

# Historical Highlights

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## Major Willard G. Palm Shot Down by Soviet Plane



On July 1, 1960, a Soviet MiG fighter north of Murmansk in the Barents Sea shot down a six-man RB-47 crew. Two young United States Air Force officers survived and were imprisoned in Moscow's dreaded Lubyanka prison. Captains McKone and Olmstead were accused by the Russians of espionage, punishable by death, for allegedly violating the Soviet Sea frontier, although their plane had been many miles away from it at all times. They managed, however, to resist all Soviet efforts to obtain "confessions" through cajolery, trickery and threats of death, and were finally and unexpectedly released after seven months of imprisonment.

The Soviet Union had a history of shadowing, escorting and occasionally shooting down American planes flying over international waters near its borders; in the 10 years between 1950 and 1960, about 75 US Navy and Air Force air crewmen in 10 separate incidents lost their lives flying routine reconnaissance missions.

The RB-47H reconnaissance plane (S/N 53-4281) was assigned to the 38th Strategic Reconnaissance Squadron, 55th Strategic Reconnaissance Wing based at Forbes Air

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### Special points of interest

- Upcoming Events are listed on page 4.
- Renew your 2017 membership today! (See the renewal form on page 11.

Force Base, Kansas, and temporarily flying out of Brize-Norton Royal Air Force Base in England. The plane was crewed by Major Willard Palm, Aircraft Commander; Captain Freeman Bruce Olmstead, Pilot; Captain John McKone, Navigator; and three reconnaissance officers (Ravens): Major Eugene Posa, Captain Dean Phillips & Captain Oscar Goforth (this was Goforth's first and only operational mission). Note: each crew member was advanced one rank after this incident as indicated above.



Pilot Major Willard Palm (front left), and Ravens (back row): Major Eugene Posa, Captain Oscar Goforth and Captain Dean Phillips. Bruce Olmsted is center, John McKone is front right.

The

planned route of the flight took the plane northward from England over international waters where the plane turned east and entered the Barents Sea northeast of Norway and continued a track in international waters approximately 50 miles from the Soviet Kola Peninsula. While the RB-47H was conducting its reconnaissance mission, a Soviet MiG-19 fighter assigned to the 206th Air Division based at Murmansk paralleled the USAF plane at a distance. The MiG fighter then turned towards the RB-47 on an intercept course, but passed about 3 miles behind it. The radar course plotted by Capt. McKone called for a turn to the northeast at about 50 miles off Holy Nose Cape at the bottom of the Kola Peninsula; however, the Soviet MiG had returned and was now flying in close formation (40 feet) off the right wing of the RB-47. As the RB-47 (flying at 30,000 feet and 425 knots) started its turn to the left, the MiG (piloted by Vasily Polyakov) broke right towards the Soviet shoreline (away from the RB-47), turned back towards the USAF plane and started shooting. Capt. Olmstead immediately returned fire, but the RB-47 was no match for the nimble MiG and after a brief fight, the RB-47 was shot down about 6 P.M. (local time) over international waters in the Barents Sea.

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*Six men were aboard the aircraft, but the Soviets only returned Palm's body. A victim of the "Cold War," he was buried in Section 3 of Arlington National Cemetery.*

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The MiG shot up the left wing, engines and fuselage in its initial firing pass causing the RB-47 to enter a spin which Major Palm and Captain Olmstead were able to pull out of; however, the MiG made a second firing pass at the plane and finished the job. Major Palm and Captain

Olmstead attempted to save the plane once again, but the damage was too serious and the bail out order was given.

At least three of the six crewmen managed to eject from the stricken plane - Captains Olmstead & McKone and Major Palm. The three reconnaissance officers (Ravens) seated in the converted bomb bay of the plane were (probably) unable to get out of the spinning plane. Major Palm apparently died of exposure in the frigid water, but Captains Olmstead and McKone were able to climb into their survival rafts and lasted long enough to be picked up by a Soviet fishing vessel after more than six hours in their tiny rafts. The US Air Force, unaware that the plane had been shot down - the Soviets did not release this information for more than a week - conducted a search for the missing plane and crew from July 2nd to the 7th but no trace was found.

The United States and Soviet Union had a long history of conducting surveillance operations against each other and in most cases, the reconnaissance aircraft of one country was intercepted and escorted by the fighters of the other. Since the CIA U-2 piloted by Francis Gary Powers was shot down 1 May 1960 (on a Soviet National 'Holiday') over Sverdlovsk, USSR, the Soviets were particularly sensitive about US aircraft conducting flights over Soviet territory. President Eisenhower pledged to end the over flights, but the Soviet Air Force was under fairly intense internal pressure to protect its territory. The MiG pilot later indicated that the combination of this internal pressure and his belief that the USAF plane was headed for a secret naval base unknown to the USAF crew actually) resulted in the shoot down of the RB-47H even though it was over international waters in international airspace.

