



## Welcome to 2026. What's in it for AAHS?

The short answer is that it's too early to tell. There is action on several fronts, but how it'll all shake out remains to be seen. The following are the editor's personal observations and opinions. They do not represent a statement by or the official position of the American Aviation Historical Society.

Looking first at the "what we know" parts, the people in the wheelhouse, or on the flight deck, to go with an aeronautical metaphor, remain unchanged. CEO Jerri Bergen and President Tyson Smith will remain in those positions. Within the support echelon, a replacement must be found for long-time AAHS and Board of Directors member John Lyon, whose declining health prevents further service to the Society. *FlightLine* editor Joe Martin (your truly) will take John's place as Society Secretary. Howard Butcher has also stepped away from the BoD to support his wife as she fights through her health issues. Treasurer Les Whittlesey, Carl Scholl, Michael Mau, Caroline Mah, and Tim Williams (AAHS Prez, 1991-2000) remain in their BoD spots. The bylaws allow for additional BoD members, so a search for prospective candidates may be on the 2026 agenda.

*AAHS Journal* editor and one-man IT department Hayden Hamilton continues his invaluable efforts in both areas. Adam Estes, whose work frequently appears in *Vintage Aviation News*, has signed on as associate editor. Other commitments have forced Steve Johnston to throttle back his involvement.

Which brings us to what we see as AAHS's most critical concern. We think it's accurate to say that to 95% or more of the membership, the Journal *is* AAHS. It's why they sign up—and hopefully re-up. As those folks well know, the Journal is chronically 90 days or so behind our desired publication schedule. The reason for that has been explained numerous times, most recently in Jerri's message in the Fall 2025 Journal. But those repeated pleas have had no discernable effect. The flow of material for publication, never a raging torrent, is now barely a trickle. AAHS will continue to produce a print Journal as long as possible, but it's a struggle that gets more difficult with every edition. If the publication gap widens even further or, in a worst case scenario, there's no longer a print Journal at all, how would that affect AAHS? It's an issue we have to face, and soon.

*FlightLine* can continue with only moderate effort and requires no external input. But "the face of AAHS" it is not. Thanks to the efforts of Office Manager Charlie Shaw and volunteer Heather Wilson, AAHS has established (and maintains) a considerable Social Media presence. (Facebook and Instagram accounts—check 'em out.) The impact of Social Media on general public awareness of AAHS and our mission is hard to measure, but it can't help but be positive. Elsewhere in cyberspace, a primary objective of the Society for 2026 is a major overhaul of the AAHS website, <https://www.aahs-online.org>, including the long-awaited "blog" platform for *FlightLine* and other enhancements. Hopes are to have this done by mid-year.

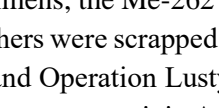
Previous *FlightLine* numbers have lightly covered the ongoing construction/renovation of the AAHS office at Flabob Airport. There has been much more to it than we've reported, and not all of it has gone smoothly. As of this writing the building contents, except for the climate-controlled "vault" holding the Society's crown jewels, have been removed so that the interior can be completely revamped. Four 40 ft. cargo containers, with internal lighting and a/c, are in place behind the office building. The ultimate office configuration has not been finalized and as yet there is no estimate of completion date, but the result will no doubt be a much enhanced environment for the conducting of AAHS business. All this is being financed by a benefactor who for now will remain anonymous.

Meanwhile, day-to-day operations are very much in *ad hoc* mode, but regular meetings of the "HQ crew" and twice-monthly Zoom conferences continue to be held. The office phone and all email accounts remain active and monitored. Among the HQ Crew regulars are Collections Manager Bob Palazzola and volunteer Heather (already mentioned), who strive mightily to evaluate and catalog the many and varied aviation history collections that AAHS continues to receive. One of the most successful AAHS efforts is the eBay "sales department" run by volunteer Julie Oppen. The library shelves are being thinned, and sales of duplicate books bring in around \$250 a month. Other income is derived from book and "merch" sales at airshows AAHS attends. (Five during 2025.) Klara Smith handles the accounting chores as well as membership liaison. Steered remotely (from the Seattle area) by volunteer Matt Miller, the *Plane Spotter* project has made good progress, but many slides remain to be identified. We're looking at trying to harness AI to assist. That one will be interesting!

