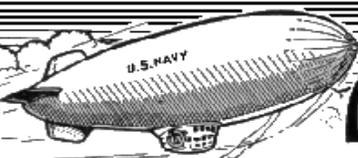


THE AIRSHIP



Navy Lakehurst Historical Society P.O. Box 328 Lakehurst, NJ 08733

<http://www.nlhs.com>

Mar - Apr 2016

Air Show Joint Base M-D-L, Sat & Sun - May 14-15, 2016

NLHS OFFICERS

President

Carl Jablonski

Vice Presidents

Don Adams
Ron Montgomery
Rick Zitarosa
Charles Bish

Trustees

Kevin Pace
Elizabeth H Rossell
Marion Kuchler
Peter Larkin
Tara Cunningham
Thomas Kunz

Assistant Treasurer

Thomas Kuchler
Peter Larkin

Chaplain

Fr. Emmett Carroll OFM CONV.

Corresponding Secretary

Thomas Kuchler

NLHS Historian & Curator Director

Rick Zitarosa

NLHS Base Tours

Membership Director

Donald Adams

NLHC & Ready Room Director

Ron Montgomery

Asst NLHC & Ready Room Director

Pete Lovering

NLHC Curators

Kevin Pace
Ron Stryshak

Legal Counsel

PAO

Thomas Kunz Elizabeth Rossell

Gift Shop Manager

Robert Hull & Diane Chierchie
Sharon Adams

NLHS Photographer

Max Frei

Webmaster: Tara Cunningham

How True

When the President calls 911, the aircraft carriers answer!

When the aircraft carriers call 911, Lakehurst answers!

View from the Top Presidents Message

Spring has arrived. This past winter was very difficult. It was milder, then, at times, very cold, rainy, windy and with one or 2 snowstorms. Spring brings with it a renewed interest in our tours and special events. Our VP & Tour Director, Don Adams, has been busy taking many requests for Spring & Summer tours. Our Tour schedule changes to add the 4th Saturday from April to October. May 14 & 15, 2016 is the Air Show at Joint Base McGuire; June 21, 2016 we observe the 95th Anniversary of Hangar 1; June 3 is the Battle of Midway observance and, as always, May 6th is the 79th Anniversary of the Hindenburg Disaster. We look forward to a busy season and I hope our members and friends of NLHS will join in and support our tours and events.

Membership Meeting

Our next NLHS General Membership meeting will be on Wednesday, Apr 13th, 2016 at 7PM on Joint Base Lakehurst, Bldg. 484, Galley Conference Room.

Our Guest of Honor will be Capt. Christopher Bergen, USN, Dep. Cdr. Joint Base M-D-L and CO Naval Support Activity Joint Base Lakehurst. Please plan to attend and meet & greet Capt. Bergen, USN. Light refreshments will be served. Please fill out and return the attendance coupon printed in this newsletter.

NOTE: Your NLHS membership card is not a Base Pass.

Officers Meeting

Our next Officers & Trustees meeting will be Saturday, Apr 16, 2016 at our usual location Bldg. 150 at 9:30 AM. For various reasons,

- 1 President's Message
- 1 Membership Meeting
- 1 Officers Meeting
- 1 Volunteer Hours
- 1 How True
- 2 Tours
- 2 Dues Notice
- 2 New Members
- 2 Surprise Award
- 2 Hindenburg 79th Anniv.
- 2 Air Show
- 2 Battle of Midway
- 2 Hangar One Anniv.
- 2 Taps
- 3 Airship MZ-3A Update
- 4-5 History of Lakehurst & Helium (Part One)
- 5-6 Something in the Air
- 6 Laser hits Aircraft
- 6 Medal of Honor Awarded
- 6-7 Call for Base Closings
- 7 Oldest Female Vet Dies
- 7-8 First Area Woman in Army Combat
- 8 Japanese Flag Returned
- 8 Calendar of Events
- 9 Hindenburg Attend. Coupon
- 9 April 2016 Meeting Coupon

some of our board members have been absent from recent meetings. Please make time to attend and show your support and give your input so NLHS can continue to move forward.

Volunteer Hours

Volunteer hours for January, February and March for the NLHC and Ready Room, tours, work projects and outside speaking engagements totaled over 675 hours. Many thanks to our volunteers for your support: Don Adams, Carl Larsen, Rick Zitarosa, Frank Dennis, Nick Rakoncza, Ron Montgomery, Charlie Bish, Ron Stryshak, Frank Smith, Kevin Mulligan, Pete Lovering, Pete Murphy, Kevin Pace, Howie Sjursen, Elizabeth Rossell, Peter Larkin, Susan K. Koller, Roger Jordan, Jim Morano, Robert Hull, Sharon Adams, Diane Chierchie and Carl Jablonski.

