



Lindbergh Chapter Nearly Five Decades of AAAA Service 1960-2007

By Paul Hendrickson

Several factors played a role in getting an Army Aviation Association of America chapter going in St. Louis, Mo. The first was the Pentagon decision to rip the Army Air Forces and its assets from the Army to create the U.S. Air Force.

Shortly after that surgery in 1947, the Departments convened a meeting in Key West, Fla., to sort out the missions and functions of the new service.

The other departments, especially the Navy with support from the Marines, agreed that the Army could have small light aircraft for field artillery spotting, communication wire laying, limited courier activities and forward patrol cover.

But, the Army could only perform pre-flight and post-flight maintenance with a few minimal minor field repairs. Any significant repairs would have to be evacuated to an Air Force facility for completion. So the Aviation School at Fort Sill, Okla., taught oil and spark plug changes and how to repair holes in the aircraft's canvas body. The school actually did more than that, but not for public consumption.

The Air Force was given authority



Mr. Paul L. Hendrickson, Command and Project Management Office, Aviation Systems Command speaking at the May 5, 1966 Advanced Planning Briefing for Industry, St. Louis, Mo.

to conduct all heavy and depot level repairs, and to approve all engineering changes to any Army aircraft.

They would be responsible for all research and development for any new aircraft which the Army might wish to test for mission enhancement or mission expansion.

All major aircraft and helicopters companies had either an Air Force or Navy complement to oversee any military programs with which the company might be involved.

So in almost all respects, the Army had to go with hat in hand whenever any new or improved program was desired and wait until the USAF approved and added it to their operating budget. Many of us can remember that when budget cuts were applied, many Army requirements were deferred or dumped.

The Transportation Corps, which was trying to form companies of relatively small helicopters to serve as quick response battlefield re-supply of men and materials, decided to create an organization in St. Louis solely to coordinate with the other departments and try to get the Army's aviation requirements recognized and supported.

To head this organization, called the Transportation Corps Army Aviation Field Support Office or TCAAFSO, the Army sent COL William Bunker to get the desired events rolling.

It was here that Bunker formed a small committee of local representatives from Bell Helicopter, Hughes

helicopter division, Vertol, and his own organization to draft By-Laws for the activation of a local chapter of the recently established Army Aviation Association.

That was quickly done the same night of the meeting and the By-Laws were expedited to Connecticut for approval.

The formal activation of the new Lindbergh Chapter occurred on June 9, 1960, a mere three years since the AAAA initially spread its wings.

The Lindbergh Chapter rapidly became one of the most dynamic chapters in the Association. It held dances, happy hours and evening social events in the O' Club on the fifth floor of the Mart building, where members conducted business for 14 years.

The TCAAFSO continued to grow its mission and gnawed at the cables that tied them to the Air Force and Navy. The Navy, protecting its own organic air arm, was fairly sympathetic with the Army's desire to free itself from the sometimes highly arbitrary constraints of the Air Force.

Each time TCAAFSO took on a new mission, the AAAA Lindbergh Chapter adapted and supported the mission. When TCAAFSO was assigned the engineering and procurement mission for Army aircraft, the command found out that they were required to provide an annual Advanced Planning Briefing for Industry.

Then Chapter President Eric Peterson pledged the chapter to perform the administrative support for

these meetings.

I was assigned the overall supervision of the briefings and found numerous volunteers from the chapter to assist. These briefings were a great success for both the command and the chapter.

Then there were the annual AAAA conventions. Originally the AAAA held all their conventions in Washington, D.C. near the AUSA convention so that AAAA members could participate and visit their exhibits.

The thinking of the majority of AAAA's National Executive Board (NEB) at that time was that the Association could not make expenses or expect any significant attendance if they held the convention outside of the D.C. area. Back then the Association was organized into regions generally along the various U.S. Army regional boundaries. These regions held their own "conventions" and proved that such an event outside of Washington could be very successful. The NEB finally decided to have conventions outside of Washington, D.C., with the first in Atlanta, Ga.

St. Louis was one of the next sites chosen and the Lindbergh Chapter did a really impressive job of making it a very good event that a great many attendees enjoyed throughout the 1980s and early 1990s.

As I had been the command representative to several panels of the Aircraft Industries Product Support organization and Advanced Planning Briefings for Industry, I encouraged the chapter to initiate and support an annual symposium for discussion between the Army and their aviation industries partners on the current problems of aviation logistical support.

That first symposium was held in conjunction with the 1978 National Convention in St. Louis. This first meeting had a sparse attendance and did not cover expenses, so the chapter underwrote the losses.

Each subsequent year, Don Luce, then the chapter president, would ask if the chapter really wanted to go on with the program, and the answer was always "yes." The attendance continued to grow, although much too slowly for the both of us.

Then Luce made a brilliant maneuver, and without asking, named the symposium the "Joseph P. Cribbins Product Support Symposium."

This resulted in an immediate gain in attendance and almost guaranteed that Joe Cribbins would serve as the master of ceremonies each year.

When the 1995 Base Realignment and Closure act decided that money would be saved by consolidating the Aviation and Troop Command with the Missile Command in Huntsville, Ala., the symposium naturally went with the command and administration moved from Lindbergh to the Tennessee Valley chapter, where it continues to be a real fiscal power house for that chapter.

When the command transfer was imminent, the Lindbergh Board members transferred \$10,000 in Lindbergh assets to the Tennessee Valley to ease them into the task of running the symposium.

Since the departure of the Army commands from St. Louis, the chapter has struggled to maintain itself in the Army aviation picture, finally settling on a program to support and annually increase a scholarship fund.

With priority given to the annual golf tournament as the fund raiser for chapter objectives, retired LTC David Reichert, the V.P. for Programs, with members who were Boeing employees, worked very hard together to make the tournament a success. The tournament is now held bi-annually and nets enough to provide about \$5000 annually to the Lindbergh chapter matching fund scholarship fund.

Today the chapter holds quarterly social meetings to encourage members to meet and greet.

With 200 plus members scattered in the greater metropolitan area in about as many zip codes as there are members, selecting sites and themes is always a challenge.

In summary, the chapter has gone from riches to a much more modest situation. The chapter will continue to seek avenues for greater member participation and ways to increase both membership and programs.

The members of the chapter board are all dedicated to Army Aviation and will do all in their power to keep that program visible in the greater St. Louis area.



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