In summary, 2026 shapes up as a make or break year for AAHS. Coincidentally, it's our 70th anniversary. We're planning a celebration in the fall, so stay tuned for more on that. In the good news column, the organization is on sound financial footing, thanks to some very generous donations, and the HQ crew are looking forward to getting back to work in their renovated home. On the downside, membership numbers have declined over the past few years, and we need to do a better job of attracting newcomers and retaining old timers. But the fact is that less than a dozen people—most days way less—are keeping AAHS going. There simply aren't enough hands to tend to all the buttons and levers that have to be pushed and pulled, so things are put on hold and good ideas never get implemented. We'll "keep on keepin' on" as best we can, but we could use some help.

So for this first newsletter of 2026, here's the same message that closed out 2025: Share your ideas, gripes, or suggestions with any of the AAHS team. Go to <https://www.aahs-online.org/about/contact.php> and select your target. Alternatively, ping us here at *FlightLine* [FlightLine@aahs-online.org](mailto:FlightLine@aahs-online.org). We'll see that your message gets into the proper hands. ➔

Joe Martin  
AAHS Newsletter Editor

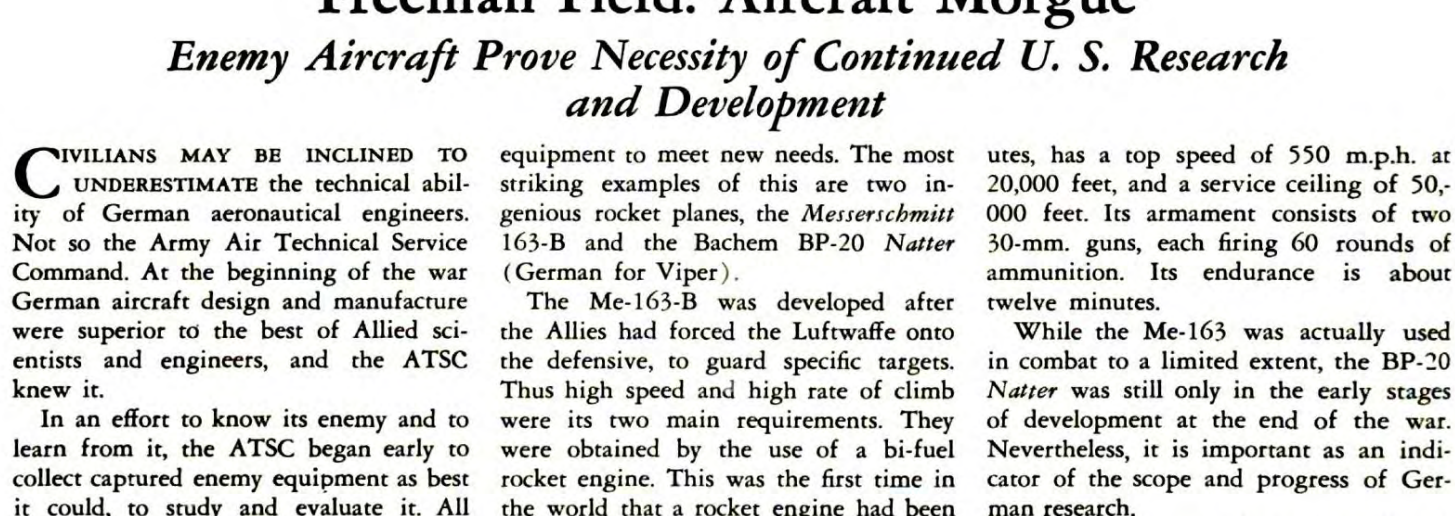


As stated in previous numbers, we're no longer attempting to produce *FlightLine* on the first and fifteenth of each month. The intent was and remains to transition to an online "blog" format but as noted in the lead-off editorial the disruptions of the past year have pushed that and much else to the back burner. Meanwhile, we'll continue in this "pseudo-blog" format.

In this number, we'll go with a teaser for an upcoming Journal article about one-time Messerschmitt chief test pilot Karl Baur and his involvement in Operation PAPERCLIP, the "importation" of German scientists to the U.S. after VE Day. In Baur's case, it was the collection of the latest German aircraft by the USAAF team known as "Watson's Whizzers" and the testing and exhibition of those jets at Freeman Field, Indiana, and other locations in late 1945. The Journal should be in your mailbox not long after you read this.

Baur's exploits while in American service more properly fell under another project called "Lusty"—an acronym for *Luftwaffe Secret Technology*. A pair of those specimens, the Me-262 and Arado Ar-234, are today well known stars in the National Air and Space Museum's galaxy. Sadly, others were scrapped before they could be saved as museum pieces. AAHS members can view a great three-part series, "ATI and Operation Lusty" that appeared in the 1995 *AAHS Journal*. Seventy years of aviation history are in that archive—another reason to join AAHS!