Within days, Olmstead and McKone were sent to the Lubyanka prison in Moscow and held in separate cells while undergoing interrogation. The situation was possibly worsened by the fact that as military personnel, Olmstead and McKone were not required to give any more information than name, rank and service number (in accordance with the Geneva Conventions). Mr. Powers, as a CIA pilot was not bound or protected by the Geneva Convention and the CIA briefed their pilots not to withhold information if forced or shot down over Soviet territory. Mr. Powers acted properly given his instructions, but the USAF pilots may have suffered because they were bound by a different set of standards and were basically instructed not to reveal any infor-



Captains John McKone, Bruce Olmstead, and their wives are honored at the White House with Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson, First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy, and President John F. Kennedy

## Palm Park Marker

### Inscription:

Dedicated in Memory of Major Willard G. Palm who died while serving his country

1921 - 1960

Major Willard G. Palm and his fellow crew members \*Maj. Eugene E. Posa, \*Capt. Oscar L. Goforth, \*Capt. Dean B. Phillips, Capt. Freeman B. Olmstead, Capt. John R. McKone, were shot down over Barents Sea July 1, 1960, by a Russian fighter plane while on a peaceful reconnaissance mission.

\*Died in this incident.

E.J. Camp, Mayor

Preston Hale Louis Howard

Frank Warren Charles Wright

(small marker)

The Military Order of the World Wars

WAR MEMORIAL

This day, November 11, 2005, we proclaim that this Memorial

"Major Palm Park" has been recorded and is available for access on the Topeka Chapter Web Site.

Commander, LTC Stanley Sutton  
Adjutant, Col Robert Tindall, Jr.

Topeka Chapter No. 882





## SCHS Events

**Nov 20** Board of Trustees Meeting-Cox Communications Heritage Education Center - meeting begins at 5:30 PM

**Nov 25** Christmas at the Ritchie's - Details to come!

**Dec 3** SCHS Annual Membership Meeting - Cox Communications Heritage Education Center - Meeting begins at 2:00 PM - Light refreshments

For an updated list of upcoming SCHS Events visit our website at:

[www.shawneecountyhistory.org](http://www.shawneecountyhistory.org)  
click the **Events** tab

mation which might have been useful to the Soviets. The Captains were not tortured but were interrogated at length nearly every day. Gradually, the Soviets allowed a limited amount of mail to flow to and from family members; however, the prison mail censors and interrogators continually tried to get the men to indicate regret for the mission and to agree that the United States should cease similar reconnaissance missions. The USAF officers resisted all attempts to by the Soviets to get the "confessions" they sought as part of the pretrial "investigation".

On 24 January 1961, after almost seven months as prisoners, Captain Olmstead and Captain McKone were released never having been brought to trial. They never confessed to any wrongdoing and the Soviet espionage case was essentially groundless so the Soviets absolved them of any "criminal responsibility". Major Palm's body was returned to the United States about a month after his plane was shot down and buried with full military honors in Arlington National Cemetery, Washington, D.C. The bodies of the three reconnaissance officers were never found.

## History of Forbes Field

Courtesy of the Combat Air Museum, Topeka, KS

Congress authorized the Topeka Army Air Field (TAAF) building project within two weeks after the Dec. 7, 1941, attack on Pearl Harbor.

Eight months later, the completed air base -- essential buildings, hangars, repair shops, steam heating plants, fuel storage and three 7,000 by 150-foot paved runways -- was formally accepted by the Army Air Corps. In August 1942 the first troops arrived and had to be quartered in the agriculture building on the Topeka Fair Grounds because their green wood two-story barracks buildings weren't finished yet. By September 1942, the field was the home of the 333rd Bombardment Group.

By 1945 TAAF was one of three B-29 centers where newly transitioned crews claimed new Superfortresses and took off for the Pacific to aid in the Forbes Field aerial view assault on the Japanese home islands. On 31 October 1947 Topeka Army Air Field was inactivated.



On 01 July 1948, Topeka Army Air Field was reactivated as a Strategic Air Command base (SAC); home to the 311th Air Division, Reconnaissance, and to the 55th Strategic Reconnaissance Wing. That mission continued until 14 October 1949, when the base was again inactivated. During that activation, TAAF was renamed Forbes Air Force Base in memory of Maj. Daniel H. Forbes, a Topeka pilot killed June 5, 1948, while testing the Northrop XB-49 "Flying Wing" jet bomber near Muroc Dry Lake, CA.