Tours

Our tours continue to be a very popular attraction. Starting now our tours will be given every Wednesday and every 2nd and 4th Saturday of the month from April through October from 10am to 1 pm. Don Adams, Nick Rakoncza, Frank Dennis, Carl Larsen, Ron Montgomery, Carl Jablonski, Kevin Mulligan, Elizabeth Rossell, Susan K. Koller and Rick Zitarosa continue to serve as tour guides.

Dues Notice

Unfortunately there are some members who have not renewed their dues. If you are delinquent this will be your last newsletter unless you renew your membership. Many thanks to all who have promptly renewed.

New Members

NLHS Welcomes the following new member:

Joseph Carey Middletown, NJ

Surprise Award!

I'm truly honored to have been selected to be the 2016 recipient of the **Pauline S. Miller Lifetime Achievement Award for Ocean County History** presented by the County of Ocean Cultural and Heritage Commission. Below is a copy of the award notice letter which I wish to share with the members and friends of NLHS.

Dear Mr. Jablonski,

*The Ocean County Cultural & Heritage Commission is proud to inform you that you have been selected to be the 2016 recipient of the **Pauline S. Miller Lifetime Achievement Award for Ocean County History**. You are the fifth person to ever receive this honor. I am attaching last year's program so you can see our format. Please see the complete list of awardees at <http://www.co.ocean.nj.us/ch/firmSaluteAwards.aspx>.*

You have earned this honor through your dedication to the Navy

Lakehurst Historical Society and the commemoration of the lighter than air legacy including the May 6, 1937 destruction of the Zeppelin Hindenburg.

*We are asking you to receive this public recognition on Thursday, April 7, 2016. We encourage you to invite your family and friends to join us. Our Annual Salute to Ocean County will be held at the Jay and Linda Grunin Center for the Arts, Ocean County College at 7:00pm (reception begins at 6:30 pm catered by OCTVS). The presentation of the **2016 Pauline S. Miller Lifetime Achievement Award for Ocean County History** will be an important part of our evening program featuring the leaders of the NJ Historical Commission, NJ State Council for the Arts and NJ Cultural Trust. The Program also features performances that have been judged for excellence during the Ocean County Teen Arts Festival.*

*Respectfully yours,
Timothy G Hart, Esq.
Division Director*

Hindenburg Anniversary May 6, 2016

We are preparing to commemorate the 79th Anniversary of the Crash of the Hindenburg on Friday evening, May 6, 2016 at the actual memorial site. Our program will begin at 6:45 PM, all US Navy and other Airship losses will also be remembered. We will honor, as well, all of our Armed Forces Members who made the Supreme Sacrifice to ensure our Freedom. There will be a ceremony of Wreath Presentations for each branch of the Service.

Our guest speakers will be COL Frederick Thaden, USAF, CO JB-M-D-L and 87th Air Wing Commander; Ocean County Freeholder Joseph Vicari and Dr. Horst Schirmer who flew on the Hindenburg as a child during test flights.

All NLHS members are cordially invited to attend. Please fill out the attendance coupon printed in this newsletter if you don't have a base pass or Military ID.

Air Show

Joint Base M-D-L will be hosting an Open House and Air Show featuring the "Thunderbirds" and the Army Golden Knights on Sat. & Sun. May 14-15, 2016. The event is open to the public. Gates open 9 am

NLHS, as usual, will have a display in the Big Hangar. Volunteers are needed to help out at the display. If you can help call 732-818-7520.

Battle of Midway

The Annual Battle of Midway Observance is tentively scheduled for Friday, Jun 3, 2016. Start time TBA. Members are invited. More information in the next newsletter.

Hangar One 95th Anniversary

NLHS will observe the 95th Anniversary of Hangar One on Wednesday, June 22, 2016 at 11 am at Joint Base Lakehurst. Our guest speakers will be Capt. Chris Bergen, USN, Dep. Cdr. JB M-D-L and CO Naval Support Activity JB Lakehurst; NLHS VP & Historian Rick Zitarosa; and NLHS Pres. Carl Jablonski. NLHS members are invited to attend. See attendance form printed in this newsletter.

Taps

It is with sorrow and sadness that NLHS acknowledges the passing of two of our members. On March 9, 2016 Valerie Grasso of Jackson, NJ passed away. Valerie and her husband Gaetano joined NLHS years ago. They became strong supporters and attended many of our events and programs and became dear friends as well.

Valerie Grasso

Valerie Grasso, 70, of Jackson Twp., NJ, passed away on Wednesday, March 9, 2016, at Newark Beth Israel Medical Center, Newark, NJ. She was born in Coventry, England, and resided in

Staten Island, NY, prior to relocating to Jackson Twp., NJ, 26 years ago. Valerie was a graduate of Staten Island College of Nursing and was employed as an RN with CareOne at Jackson, Jackson Twp., NJ, retiring in 2009 after 10 years of employment. She was active with Jersey Shore Amateur Radio Society (JSARS).