As we dusted off a couple of our books relating to LUSTY and the German jets, we were curious about what was printed about them at the time. We found a very interesting article in the November 1945 edition of *U.S. Air Service* magazine. It's surprisingly detailed, so we clipped it. Here 'tis.



ONE OF GERMANY'S FOREMOST SECRET WEAPONS, THE "VOLKSJAEGER"  
This Captured Jet-Propelled "Heinkel" 162 is Being Studied at the Air Technical Service Command, Freeman Field, Ind. It was First Encountered in Combat on April 4, this Year and was Used to Break Up Bomber Formations. It Had a Maximum Speed of 522 mph at 19,700 Feet

ATSC photo

### Freeman Field: Aircraft Morgue Enemy Aircraft Prove Necessity of Continued U. S. Research and Development

CIVILIANS MAY BE INCLINED TO UNDERESTIMATE the technical ability of German aeronautical engineers. Not so the Army Air Technical Service Command. At the beginning of the war German aircraft design and manufacture were superior to the best of Allied scientists and engineers, and the ATSC knew it.

In an effort to know its enemy and to learn from it, the ATSC began early to collect captured enemy equipment as best it could, to study and evaluate it. All this equipment has recently been transferred to the newly activated Freeman Field in Indiana, where, in the words of Maj. Gen. Hugh J. Knerr, Commanding General of ATSC, it serves as a living memorial "of the long and difficult race which the AAF and the RAF were forced to undertake to catch up with and finally surpass German research and engineering achievements."

Airplanes, engines, engine accessories, instruments, armament, radar equipment and photographic devices—all have been brought to Freeman Field for evaluation, and all were on display at a national press conference held at the field on September 29 and 30.

The collection of German aircraft bears ample testimony to the Germans' ability to design entirely new types of

equipment to meet new needs. The most striking examples of this are two ingenious rocket planes, the *Messerschmitt* 163-B and the Bachem BP-20 *Natter* (German for Viper).

The Me-163-B was developed after the Allies had forced the Luftwaffe onto the defensive, to guard specific targets. Thus high speed and high rate of climb were its two main requirements. They were obtained by the use of a bi-fuel rocket engine. This was the first time in the world that a rocket engine had been used exclusively to power an airplane.

The engine is the Walter 109,509. Weighing only 365 pounds, this engine gives a maximum thrust at S. I. of 3,300 pounds. The fuels used are known as T-Stoff (concentrated hydrogen peroxide) and C-Stoff (a mixture of hydrazine hydrate and alcohol). At full thrust the fuel consumption is more than 1,000 pounds a minute, but for cruising it is considerably less since only the smaller of two combustion chambers is used.

Other features of the plane are a normal flying weight of only 9,500 pounds, a special swept-back wing design, and a jettisonable twin-wheel undercarriage.

In performance the Me-163 probably excels all present-day interceptors. It can climb to 30,000 feet in 2.6 minutes.

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with a liquid rocket unit similar to that used in the Me-163 and having a wing area of only 1,250 square feet, the plane can climb to more than 37,000 feet in one minute and attains a maximum speed of about 625 m.p.h. at 16,000 feet. At full power it will fly for 80 seconds and at normal power for two minutes. Its armament was to be 24 7.3-cal. rocket projectiles in the nose for close range.

Unlike the Me-163, which had no armor, it was heavily protected in the cockpit. Getting a headstart on this country on jet-propelled aircraft, too, the Germans designed a twin-engined jet fighter as early as 1938 and flew it for the first time in 1940. This was the Me-262, since then considerably modified. The production model was powered with two *Jumo* 004-B jet engines capable of producing 1,890 pounds of thrust at sea-level. These engines, incidentally, use an axial-flow compressor rather than the centrifugal type used in this country.

With a high speed of 530 m.p.h., a service ceiling of 39,400 feet, and a rate of climb of 8,750 feet a minute, the Me-262 was used in combat as both fighter and bomber. As a fighter it carried four 30-mm. nose-mounted guns, and as a bomber two 250-kg. or one 500-kg. bomb, carried externally, plus two 30-mm. guns.

The deepest penetration of the 262's with bombs was 160 miles at an altitude of 13,000 feet and a speed of 420 m.p.h. Bombing accuracy at 13,000 feet, however, proved poor, so pilots were later instructed to go down to lower altitudes. They would dive from 13,000 to 3,200 feet—though at no more than 570 m.p.h.—drop their bombs, and then easily climb away from opposing fighters and flak because of their high speed.

