; we’ve also begun an oral history program to record the personal narratives of helicopter veterans for current and future generations to hear.

In this premier issue of our quarterly newsletter *Hoverfly*, you’ll find updates on our current projects along with feature articles. The original hoverfly, designed by nature, never inspired artists or poets, but it did inspire others: the world’s first mass-produced helicopter, the Sikorsky R-4, was given this name while in British service during the Second World War. It’s a name suggestive of a key ability of helicopters and constitutes just the right balance of history and aeronautics for our publication. Whether you’re a pilot or simply like to read about helicopters from the comfort of a favorite armchair, I hope you’ll enjoy this first issue and I look forward to reporting back with exciting developments throughout the year ahead.

Kenneth Eward
President

staff@helicopterconservancy.org

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

<i>Five by Five</i>	1
<i>Around the Hangar</i>	1
<i>Alaskan Tour</i>	3
<i>Roadside Remembrance</i>	7
<i>Short Final</i>	8

AROUND THE HANGAR

The “pandemic year” has been unprecedented in its challenges, most poignantly the loss of director and close friend Chris Daly to COVID-19. Our in-person work has also suffered, but we’ve remained dedicated to our purpose and have achieved

some successes regardless. In a time when many museums and cultural institutions have been forced to close, we consider ourselves fortunate to be on solid footing and look forward to a return to a more normal state of affairs in the months ahead.

AROUND THE HANGAR *(continued)*

Christopher J. Daly Award

In summer 2020, the board of directors established the Christopher J. Daly Award to recognize an outstanding volunteer each year. The award is named after Secretary Chris Daly who succumbed in April 2020 to complications of COVID-19. Chris was an exceptionally dedicated and enthusiastic volunteer who gave unreservedly of his talents in every aspect of his life. He served as a Seabee in the US Navy following high school, then as a Black Hawk crew chief in the Army National Guard, deploying to Kuwait in 1990 for Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm. After retirement from the military, Chris continued to work with helicopters as a jet turbine mechanic and was known for his dedication to serving his community. The first Christopher J. Daly Award will be presented at our summer 2021 business meeting, to be given to a volunteer who exemplifies Chris' dedication to public service and the enthusiasm he put into everything he did.

Breathing Life into the Past

A growing number of museums have begun oral history programs to preserve personal accounts of the past, particularly those of veterans. We recently established our own helicopter-focused program in partnership with the Wisconsin Veterans Museum. Led by history teacher Jessica Monson-Donnerbauer, our program encourages helicopter veterans to share their experiences through recorded interviews accessible to the public. The pandemic has prompted us to switch from traditional in-person interviews to an online format through video conferencing apps like Zoom and Skype. If you or a family member has had a career in helicopter aviation, whether in the military or as a civilian, we'd love to hear from you. To find out more about this program, write to us at:

staff@helicopterconservancy.org

Welcoming a New Board Member

On October 11, 2020 Les' Melnyk joined our board of directors. Over the course of his 30-year career in the Army National Guard, Les' served in a variety of operational, history and public affairs billets, retiring as a colonel in June 2018. During his career, he deployed to

Iraq as the Command Historian for US Forces-Iraq, later serving at the Pentagon as the Director of Public Affairs for the National Guard Bureau and advisor to a member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Les' currently works as the Chief of Public Affairs & Outreach for the National Cemetery Administration, Department of Veterans Affairs.

A native of Queens, New York, Les' holds both a master's and doctorate in history from the City University of New York, and a master's in government information leadership from National Defense University. He has been fascinated with helicopters from a young age, and while his eyesight prevented him from becoming a pilot in the Army, he is a proud graduate of the Army's Air Assault School. We're fortunate to have Les' with us and the experience he brings to our organization. Welcome, Les'!



Les' Melnyk

Cover photo: few images could be more symbolically fitting for the launch of our new publication than this magnificent photograph of a UH-1Y Huey helicopter lifting off from the flight deck of the USS *Bonhomme Richard* in July 2013. At the time this photo was taken, the *Bonhomme Richard* (LHD-6) and its embarked 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit were participating in a joint-force exercise in the Coral Sea. (Petty Officer 3rd Class Michael Achterling/USN)

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

(continued on page 6)

ALASKAN TOUR

AN INTERVIEW WITH LT. COL. ROBERT W. HAWES, USAF (RET.)