Valerie is predeceased by her Parents, David and Bette Martin. She is survived by her Husband of 51 years, Gaetano Grasso of Jackson Twp., NJ; her Daughters, Lisa Girard of NJ, and Gina Martin of CT; and by her 2 Grandchildren, Matthew Girard of NJ, and Marissa Dalley of NC.

If so desired, donations may be made in Valerie's memory to the American Cancer Society, 2310 Route 34, suite 1D, Manasquan, NJ 08736.

=====

On March 12, 2016 Morris "Lil Mc" McConnell, 88, passed away in New Hampshire. Mac was a USN LTA Veteran and a caring and kind soul. "Lil Mac" was a big part of our building program and Gondola Restoration and a dear friend as well.

Remembering Morris "Mac" McConnell

It was with great sadness that NLHS learned of the recent passing of Honorary Life Member Morris "Mac" McConnell, a beloved and long-standing distinguished Member of NLHS. Born in Mississippi, "Mac" was stationed at Lakehurst as a young Storekeeper during his youthful stint in the Navy. He married a local girl from Lakewood and settled here, getting a job as a civilian working in the Lakehurst A&R (Assembly & Repair) and O&R (Overhaul & Repair) Departments, where he spent over ten years working on airships, airplanes and helicopters with a special skill for fabric, airframe, cable and rigging work. "Mac" could tell you more about airship fabric, valve, control and pressure systems than any dozen books; he was a wealth of information and history.

Well-respected by his Lakehurst peers and co-workers as a practical

mechanic and "problem solver" he stood all of five-foot-four and was maybe 130 pounds "wringing wet" but he was an authoritative presence and always welcome on any project. When the last of the original Navy airships were phased out in the early 1960's Mac eventually ended up in the Lakehurst Test Department, where he finished a career of over 30 years in the early 1980's; he would return to work with airships as a consultant on several projects, including the Piasecki "Heli Stat" project at Lakehurst in the 1980's and the Navy MZ-3A airship twenty years later when Mac was well into his 80's.

His keen mind, insight and experience were always appreciated. At NLHS Mac will be remembered as Chairman of the Nominating Committee and as a man who would step forward and put his whole self into even the most menial project. Slowed by a stroke the past few years, he was on extended stay in New Hampshire at the time of his passing. Funeral/Memorial arrangements are incomplete at press time. He was much loved and will be greatly missed. "Thanks For Everything, Mac!"

=====

The Officers, Trustees and Members of NLHS extend deep sympathy and condolences to the Grasso and McConnell families. May They Rest In Peace.

Congressman McArthur Meeting

On Thursday, March 10, 2016, your president had the opportunity to meet with Congressman Tom McArthur. A variety of topics including Joint Base M-D-L were discussed. The Congressman has been and continues to be a staunch supporter of Joint Base M-D-L and our military.

Navy MZ-3A Airship Back In Service

Navy MZ-3A airship (Buno #167811) was recently overhauled, re-inflated and test-flown at Elizabeth City, NC in mid-February and Pro-

ceeded to its newest assignment in Florida. Current plans for the venerable A-170-type airship call for a deployment of six months to one year. The Navy "heritage" decal job that was applied in 2011 survived the deflation/storage/reinflation so the ship appears much as she did in her 2011-1014 configuration.

NLHS has a long connection with the MZ-3A project going back to when the ship was first inflated in Lakehurst Hangar #6 in April of 2006. For many of its years of Navy service the airship was treated like a "red headed stepchild" by the Navy....NLHS and its Members were instrumental in helping rally politicians at the local and National level to help keep a financial lifeline flowing to the airship and its operations, most of which consisted of classified "R&D" work for NAVAIR, the Office of Naval Research and other Government agencies, including a stint of work in conjunction with the 2010 BP Horizon Deepwater oil spill incident in the Gulf of Mexico.

In the fall of 2014 it looked like all efforts to continue funding operation of the airship were finally exhausted; the airship sat for six months in Lakehurst Hangar #1 (where it was a very popular centerpiece for viewing by NLHS Tour Groups) and, despite numerous protests, it was finally deflated in January of 2015 and stuffed in shipping containers for dispersal/disposal.

Not three months later, the Navy received an urgent request that the ship was needed for more R&D work and a laborious task was undertaken to try to put this ship back together. This proved to be not an easy task; most experienced personnel had been furloughed by the time the airship was deflated in January; damage was sustained in the deflation process, and when the envelope (gas bag) of the ship was unpacked for reinflation over 200 small holes had to be patched individually. The airship is nevertheless back in good operating condition and doing the job she was built to do. More info to come as available.

The History of Lakehurst and Helium (Part One)

One of the oldest and most historically-significant locations on the base is a rather nondescript brick building on Hancock Road, Building #8. Most recently the former Base Security Building, it was known from 1924-1967 as the "Helium Plant, Naval Air Station Lakehurst" a place of "cutting edge" technology in a new and exciting scientific development which promised to revolutionize military and commercial navigation by air.