ANOTHER JET FIGHTER which demonstrates the Germans' ingenuity in the *Heinkel* 162, a twin-tailed plane popularly known as the *Volksjaeger* (people's fighter) and code-named *Salamander*. Designed to employ as little as possible of scarce materials, it had wooden wings and duralumin formers and skin on the fuselage. It was first encountered in combat on April 4 of this year. Though a small plane, with a wing span of 24 feet, it had a maximum speed of 522 m.p.h. at 19,700 feet and of 485 at 36,000 feet.

In the twin-engined, single-place *Arado* 234 the Germans produced the first jet plane for reconnaissance missions. The

Ar-234-B was first flown in December, 1943; went into production in June, 1944, and was used in combat soon after both for reconnaissance over Allied territory and for bombing tactical targets. For high altitude operations it was fitted with a pressure cabin, and as a bomber could carry from 1,000 to 2,000 kg. of bombs. It has a high speed of 470 m.p.h. at 19,700 feet and a service ceiling of 37,700 feet.

Soon after the Ar-234-B first flew, the C sub-type was completed for flight trials. This was powered by four BMW 003 jet units, arranged in two twin nacelles slung beneath the wing, and proved to be an unusually efficient aircraft. Not only did it have good inherent aerodynamic stability, but it turned in very high performance. Fortunately its development was retarded because of frequent disruption of the factories by Allied bombers. But the fact remains that the Germans had engineered this and other planes of advanced design and were overcome in the end because the Allies had time to build up an air force of superior numbers.

IT IS NOT ONLY IN JET AND ROCKET PLANES that the Germans excelled. Since the beginning of the war, and before, they have produced conventional aircraft to rival the best in the world—fighters, bombers, dive bombers, transports.

In the fighter class, the single-engined Me-109 and *Focke-Wulf* 190 were outstanding. Both made their appearance early in the war, both were built in many versions, and both were still going strong at the time of Germany's capitulation.

Coming into service in September, 1942, the famous Me-109-G was used effectively both as a high-altitude fighter and bomber. Some of its sub-types had pressurized equipment for sustained operation at high altitudes, and could be fitted with MW-50 or GM-1 power-boosting systems for short emergency acceleration at altitude.

From the time the first FW-190 was flown in 1938 until last May, the plane underwent many changes and modifications but remained one of Germany's best fighters. It was truly a pilot's delight, for, in addition to giving excellent performance, it was fitted with a number of automatic devices so that the pilot had a minimum of manual operations to attend to and could concentrate on combat.

At ATSC Headquarters at Wright Field, Ohio, was kept a blacklist of enemy equipment which was wanted, including latest examples of everything from complete aircraft, engines, automatic pilots and radar devices down to landing gear parts, guns, spark plugs and instruments. This was cleared with the British Air Intelligence in London and provided to ATI in the field. From then on it was up to the ATI teams under Lieut. Col., then Major, John O. Gette, to get the desired items however they could.

The teams were aided in their missions by tracking down all the information gathered from German prisoners of war, all the facts supplied by the willing French who had worked in German parts plants in France and Luxembourg, all the data gathered by the far-flung organization which examined and noted every German plane shot down in the ETO. So, when the blacklist showed that the engineers of the ATSC wanted a certain German turbo-supercharger, hydraulic landing gear or automatic pilot, more than likely the information as to about where it might be found would be appended.

Maybe it was in a certain plant in Strasbourg or in a freight car on a siding in Holland, or perhaps one could be salvaged from a crash near Antwerp.

At any rate, the ATI teams didn't suffer forth without knowing exactly where they were going and what they were after.

illustrate the Italian engineering genius. Most of the aircraft equipment at Freeman Field today was obtained before VE-day. How it was captured is a story in itself—an adventure story in which British Air Intelligence and American Air Technical Intelligence teams played the roles of heroes.

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utes, has a top speed of 550 m.p.h. at 20,000 feet, and a service ceiling of 50,000 feet. Its armament consists of two 30-mm. guns, each firing 60 rounds of ammunition. Its endurance is about twelve minutes.

While the Me-163 was actually used in combat to a limited extent, the BP-20 *Natter* was still only in the early stages of development at the end of the war. Nevertheless, it is important as an indicator of the scope and progress of German research.