Robert Hawes was born and raised in San José, California, and was commissioned a second lieutenant in the US Air Force in 1957 after graduating from San José State University. He flew both helicopters and fixed-wing aircraft during a long and eventful career, piloting more than two dozen types of helicopters alone over the course of his 21 years of active duty. Hawes saw combat over the jungles of Southeast Asia during the Vietnam War, where he rescued aircrew downed behind enemy lines. He later commanded a test and evaluation detachment and flew VIP transport assignments that included a stop at the Ellipse, adjacent to the White House lawn. After retiring from the Air Force in 1979 at the rank of Lt. Colonel, Hawes led an equally eventful career as a civilian helicopter pilot, working first as a test pilot for Sikorsky, where he set two world speed records in the S-76, followed by 10 years spent working as an FAA pilot examiner. His flying has been captured on aviation magazine covers and in the 1981 film *They All Laughed*, starring Audrey Hepburn. Robert Hawes, now 86, and his wife Nan currently live in eastern Connecticut.



Robert Hawes at the controls of an H-21B. (Robert W. Hawes)

Lt. Col. Hawes agreed to talk with us about his early service years as an Air Force helicopter pilot in Alaska, at a time when the helicopter's potential was just beginning to be fully realized.

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

Hoverfly: *When did you decide that you wanted to become a helicopter pilot?*

Robert Hawes: My Air Force career started in January 1957. I went through pilot training which included the T-33 single engine jet, and was recommended to go on to the F-86 Sabre jet fighter. Flying the T-33 was uncomfortable and the only really fun thing to do in my opinion was to fly very fast and very low, which seldom happened. I had seen a helicopter demonstration sometime earlier, and after graduating from jet school and getting my

wings, I chose helicopters as the advanced school. My jet instructor wouldn't talk to me!

So tell us about your military service in Alaska.

After four years of instructing in the Air Force helicopter school, I was assigned to fly H-21 helicopters in Alaska in the fall of 1962. The H-21 "Workhorse"—we called it the "Banana" because of its distinctive shape—was an early tandem rotor design developed as an Air Force arctic rescue aircraft. (The Army also adopted it, calling it the "Shawnee".) I was in C Flight of the 5040th Air Transportation Squadron. We were a small unit—as I remember about 7-8 pilots and 4-5 pararescue personnel. Our primary missions were to logistically support the Ground Control Intercept site Fire Island just off the coast of Anchorage; provide rescue support to the F-102s flying out of the base at



The Piasecki H-21B Workhorse, nicknamed the “Banana” by its crewmen, was the first helicopter designed for arctic rescue missions. (Robert W. Hawes)

“I once went out with F&G and found a huge herd of caribou. The scientist wanted to know how low we could get, so I obliged, descending until our landing gear was just above their antlers.”

King Salmon; perform other rescue and support missions as required; and fly Alaska Dept. of Fish and Game (F&G) personnel.

At the time, Alaska was a good place for the H-21 helicopter, which was not highly powered: the weather was cool and the majority of our flying was at sea level. The H-21 was equipped with a hoist and external cargo hook; as I remember we never had to train to keep current in cargo hook and hoist operations; our currency was met through many operational missions.

The “Workhorse” had some unconventional handling qualities, didn’t it?

The H-21, being one of the initial tandem rotor helicopters, had an unusual tendency: if the engine should quit and autorotation was required, you couldn’t turn the aircraft while at maximum allowable RPM. Pushing the foot pedals just rocked the aircraft, and it would continue to fly straight ahead. To make a turn, the pedals would be pushed to the stop in the direction of the turn while raising the pitch lever to reduce RPM. The amount of pitch would determine the rapidity of the turn. Once a pilot became used to this anomaly, controlling the helicopter wasn’t a problem.