Helium gas, the second-lightest gas known to man, was first discovered in the rays of the sun in 1868 and the first actual presence of "trace gases" in natural gas wells occurred in 1905 when a triumphant "Gas Gusher" at a place called Dexter, Kansas turned into a "bust" as it was discovered that the gas from the well "wouldn't burn." As it turned out, the gas well contained a relatively large concentration of this heretofore-rare Helium gas. Pretty-much a laboratory-shelf curiosity, costing about \$2500 per cubic foot, its one interesting property was that it was the second-lightest gas known to man with hydrogen gas being the first.

Hydrogen, the primary lifting gas used in balloons and dirigibles in the early 20th century (coal gas was occasionally used) was cheap, abundant and could be produced by a variety of methods just about anywhere in the world. Its one disadvantage was that it was highly-flammable and, when contaminated with sufficient quantity of air, it was downright explosive. As World War One raged in Europe and the belligerent nations of both sides used balloons and dirigibles for aerial observation, maritime scouting and bombing missions in the new era of "War In The Air" the dangers of hydrogen were becoming very apparent. If only there was a way to manufacture sufficient quantities of non-flammable Helium gas for practical use! The British, who were in the process of deploying a large fleet of both non-rigid (blimps) and rigid airships, were particularly

interested.

As it turned out, helium existed in natural gas deposits found *only* in the United States (specifically the greatest concentrations were found in an radius of around 250 miles around Amarillo, Texas though decades later deposits were found in Canada, the Soviet Union and parts of Africa.)

With the United States entry into World War One, American military aviation and airship needs suddenly apparent, Helium became a "hot button" issue. It eventually turned out that a gas well site at Petrolia Field near Fort Worth, Texas had a reliable and sufficient gas quantity to enable large-scale extraction. By Armistice Day 1918 the first load of gas cylinders bound for American observation balloons in France were on the dock in New Orleans; it never saw use in World War One, but it was envisioned that very soon one of the greatest fears of Lighter Than Air flight.... Fire.....might become a thing of the past.

As post-war demobilization swept across battered Europe, the Air Fleets of all former combatant nations were drastically reduced (and, in the case of Germany and the Central Powers they were eliminated by the Treaty of Versailles.) With the British and (particularly) the Germans having developed Lighter-Than-Air technology, the United States was now very anxious to wed its new non-flammable lifting gas with the latest technology available from friend and foe alike. It was during the 1919-1921 period that three pivotal events took place; the Army Air Service began to develop its Scott Field Air Base outside Belleville Illinois, the U.S. Bureau of Mines began large-scale production of helium at its Fort Worth plant and the U.S. Navy began to develop the original 2000 acre tract at the former Camp Kendrick which would become the U.S. Naval Air Station, Lakehurst NJ.

With the new giant Hangar #1 completed and the base put into commission on 28 June 1921, Lakehurst eagerly awaited its first giant rigid airships; the ZR-1, which would be built "in house" based on plans of a captured German Navy Zeppelin and the ZR-2, which was

being purchased from England. ZR-2 (under her British designation "R-38") had made her first test flight in England on 23 June and it was anticipated that the ship would very shortly cross the Atlantic with Commander Lewis Maxfield and the first U.S. Navy Rigid Airship Crew. As helium supplies were still being accumulated, the ZR-2 would make all her early flights using the traditional hydrogen gas.

As Lakehurst prepared to receive its new British-built airship, word began filtering across the seas that all was not well in the UK. It seemed that the ZR-2 was having a lot of "teething troubles" in her early trial flights, particularly with flight-control and structural strength issues that manifested themselves in a structural frame failure on the third trial flight of 17 July which put her back in the builder's hangar for a month of extensive repairs and alterations. Letters from crew members in England to friends newly-stationed at Lakehurst were increasingly-apprehensive; they were tired of dealing with technical issues that had to be continually re-visited, of waiting for clear weather so that they could get the ZR-2 back in the air and see if all the defects were corrected and (hopefully) officially take possession of the ship and set out on their trans-Atlantic journey (which would only be the second time an aircraft had ever flown the Atlantic from East to West, the first time having been accomplished by the earlier British dirigible R-34.)

Tragedy struck. On 24 August 1921 the ZR-2 was making high-speed turning tests during the last hour of its final trial flight. Over the large port city of Hull, England in perfect weather the giant airship suddenly buckled in the middle and broke in half, the rear section drifting down and alighting at low tide in the River Humber but the front section trailing smoke which almost immediately erupted into a devastating hydrogen explosion which shattered windows for a half-mile. Although there were parachutes aboard very few of them were seen to open. The shock wave/concussion, the immediate eruption of burning

gasoline on the river surface and sheer suddenness of the event caused a horrific death toll of 44 men (16 U.S. Navy personnel, 28 British killed; there were only five survivors.)

The tragic aftermath left many disturbing revelations, particularly regarding the design/approval process for ship and various technical issues which would be debated for years. One thing could not be disputed; the eruption of the hydrogen lifting gas was directly responsible for the heavy loss of life. But helium supplies were still inadequate to fill even one large airship.