During the Korean War, Forbes AFB reopened and was again assigned to SAC. on 16 February 1951 the 21st Air Division was activated at Forbes, and the division's 90th Bombardment Wing moved to the base in February and March. The wing trained SAC's newly activated 376th, 308th and 310th Bomb Wings. From June 1951 to August 1953 it also trained B-29 replacement crews for combat. About 10 a month were trained until August 1952 when the bomb wing training program was concluded and the number of B-29 crews produced was doubled.



Postcard of front gate, Forbes AFB. Note the Tactical Air Command shield on the gate guard shack

On 16 June 1952, the 90th was redesignated the 90th Strategic Reconnaissance Wing, Medium, and five months later started training recon crews as replacements for Far East Air Forces. During October 1952, the 55th Strategic Reconnaissance Wing moved to Forbes from Ramey AFB, Puerto Rico, continuing its program of photography, photomapping and electronic reconnaissance. The 90th and 55th Strategic Reconnaissance Wings flew Boeing RB-29 and RB-50 Superfortresses, then the Boeing RB-47 Stratojets.

The planes were equipped with a bank of six cameras behind and below the aft crew compartments. Aerial photo and electronic intelligence monitoring became the primary mission of Forbes-based Wings during this period. Such flights often put the planes and crews close to Korea and the USSR. For the arrival of RB-47 jet aircraft in February 1954, a 12,000 foot runway was constructed. Both the 90th and 55th Wings trained to combat readiness and began overseas duty tours.

### IN HARM'S WAY

In 1953, 1960, and 1965 four Forbes-based 55th Wing planes were attacked by Russian MiG fighters over international waters:

1. March 1953 - An RB-50 was attacked by a MiG-15 off the coast of Kamchatka, Western Russia. The RB-50 fired on the MiG, and it dove away.
2. July 1953 - A MiG-15 shot down an RB-50 over the Northern Pacific. Only the copilot was rescued from the 16-man crew.
3. July 1960 - An RB-47 was shot down by "Russian fire" in the Kola Peninsula region over the Barents Seas. Two of the six-man crew survived and were imprisoned by the Soviets for several months.
4. April 1965 - Two North Korean MiG-17 fighters fired upon an RB-47 off the coast of Korea. The aircraft was damaged, but the crew were unharmed and successfully landed the RB-47 at Yokota Air Base in Japan.

In the overhead photo of Forbes AFB at the right (taken in July 1963) there are 70 B-47 and RB-47 Stratojets parked on the ramp with at least six other aircraft of different types.



B-57 Canberra, U. S. Air Force, Forbes Air National Guard Base (former Forbes Air Force Base)

In June 1960, the 90th SRW was deactivated and replaced by the 40th Bomb Wing, transferred from Schilling AFB, Salina KS. The 40th was here until 1964 and it flew the B-47 Stratojets. The Tactical Air Command began operation of the base in 1965.

In October 1958, Topeka received news that Forbes AFB would support Atlas E missile sites to be constructed in the surrounding area. The Corps of Engineers Kansas City

District managed construction of the nine "coffins" where the missiles would be stored horizontally. Although Forbes was slated to have three sites with three missiles at each site, in February 1959, the Air Force directed that each missile be placed at an individual launch site. These sites were situated at or near Valley Falls, Dover, Waverly, Osage City, Delia, Wamego, Overbrook, Holton, and Bushong. Construction officially began on June 9, 1959, when Kansas Governor George Docking drove a silver nail into a construction form.

Site construction was split between two firms, with one firm respon-



sible for work at three sites and the other for work at the other six. There were difficulties encountered due to some 519 modifications made during construction. One modification concerned the propellant loading system. Prefabricated in Pittsburgh by Blaw-Knox Manufacturing for Atlas E sites at Vandenberg AFB, California; Warren AFB, Wyoming; Fairchild AFB, Washington; and Forbes AFB, the system components were to arrive on skids bolted together. Unfortunately the skids often arrived late and testing revealed system defects that took time Forbes Field, Topeka, Kansas

Labor-management problems caused occasional setbacks in construction. During the project there were 22 work stoppages, most of which were quickly resolved. However, in October and November 1960, a long work stoppage occurred due to a work assignment dispute between the hoisting engineers and the electrical workers. The problem was resolved after the National Labor Relations Board issued a restraining order. There were 25 lost-time accidents during construction, including two fatalities that were electricity-related. One minor disturbance occurred at one of the sites when student pickets from McPherson College arrived to protest the deployment of ICBMs.