What was the most memorable event during your time in Alaska?

The Alaska earthquake: This happened at 5:36 PM Alaskan time on Good Friday, March 27,

1964. I was in the basement of the officer’s club, playing “7-14-21.” In this dice game, the person who rolls the 7th ace names a drink, the person who rolls the 14th ace drinks it, and the person rolling the 21st pays for it. I rolled the 14th ace and was ordered a double “salty dog”—this is a drink made by mixing gin or vodka with grapefruit juice and served in a highball glass with a salted rim. Anyway, the drink was never delivered, because that’s when the earthquake hit.

Being from California, I knew it was an earthquake and dove under a planter. Generally an earthquake lasts for maybe 10-15 seconds from what I can remember. The Alaska earthquake was felt for more than four minutes! As the earthquake continued, I thought I’d better leave the building and crawled up the stairs. The earthquake was still in progress when I got outside, and I remember the telephone poles swaying back and forth.

I drove to base housing, less than a mile away, and happily discovered my wife and two young boys were OK. But everything that had been on a shelf or in a cabinet was now on the floor. Lots of broken glass, ceramic, etc. I started helping to clean up, then an Air Force vehicle came by with a bull horn stating all helicopter pilots needed to report for duty. I learned that none of the helicopters were damaged, and we began to discuss our flight activities for the next morning.

There is an area of Anchorage next to the water called Turnagain. Many houses had been built there, despite warnings about its geological instability. When the earthquake hit, the whole area shifted out to the bay and about 75 houses were heavily damaged. Our first mission the next morning was to check that location. We lowered our pararescue men on a hoist, and they would check to see if there were casualties, offer what help we could give, etc.

Highway One ran along the shoreline from Anchorage to Portage, about 40 miles. Many bridges were knocked down along that route. We’d load the helicopter up with C-rations and land near houses that were cut off from land traffic, inquire about their food supply and drop off C-rations as needed. Temporary

bridges were built quickly, allowing these people access to desired areas. No one knew at the time, but the whole area had subsided about eight feet. A month or so later a high tide rolled through, washing out the temporary bridges. We had to start all over again, going house to house.

There were many trips inland to drop off items people needed, particularly medicine. In addition, we took photographers to take pictures of the devastation, allowing authorities to determine where and how much help was needed. I don't remember just how long the earthquake missions continued, but it had to be more than a month.

Overall, I had never seen any devastation that compared to the earthquake, yet I would say more than 90% of Anchorage was OK. Our living unit was an eightplex; we had many cracks in the plaster, but only one window was damaged, just a 5-6 inch glass crack in a corner.

[Though lasting only a few minutes, the magnitude 9.2 Good Friday earthquake was the most powerful ever recorded in North America. Its epicenter was later determined to be just 75 miles east of Anchorage.]

You mentioned that some of your flights were flown in support of Dept. of Fish and Game programs, correct?

I remember several missions flown to keep tabs on the salmon population. We'd fly 10-20 feet above a stream with a F&G wildlife biologist in the copilot's seat, counting salmon with a click counter in his hand as we went by. I once went out with F&G and found a huge herd of caribou. The scientist wanted to know how low we could get, so I obliged, descending until our landing gear was just above their antlers. They were running very fast, about 50 knots as I remember.

You also flew moose tagging missions in which you "rode herd" not on a horse but in a helicopter. How did those unfold?

The F&G guys knew the general area of the moose bedding sites—we called them nests. We'd then go out and look for them. Most of the time there were three F&G personnel

aboard who were dropped off. We'd land near the nest, and the mother would be spooked away from the nest by the helicopter, but stayed fairly close, 30-40 feet away. In most cases the mother wouldn't try to return and we could land the helicopter. If the mother stayed too close by, we'd come to a hover and position ourselves to keep between her and her calves. Two guys would tag the calves while the third stood guard with a rifle to protect the team from grizzlies and other possible threats. The tagging was done on the calves' ears with pliers and was pretty fast, just a couple of minutes, and then we'd be off to the next site. We'd do four or five nests during a flight, and most of the time, that was it for the year.