And then, just seven months later the U.S. Army's Italian-built semi-rigid airship ROMA was involved in another hydrogen-related catastrophe when she lost elevator (height) control and dove into a row of power lines near her base at Langley Field, VA. Eleven men saved themselves by jumping, 33 were lost in the crash and fire.

With the Army and Navy airship programs having attained much the same high-profile status of the Space Program some 40 years later, the "Helium Discussion" became a national front-page issue. Naval Air Station, Lakehurst and the new ZR-1 airship would soon become center-stage as the United States made an all-out effort to utilize its great natural resource of helium to conquer the skies.

Next Issue: USS SHENANDOAH And Helium Operations At Lakehurst

Something in the Air : Lakehurst,

NJ

By: Todd C. Simmons

It is a lovely morning in Lakehurst, NJ. A slight wind blows, just stronger than a breeze, but not stiff or uncomfortable by any means. We are early for our tour of the Lakehurst Naval Air base's historic site and collection of artifacts relating to the Hindenburg, and no-one else is around. This is the place that the directions told us to meet, or at least we think it is. We are parked in the lot of a church that sits just off the road and its brownish grey stone blends into the late winter woods, so you see it just as you pass it. We drove down

past the base looking for a place to turn around around, and saw a huge hangar beyond the gates. One we are almost certain we will taken inside, but as we have come to learn through our reading, and will learn even more, there is very little that is certain about the Hindenburg.

Slowly the lot begins to fill to one side and we become more sure of ourselves when a man in a Navy cap gets out and walks up to the loose group. Someone says half under their breath "He looks like he could have been around for the Hindenburg". He hands out brochures about the church and walks off to unlock it. Without any fanfare or ado the tour has begun.

There are quite a few places that could be thought of as cradles of aviation, a couple that are birthplaces, but only one, as far as I know, that is called the Cathedral of the Air. Of the things we see this day, this will be hard to top. It is an interdenominational church, and as we stand in the narthex, our guide Nicholas describes what we will see. The two plaques that frame the door to the chapel dedicated to the men who lost their lives on the airship crashes of the Akron and Shenandoah, both far deadlier crashes than the Hindenburg, but lacking the immediacy of that radio broadcast and news reel footage that showed the Zeppelin burst into flames. He tells us that of the 18 stained glass windows that are inside the church, fourteen of them dedicated to either the mythology of flight, as in the case of Icarus, or actual milestones in flight such as the Montgolfier balloon or the Glenn Curtis hydroplane. I have never in my life been in a place like this. There is a sense of reverence and awe that these windows inspire, and they are deeply, achingly beautiful.

Nicholas is joined by the day's coordinator, Donald, and they tell us to take our time and enjoy what we see, but a day here would not be enough. Although the paper we were sent strictly stipulated that tours are to meet at the church, we find a larger group that met at the gate already inside at the crash site by the time we pull into the parking lot there. They

have missed out on what might have been one of the most extraordinary churches I have ever seen.

Standing on the field at the monument you get some sense of the size of the Hindenburg, but it is still hard to imagine it. In the distance you see where the mooring towers once stood knowing this marker is where the gondola crashed. Our guide describes the events that led up to the crash, pointing to a line of trees or a ball field and describing the venting process or a sharp turn, and explains why it is believed to have burst into flames and crashed. "There are a lot of other theories, and I've heard them all," he tells us. Still, when he opens up the time for questions, the first three are not actually questions but alternate theories to what he has just said, and he patiently points out the flaws of each. It turns out that the remark about our guide, while unkind was not untrue. As a boy he went outside with his mother and they looked up as the Hindenburg passed over their home. He remembers the sound of the engines.

Once you are in the hangar you have no doubt about its size. It is almost impossible to describe this hangar. It is cold, colder than the air outside. It is vast. Even though it looks huge from the outside, it seems much bigger inside. To give a little perspective on its length, this is where training is done for aircraft carrier duty, a practice deck scaled to 1/3 size takes up less than half the hangar's length. One end, the end with the aircraft carrier practice deck, is sunny but the other end is darker and the photographs we take come out looking old as if tinted with sepia. Each of the two doors at either end weigh 350 tons.

My son's view:

Lakehurst is very interesting. It is, can I say cool just this once? It is cool to see the place where the Hindenburg crashed. We got to see inside the hangar where the Hindenburg was stored. I Had a long conversation with the tour guide Nicholas. He actually saw the Hindenburg fly overhead the day it crashed. When his mom asked him if

he wanted to see the Hindenburg, he thought " What the heck is a Hindenburg?" I talked with him about lighter than air travel. Another tour guide said that after the Hindenburg if you talked about LTA (lighter than air) at your job years after the crash, you'd better kiss your job goodbye.