Despite the labor problems and student pickets, the project continued on schedule. On July 1, 1960, the 548th Strategic Missile Squadron stood up. Nearly 6 months later, on January 24, 1961, the first Atlas missile arrived at Forbes. By October, all nine sites had their Atlas E missiles. The Forbes sites were completed 3 weeks ahead of schedule. On October 16, 1961, Air Force Ballistic Missile Activation Chief, Maj. Gen. Gerrity turned over operational control of the sites to Second Air Force Commander Lt. Gen. John D. Ryan. In the ensuing press conference the two generals urged Kansans to become interested in constructing fallout shelters as an insurance policy that could enhance deterrence.

As a result of Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara's May 1964 directive accelerating the decommissioning of Atlas and Titan I missile bases, the 548th Strategic Missile Squadron was deactivated on March 25, 1965.

Forbes transferred to the Tactical Air Command and the 838th Air Division in October 1964. The 313th Troop Carrier Wing (later Tactical Airlift Wing) became the primary flying unit at Forbes, operating Lockheed C-130B and C-130H Hercules cargo aircraft. IN 1966, the 1370th Photo Mapping Wing of the Military Airlift Command began operating at Forbes with Boeing RC-135 Lockheed RC-130 aircraft. The 1370th later became the Aerospace Cartographic and Geodetic Service (ACGS).

In January, 1974, the Metropolitan Topeka Airport Authority was created by Topeka City Charter Ordinance to oversee the transition period, the title for most of the 3,100-acre facility was transferred to the City of Topeka in April of 1976. Title was transferred to the city, less the Air Guard enclave on the northern third of the 6,000-foot north-south ramp, a portion of the south ramp and four associated buildings reserved for the Kansas Army National Guard. Commercial air service was moved to Forbes in May of 1976 and a month later Frontier Airlines initiated the first-ever jet service to Topeka.

## SCHS News to Use



If you're not receiving our bi-monthly email newsletter **SCHS News to Use**, please send your name, address, and email to [tosch-supdate@gmail.com](mailto:tosch-supdate@gmail.com). It's our primary method of keeping you up to date on coming events and activities. If you're not sure that we have your current email, send the requested information and we'll check.

# BY-LAWS CHANGES RECOMMENDED BY THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

At the annual meeting to be held on December 3, 2017, the members will be asked to approve changes in the SCHS By-Laws that have been voted on by the Board and are recommended for approval by the general membership. The changes are detailed below. There will be a discussion about the changes at the meeting with an opportunity for questions before a vote is taken.

Following are the present Articles and Sections followed by the recommended revision(s).

## Article II - Purpose

Section 1: The purpose of the SCHS, a non-profit corporation, is to preserve, collect and interpret the history of Shawnee County, Kansas. This purpose shall include, but not limited to:

Promoting public participation in local historical preservation and heritage commemoration;

Recognizing exceptional historic preservation;

Publishing materials on Shawnee County, Kansas history;

Preserving and interpreting selected historic landmarks;

Providing community education in areas of local history and culture; and



Collaborating with relevant heritage organizations.

Revision is a renaming of the Article and includes the addition of Vision, and Mission.

## **Article II – Vision, Mission, Objectives**

Section 1: Vision – A heritage literate community.

Mission – To promote greater awareness of the history of Shawnee County, Kansas, and its place in the national struggle for freedom through preservation, interpretation, education and citizen engagement.

Objectives - SCHS, as a non-profit corporation, intends to preserve, collect and interpret the history of Shawnee County, Kansas. These objectives shall include, but not be limited to:

Promoting public participation in local historical preservation and heritage commemoration;

Recognizing exceptional historic preservation;

Publishing materials on Shawnee County, Kansas history;

Preserving and interpreting selected historic landmarks;

Providing community education in areas of local history and culture; and;

Collaborating with relevant heritage organizations.

## **Article III - Membership**

Section 1: Application for voting membership in the SCHS shall be open to any who support the purpose statement in Article II.

Section 2: Continuing SCHS membership is contingent upon being up-to-date on annual membership



Our thanks to those of you that came out to Topeka Gives 2017 and supported your Shawnee County Historical Society and other community non-profits. The SCHS received \$2054 in contributions and match funds.



SCHS made \$55.08 between April and June 2017. One of the best ways you can help support the SCHS is to sign up for community rewards. It does not cost you anything and Kroger (Dillon's) will donate a percentage of your spending to the groups and organizations you choose. You can learn more at:

**[www.kroger.com/  
account/  
enrollCommunity  
RewardsNow](http://www.kroger.com/account/enrollCommunityRewardsNow)**

dues.