Were there any other episodes from your time in Alaska that stand out?

We got a call that a small plane had run into the side of a nearby mountain in a snowstorm. It was snowing, but not badly, when we took off to search for the crash site. Approach control gave us a frequency and we spoke directly with the pilot, whose radio was still working. He had been flying straight and level in whiteout conditions when he noticed that the needle on his airspeed gauge was at zero. He'd flown right into a snowdrift on the side of the mountain without realizing it, and fortunately was unharmed. When we got to the crash site, we saw the tail of the airplane sticking out of the snow. We hovered up next to it and our

"He had been flying straight and level in whiteout conditions when he noticed that the needle on his airspeed gauge was at zero. He'd flown right into a snowdrift on the side of the mountain"



In the early 1960s, the helicopter was still an emerging technology and accidents were not infrequent. In this photo, C Flight returns to the crash site of a sister ship that had suffered engine failure. The crew escaped without serious injury. (Robert W. Hawes)

pararescue man got out, grabbed the tail, and worked his way to the front of the aircraft. He reached the pilot and both worked their way back and got into the helicopter. The snow had increased considerably by this time and we had to take off flying sideways on instruments alone, with no visibility, before turning away from the mountain. After we'd gotten back safely, the private pilot wanted to know if we would return to the mountain when the weather improved to pull his airplane out of the snow for him. We politely declined, reminding him that we were in the rescue business, not in the salvage business.

Reflecting back on this time in your career, what are your thoughts, and how does it compare to all that came after?

Without a doubt, this was the most productive non-combat helicopter tour of my career. There were many different and varied ways to put a helicopter to good use in Alaska, including a fair amount of sling and hoist work. Lots of places could only be reached by air or by water. Though I've had many interesting assignments flying a helicopter in the military and as a civilian in the 36 years after leaving Alaska, nothing compares to the variety of missions in the three years I spent flying there. 🚁

Tweet this story:



Have an idea for a story? Contact the editor at: staff@helicopterconservancy.org

AROUND THE HANGAR *(continued from page 2)*



Readings

A new book by historian Paul Harris and Helicopter Conservancy President Kenneth Eward titled *la Drang 1965: The Struggle for Vietnam's Pleiku Province* (Osprey Publishing, Oxford) explores an early chapter in helicopter history made famous in the 2002 film *We Were Soldiers*. Based on declassified documents and firsthand accounts, this book describes the origins of the helicopter air mobility doctrine that would define US involvement in the Vietnam War and which influences tactics even today. Harris is a senior lecturer at Sandhurst (the British West Point) and Eward

teaches at American Military University when not engaged in volunteer work for the Conservancy. The authors have generously donated half of their proceeds from this book to support our helicopter restoration and oral history programs.

Giving Tuesday Fundraiser

We raised over \$600 in December on Giving Tuesday and in other end-of-year donations. A big THANK YOU to everyone who donated and to all who helped in the fundraising effort! The contributions we received were vital to continuing our programs during what has been a particularly difficult time for museums. Your donations are important, regardless of size, and we appreciate all the support you continue to give.

BECOME A MEMBER!

Visit our website to learn how to join or to become a sponsor:

<https://helicopterconservancy.org/membership-%26-donations>

ROADSIDE REMEMBRANCE


ONE VETERAN PAYS TRIBUTE TO COMRADES LOST BUT NOT FORGOTTEN

Driving through the American heartland, you may come across any number of memorials populated by pipe-work soldiers. These memorial sculptures are the work of Minnesota native and Conservancy volunteer Mitch Madison, who uses abandoned dairy farming equipment in their construction.