The cupola from the movie with George C. Scott is here, and an airship servicing lift. In the room outside the door into the body of the hangar are models and fragments, cups and silverware from the Hindenburg and information about the other Zeppelins that were here or used during those years. Then there are three rooms under the practice deck dedicated to the armed forces and conflicts, rooms filled with uniforms and models. But nothing that compares with what is just outside the walls of this little museum in the practically empty, cool space of the hangar. In a way it too is a cathedral to the air, or at least to the airship. Between these two buildings, this vast hangar and that little church, we have a sense of certainty. Today we have seen things we will never forget.

Military plane latest aircraft hit by laser over N.J.

The FAA is investigating after a military KC-10 refueling jet was hit by a laser Tuesday while flying a training mission over the Jersey shore, officials said.

The flight crew reported a green laser illuminated the plane at 10:20 p.m. at an altitude of 4,000 feet in the Chatsworth area of Lacey Township, Ocean County, FAA spokesman Jim Peters said. The FAA notified the Lacey police department.

The KC-10 was from the 514th Air Mobility Wing, a reservist refueling wing operating from the Joint Base, said wing spokeswoman Master Sgt. Donna Jeffries.

Jeffries said the crew reported a "momentary flash" and was able to avert their eyes.

While a potentially dangerous situation, this event turned out to be a minor incident and the massive tanker jet returned safely to the base, she said. The KC-10 was about 15 miles away when the laser illumination

occurred, Jeffries said.

Laser incidents are rare with military aircraft, she said. In the past five years, she said only one other incident has occurred with the wing, Jeffries said.

In July, a dozen aircraft over New Jersey skies reported dangerous laser beams crossing their paths in a single night. A Coast Guard aircraft over Ocean City, Cape May County was among those affected.

Shining a laser into an aircraft cockpit is a federal crime with potential jail time and fines. Nearly 3,900 laser-aircraft incidents were reported nationwide in 2014, up from roughly 2,800 in 2010, according to FAA data.

A SEAL Team 6 member Receives the Medal of Honor

In the darkness of a single-room building in Afghanistan, Navy Senior Chief Edward C. Byers Jr. had little time to react: A fellow Navy SEAL had just been shot in the head during a hostage rescue mission, and it wasn't clear who else in the room wanted to kill the American team.

Byers burst in anyway, shooting a Taliban fighter who had an automatic rifle aimed at him. Another man scrambled to the corner of the room where another rifle was stored, so Byers tackled him and then tried to adjust his night-vision goggles to see whether he was the American hostage. The hostage, lying five feet away, called out in English, so Byers killed the insurgent he was straddling and then hurled himself on top of the hostage to protect him from gunfire. At the same time, Byers pinned another enemy fighter to the wall with a hand to the throat until another SEAL shot the militant.

Byers, 36, received the Medal of Honor in a White House ceremony Monday for his actions on Dec. 8-9, 2012. The ceremony forced him to do something else difficult for someone in his line of work: Step out of the shadows and in front of news cameras as he receives the nation's highest award for valor in combat.

Byers is believed to be the first service member to ever receive the Medal of Honor for actions while

serving with the Naval Special Warfare Development Group, commonly known as SEAL Team 6. Defense officials declined to confirm that, but said that Byers is the first living SEAL to receive the Medal of Honor since the Vietnam War. U.S. officials have previously acknowledged that the 2012 raid was carried out by SEAL Team 6.

"I've lived my entire career a very private life," Byers said Friday in an interview at the Pentagon. "We don't talk about what we do, and this honor carries with it some obligations that I need to carry out. You know, you follow those through. But, I plan to continue doing my job as normal and to continue being a SEAL. It's something I love and grew up wanting to be."

The SEALs successfully extracted the hostage, Dilip Joseph, a doctor, from the clutches of the Taliban, but the first SEAL through the doorway ahead of Byers, Petty Officer 1st Class Nicolas D. Checque, 28, was killed. Checque posthumously received the Navy Cross, one step down from the Medal of Honor, for his heroism in the mission, Navy officials said. That has not previously been reported, and is not listed on the Defense Department's online listing of valor recipients.

Byers has earned two Purple Hearts for being wounded in combat and five Bronze Stars with V device, a lower-level but still prestigious award that recognizes heroism.

Call for base closings could hit Jersey site

President Barack Obama is trying one last time to begin a new round of military base closings, a move that could threaten Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, and would act even if Congress didn't.

In his \$4 trillion budget proposal, the president's spending plan for the fiscal year beginning Oct. 1 resurrects his call for a new round of base realignment and closure, known by its acronym BRAC, which the document calls "critically important to realign resources" now going for unneeded facilities.

"The need to reduce excess facilities is so critical that, in the absence of authorization of a new round of BRAC, the administration will pursue new options to reduce wasteful spending on surplus infrastructure within existing authorities," the budget said.

New Jersey's military facilities pump \$6.5 billion into the local economy, and support more than 73,000 jobs, according to the state's New Jersey Military Installation Growth and Development Task Force.