Section 3: The Board of Trustees shall have the authority to establish and define nonvoting categories of SCHS membership.

Revision adds this Section 4:

Section 4: The Board of Trustees shall have the authority to establish policies governing membership terms, renewals and dues payment dates.

#### **Article VII – Board of Trustees**

Section 9: Vacancies in the Board of Trustees shall be filled for the balance of the term by a vote of the majority of the remaining members of the Board of Trustees.

Revision conforms with current practice of Board appointment of Trustees to fill vacancies with election to full term at next annual membership meeting. Removes vague “balance of the term”.

Section 9: Vacancies in the Board of Trustees shall be filled for the balance of the calendar year by a vote of the majority of the remaining members of the Board of Trustees. Thereafter, at the annual membership meeting next following the occurrence of any such vacancy, a trustee shall be elected for a three-year term to fill the formerly vacant position.

#### **Article XI - Dues**

Section 1: Dues of the SCHS shall be set annually by the membership at the annual meeting upon the recommendation of the Board of Trustees. Dues shall be payable on January first (1) of each year.

Revision allows for a change in dues amounts and membership terms by the Board of Trustees with the approval of the membership and allows for a change from a calendar year membership term to an anniversary term in conjunction with the change in Article III above.

Section 1: Membership dues shall be set by the membership at the annual meeting upon the recommendation of the Board of Trustees.

## Don't Forget to Renew Your 2018 SCHS Membership

SCHS Memberships make great gifts for friends or family!

### MEMBERSHIP FORM

Membership is from January-December, annually

#### MEMBERSHIP FORM (Please print)

Yes! I wish to join the Society that preserves the past and celebrates our heritage.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

Home Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Cell Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Check type of membership: \_\_\_\_\_ Regular (\$35.00) \_\_\_\_\_ Patron(\$50.00)

\_\_\_\_\_ Renovator (\$100.00) \_\_\_\_\_ Heritage Education Sustainer (\$150.00 +)

#### GIFT MEMBERSHIP (Please print)

\_\_\_\_\_ \$ Gift Membership for someone I know who will benefit from membership.

(Photocopy this form for more than one. Use rates listed above.)

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

#### VOLUNTEER for a COMMITTEE

☐ Nominations ☐ Membership ☐ Publications

☐ Annual Meeting/Socials ☐ Preservation ☐ Public Relations

☐ Landmark Preservation Committee ☐ Education/Communications

Name \_\_\_\_\_

(Make checks to "Shawnee County Historical Society")

Please send form(s) with your check to:

Shawnee County Historical Society, P.O. Box 2201, Topeka, KS 66601-2201



## 2017 Officers :

George Bernheimer, President

Tom Ellis, President-Elect

Shirley Driscoll, Secretary

Bill Wagon, Treasurer

## 2017 Trustees :

Jon Boursaw

Tim Hrenchir

Johnathan Hart

Michael Lennen

Patrician Michaelis

James McHenry, Jr.

Johnathan Hart

Chris Schultz

Chris Bowers

Bryan Taggart

Carol Christensen



RETURN SERVICE  
REQUESTED

## Get Involved

The SCHS would like to thank all of our volunteers and staff that help us maintain our commitment and involvement in Shawnee County and other local communities. We could not make this happen without you!

There are many ways in which you can help the Shawnee County Historical Society preserve the past for the future. Become a member! Volunteer some time! Or make a donation. Also remember the SCHS in your estate planning.

Membership in SCHS is from January 1 through December 31 each year. There are three levels of support. The Society greatly appreciates and benefits from the highest level of membership in which you are able to participate. You will receive:

- Quarterly Newsletter
- Discounts at events
- The Shawnee County Historical Society News" to "SCHS News to Use bi-monthly email newsletter
- Online Archives
- The Shawnee County Historical Society News
- Invitation to the Annual Meeting on or near December 5, the anniversary of Topeka's founding
- Pre-announcements of Society activities and special events

Membership revenues also support other local endeavors including our Educational Program and History Day at Washburn University.

In addition, your Society works closely with the Kansas State Historical Society and is dedicated to a preservation focus, meant to preserve and celebrate the tangible aspects of our heritage. Together we can preserve Shawnee County History for future generations to enjoy.

We also work collaboratively with the National Park Service to provide learning opportunities for students and adults. The SCHS has partnerships with the National Association for State and Local Histories to preserve Shawnee County History.