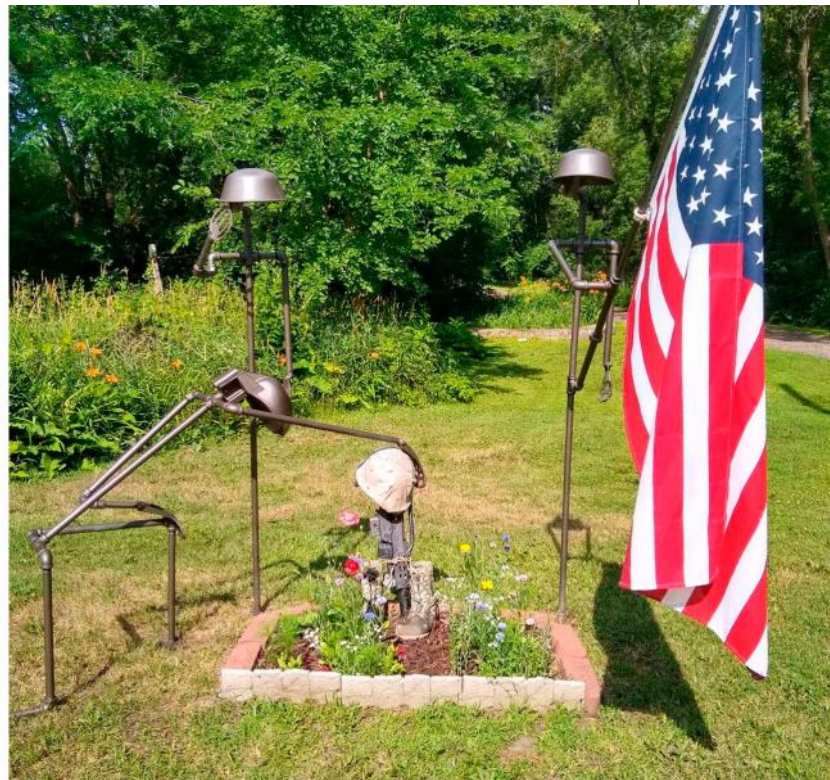
The idea came to him one day as he stumbled across a pipe that had once been part of the dairy cow drinking water system inside an old barn on his farm. The pipe still had a drinking cup attached and as Mitch turned it over in his hands, he noted a resemblance to a military helmet. Inspiration struck: "I told my wife, 'I think I can do something with this.'" Mitch gathered more pipe and more fittings and got to work. Soon a number of soldier figures began to take shape. Mitch arranged them into a personal memorial which he and his wife took with them on their annual trek to their winter home in Texas. Before long, people began to notice and Mitch received requests for his soldier sculptures from veterans' organizations located not just in Minnesota and Texas, but in other states as well.

Mitch's own military service began in 1968, when he entered the US Army's warrant officer flight training program, often described as "high school to flight school" training. Following receipt of his aviator's wings, he was assigned to the 21st Signal Group in the rugged Central Highlands of South Vietnam, where he flew UH-1 Huey and OH-58 Kiowa helicopters until his discharge in 1970. On his return home to Minnesota, he joined the Minnesota Army National Guard, flying helicopters for the next ten years before his retirement from military service.

Since 2014, Mitch has built 73 soldiers, installed in memorials throughout Minnesota, Wisconsin and Texas, with another in Delaware. His work has been recognized by the national judge advocate of the American Legion and featured on that organization's website. A number of VFW posts have installed his soldiers in their memorials also.

According to Mitch, "The main reason I continue to build them is because when people walk by they will stop, take pictures, express their feelings, and even lay flowers. I lost some friends in Vietnam and it's just my way of remembering them." 

Mitch can be contacted at: mitchmadison@yahoo.com



An early memorial installed by Mitch Madison in 2014. (Mitch Madison)

Tweet this story:





**Helicopter
Conservancy
Ltd.**

Preserving helicopter history

Board of Directors

Kenneth Eward (President)
Rosemary Marusak (Acting Treasurer)
Jessica Donnerbauer (Secretary)
Les' Melnyk