"Base closures destroy local communities and diminish our ability to project strength abroad at a critical time in our nation's history," said U.S. Rep. Tom MacArthur (R-3rd Dist.), a member of the House Armed Services Committee. "We cannot put this burden on taxpayers while simultaneously compromising our military's readiness with an irresponsible round of base closures."

Another member of the Armed Services panel, Rep. Donald Norcross (D-1st Dist.) said he, too, would oppose additional base closings that "historically done little to save the Department of Defense money and instead devastated local economies and left a trail of abandoned military facilities requiring extensive environmental cleanup."

Congress rejected Obama's call last year for a new round of base closings. Lawmakers also acted separately to protect the joint base by voting to prevent the Pentagon from moving or retiring any of the KC-10 refueling tanker planes at the base. MacArthur and Norcross helped author both provisions, which were included in the defense policy bill and in legislation funding the government through Sept. 30.

Obama visited the joint base in December 2014.

In 2005, the last round of BRAC consolidation led to the creation of the joint base in Wrightstown, the only tri-service military facility in the U.S. In 1993, the Pentagon proposed reducing operations at McGuire Air Force Base, now part of the joint facility, in favor of Plattsburgh AFB in New York. The base closing commission, led by former New Jersey Rep, Jim Courter, instead

voted to expand McGuire and close Plattsburgh.

A task force, chaired by Lt. Gov. Kim Guadagno, recommended in July that the state encourage defense-related development around its bases, educate well-trained employees to work at those facilities, and regularly lobby the federal government to prevent them from being shut down or scaled back.

In January, the Pentagon selected McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst as one of 11 military bases under consideration to house the Air Force's new KC-46 tankers.

The president's budget also includes \$5 billion over 10 years for changes to the criminal justice system, including developing alternatives to incarceration for some nonviolent offenders, something Obama discussed in November on a visit to Newark.

Oldest Female Veteran Dies

Alyce Dixon, the nation's oldest female veteran, who expedited mail delivery in World War II and later worked as a civilian at the Pentagon, facilitating what she called the purchase of everything from "pencils to airplanes," died Jan. 27 at a veterans' retirement center in Washington. She was 108.

Mrs. Dixon was working for the War Department's secretarial pool at the newly constructed Pentagon in 1943 when she enlisted in the Women's Auxiliary Army Corps, soon to be called the Women's Army Corps.

She was initially limited to administrative assignments in Iowa and Texas. But in 1945, she joined the newly established 6888th Central Postal Directory Battalion. The battalion was the only unit of black WACs to serve overseas in World War II and was led by Charity Adams, one of the first black female commissioned officers in the war.

The 6888th was tasked with sorting and distributing what she estimated were billions of backlogged letters and packages to soldiers — a pileup attributed to the disruption in delivery caused by the Battle of the

Bulge.

Their mission was deemed vital to sustaining morale on the front lines, but a significant hurdle was identifying a piece of mail's ultimate destination based on incomplete information supplied by the sender.

"We had to fight mice and rats while sorting the mail. People down south from Alabama were sending fried chicken and bread to soldiers in France."

Working three shifts a day, seven days a week, the battalion accomplished in three months what was projected by the brass to take half a year.

Mrs. Dixon returned to Washington in the late 1940s and worked for the Census Bureau and later the Pentagon, retiring in 1972 as a purchasing agent.

"I was able to buy everything from pencils to airplanes," she told the American Forces Press Service in 2009. "I became a good buyer. I dealt with all the stores here in Washington that sold office supplies."

First area woman to enlist in Army combat role

The United States Army Mid-Atlantic Recruiting Battalion in Toms River has enlisted its first woman in a combat role from the Central Jersey area.

In a historic decision in December, the Pentagon loosened its restriction on female soldiers, opening all combat jobs to women. The decision opened about 220,000 military roles to women.

That announcement wasn't what drove Brick resident Alex Palmieri to enlist in the Army, but it gave her more options. Palmieri, 19, chose to be a combat engineer and will start basic training in April.

"I'm definitely proud of myself, but I still have to prove myself," Palmieri said in a phone interview. "I like how I can pave the way for more females. I think once they see more (women) graduating, they'll feel more safe in a way, more accepted."

A 2014 graduate of Brick Memorial High School, it wasn't always a dream of Palmieri's to serve

in the Army one day. Palmieri said about three years ago, she knew that she wanted to do something with the Army, she just didn't know what job.

"It definitely impacted my options," Palmieri said of the Pentagon's decision to allow women in combat roles. "I liked the idea of girls being able to show how they can do whatever they want just like the boys could."

Palmieri will do her basic training at Fort Leonard Wood in Missouri.

When asked if she's nervous about basic training, Palmieri said: "That would be like unnecessary pressure to put on myself. You can't fail. I wouldn't want to put failure on myself."

Robbinsville woman returns WWII Japanese flag to soldier's family

Since 2001, a Robbinsville woman held onto a Japanese flag her father brought back from World War II, never knowing how he got it but was always curious about the signatures on it.