Mailing Address

569 18th Street
Chetek, WI 54728

Physical Address

Hangar 1-2
New Richmond Regional Airport
New Richmond, WI

Telephone

(715) 418-9179

E-mail

staff@helicopterconservancy.org

Website

<https://helicopterconservancy.org>

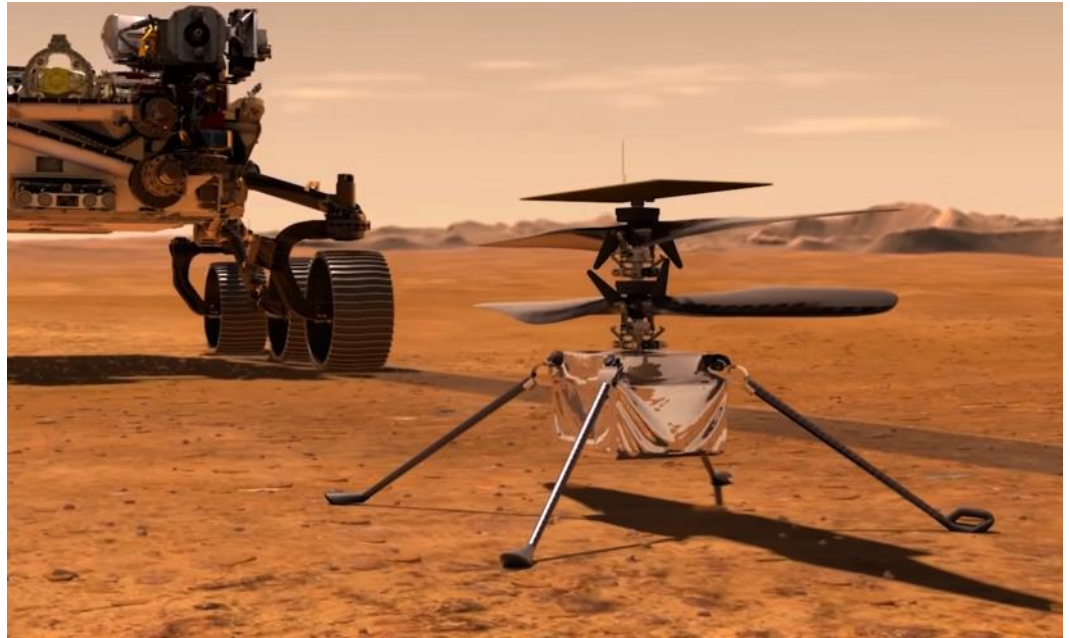
The Helicopter Conservancy is a nonprofit, tax-exempt organization formed under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code.

All inquiries about the newsletter, membership, donations and other matters should be sent in writing by e-mail or to our mailing address above. We'd like to hear from you and promise a reply within five business days.

Follow us on
Social Media:



SHORT FINAL



NASA's Ingenuity Mars Helicopter will undergo a series of preflight checks after being deposited on the Martian surface by the rover Perseverance, as depicted in this artist's conception. (NASA/JPL-Caltech)

The first aircraft on Mars is a helicopter. On February 18, the Mars rover Perseverance touched down on the surface of the red planet after a seven-month voyage from Earth. Tucked beneath the rover is a diminutive, lightweight helicopter, included in the mission to evaluate the feasibility of exploring Mars by air. Weighing in at just under four pounds, Earth weight (1.5 lbs. on Mars), the Ingenuity Mars Helicopter will test whether an autonomous aerial vehicle is capable of operating in the harsh conditions of Mars while exploring its surface and returning useful data.

This will be no mean feat. The Martian sky is only about 1% the density of Earth's atmosphere at sea level, which means Ingenuity's rotors will have to work very hard to generate the lift it needs to fly. Such rarified air can

only be found on Earth at altitudes exceeding 100,000 feet, well above the ceiling of even the most capable conventional helicopters. To achieve flight in this environment, Ingenuity's designers turned to ultralightweight composite materials and a ruthless commitment to limiting the craft's overall mass. Even after it has flown successfully, Ingenuity will need to demonstrate that it can survive Martian extremes of temperature, wind, dust and radiation.

Ingenuity is scheduled to make its first flight in late March after passing a series of self-diagnostics and incremental tests of its capabilities.

Learn more at:

<https://mars.nasa.gov/technology/helicopter>

Click [here](#) to receive *Hoverfly* by e-mail or visit our website to subscribe.