Then last February, at the 70th annual Los Banos Prison Rescue Dinner in New York City – honoring those who served in the 1945 rescue operation of allied POWs in the Philippines – Barbara O'Hare brought her flag.

World War II veteran of the 11th Airborne Division Harold Gross took notice.

O'Hare said Gross is a member of the Japanese Language Group in Connecticut and suggested she take the flag to another member, Hiroshi Asada, who could translate the messages on the flag.

Asada said he was able to decipher the last name on the flag to be Tachigami with the help of his mother and aunt. Then he tracked down the deceased soldier's 81-year-old, only-surviving daughter living in Fukuyama City, Japan, who will now get her father's flag shipped back to her in March.

"I always knew there was some family behind it," O'Hare said. "The fact that we found them is amazing to me."

O'Hare said she inherited the flag in 2001 after her father, World War II veteran Ralph Muentener, passed away. He served with the 11th Airborne Division's 511th Parachute Infantry.

"(My father) never discussed it with me," O'Hare said about the flag and the war in general. "You know those WWII guys don't discuss the war. I don't know how he got it. I'm glad I don't know that part."

Asada said during the World War II time period, Japanese families often signed flags for their soldiers to take into battle.

He said the Tachigami soldier most likely died on the battlefield when O'Hare's father took the flag.

He said other than the flag being discolored with stains, it was in pretty good condition, but the messages written on it were still difficult to decipher.

"Some of it's hard to read because it's in cursive," Asada said. "Typically the flags (given to Japanese soldiers) have some kind of line dedicated to such and such person. This flag doesn't have anything like that. That made the search difficult."

When he finally deciphered the last name to be Tachigami, thankfully Asada said it was an uncommon name, he traced down about 200 households with the name in Fukuyama City, in the Hiroshima Prefecture.

"I thought 'Oh maybe I can find them,'" Asada said. "I randomly phone called numbers, did social media searches. I didn't get anywhere."

Then he said a friend living in Japan informed him the Japan government agency Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare deals with tracking down war veteran families in situations like these.

"(The agency officer) thought we probably couldn't find the family member," Asada said.

But sure enough, 81-year-old Hideko, daughter of deceased soldier Kakuichi Tachigami was found in ailing health.

"I don't want to hold up keeping the flag any longer," O'Hare said, thinking of Hideko, who is losing her memory.

O'Hare said she and Asada – who kept the flag in Connecticut for the past few months while tracking down the Tachigami family – will make a presentation with the flag about their project at the 2016 Los Banos Prison Rescue Dinner on Feb. 27. Then the flag will be shipped to Hideko in March.

"I think about the people involved," Asada said. "The soldier carrying the flag until the end. He never came back but the flag traveled from Japan to the U.S. and now back to Japan."

2016 Calendar of Events

Apr 1 – Beware! April Fools Day

Apr 13 - Membership Meeting 7 pm, JB Lakehurst, Bldg 484

Apr 15 – Officers Meeting – 9:30 am, Bldg 150

Apr 22 - Passover

May 6 – 79th Anniv. Hindenburg Obs. 6:45 pm - JB Lakehurst

May 8 – Mother's Day

May 14-15 – Air Show JB McGuire

May 30 – Memorial Day

**NLHS May 6, 2016 - 79th Anniversary Hindenburg Memorial Services
ATTENDANCE COUPON**

**I WILL ATTEND THE FOLLOWING EVENT ON Friday, May 6, 2016 at 6:45 PM
Each person Attending must fill out a coupon.**

FULL NAME in following format: (please print) Make copies for each person attending

Last Name _____ First Name _____

Full Middle name (not maiden name) _____

Drivers License #: _____ State: _____

PHONE (with area code): _____

MAIL TO: Navy Lakehurst Historical Society P.O. Box 328 Lakehurst, NJ 08733

ATTN: Hindenburg Ceremony

Or e-mail to: NAVLAKE@PRODIGY.NET

DEADLINE for registration: May 2, 2016 by 12 noon

You must fill out this coupon if you plan on attending this event and don't have a pass for the base.

NOTE: Your NLHS Membership card **IS NOT** a base pass.

**NLHS April Meeting Attendance Coupon Wednesday, April 13, 2016 7PM
Meeting Location: The Galley Conference meeting room located in Bldg. #484**

FULL NAME in following format: (please print) Make copies for each person attending

Last Name _____ First name _____

Full Middle Name (not maiden name) _____

Drivers License #: _____ State: _____

PHONE (with area code): _____

MAIL TO: Navy Lakehurst Historical Society P.O. Box 328 Lakehurst, NJ 08733

Or e-mail information to : NAVLAKE@PRODIGY.net

ATTN: April Meeting

DEADLINE: April 10, 2016 by 12 noon

**You must fill out this coupon if you plan on attending the meeting
and don't have a pass for the base.**

NOTE: Your NLHS Membership card **IS NOT** a base pass.