Midway between a directed missile and an interceptor fighter, the *Natter* was designed as a cheap, semi-expendable, rocket-propelled plane of very small endurance for defending special vital targets. The plane was to be launched from a vertical ramp and its initial flight directed from the ground according to information obtained from radar detectors, the sole duty of the pilot being to control the plane during the last few hundred yards of its flight towards a bomber. After aiming the plane, the pilot would detach the whole rear section of the fuselage with its expensive rocket unit, which would be floated to earth by parachute, and then bail out himself.

The idea for the *Natter* was first conceived in August, 1944, and flight tests began three months later. Fitted

More heavily powered than the Me-109, the 190 was the first German fighter to use an air-cooled engine, being equipped with a 1,560-h.p. BMW 801 engine. Several later versions, however, substituted liquid-cooled engines, which were more highly esteemed. Of these, the most noteworthy is the Ta-152 with the famed *Jumo* 213 engine.

IN THE BOMBER CLASS, the Junkers Ju-88 was the German mainstay. This was a twin-engined plane designed for a crew of four. First flown in 1936, it was subsequently adapted for a wide variety of functions, saw action throughout the war, and was still in production when the war ended. Among its many duties were level bombing, dive-bombing, torpedo-bombing, photo reconnaissance, night flying, and serving as the lower component of composite aircraft.

Based on the design of the Ju-88 were the Ju-188 and Ju-388. The latter was a high-performance, high-altitude plane which was included in the restricted production program in force at the end of the war. Using two BMW 801 engines, it has a top speed of 378 m.p.h. and a service ceiling of 42,200 feet, but it can make as much as 432 m.p.h. with *Jumo* 222 engines. All models in the night-fighter series have pressurized cabins and pointed nose fairing for the radar aerial arrays.

Other German bombers now assembled at Freeman Field which were of sound design and were used with good results during the war are the *Heinkel* 111, the *Heinkel* 129 and the *Messerschmitt* 410.

The He-111 was originally built as a Luftwaffe transport in 1935, was redesigned as a bomber for use in the Spanish Civil War, and was used as a bomber, torpedo-bomber, reconnaissance plane, glider tug and transport in this war. Later versions incorporate assisted takeoff by a winch system and rockets, which are slung under the center section. The HS-129 was the standard ground-attack plane developed for close cooperation with the German Army and noted for its heavy armor and armament. The Me-410 was a two-place plane which could be used as a fast bomber, heavy fighter, reconnaissance plane or ground-attack plane.

Among Freeman Field's proudest possessions is one of the two *Jumo* Ju-290 four-engined transports, the largest land planes ever built by the Nazis.

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It was a pretty sure bet that when an ATI team went on a mission to a "technical target," it came back with what it went after or it didn't come back. It had no time limit but merely an objective, and it got there when it could and the best way it could. If it couldn't fly, it could drive, and if it couldn't drive it could walk. And if it was after was there, it brought it back—though it often took mechanical ability, ingenuity and a vast amount of patience, as for example to extricate an 1,800-pound engine from a crashed and burned plane half submerged in a frozen swamp miles from a road and to transport it intact two or three hundred miles to Paris.

With the war on all fronts over, this type of adventurous intelligence work is over, too. But the ATSC will continue to collect enemy equipment of all kinds at Freeman Field until it has a sample of each, in order to evaluate it and learn anything it can from the Axis scientists.

At the same time the ATSC is planning to establish a kind of museum of American aircraft at the field for historical purposes. In the collection will be one or more types of each U. S. aircraft used in and since World War I, including many name planes of the AAF, such as *Hell's Angels* and the *Swoose*.

Together the two collections should serve as a continual reminder of General Knerr's thesis that technical supremacy is the basis of air power.

"In the coming years of peace," he has warned, "we must continue to maintain our scientific and engineering leadership in the air. It costs money, but what it costs is a drop in the bucket compared to the cost of war. If we remain the world's foremost air power, which we are today, there need be no more wars."

Many moons ago we asked (rhetorically) what were the five, or ten (or X) most influential aircraft in history. The response didn't exactly bust the internet, but we're gonna continue anyway—just not today. We did get a sorta-but-not-really nomination of the Ford Tri-Motor, but that one won't make our list. If you think it should, then give us your rationale. If other candidates come to mind, tell us.

To refresh, our first pick (in No. 25-02) was the 1783 prototype hydrogen balloon designed by J.A.C. Charles. That basic design was followed for the 100+ years that the spherical balloon, despite all its deficiencies, ruled as the world's only workable aircraft.

Staying within a chronological framework, our next candidate (No. 25-06) was the Wright Flyer of 1907-1908 that opened European and American eyes alike and kicked off the development of practical airplanes.

We'd given some thought to a rather obscure type that appeared around the time of the Wright Brothers' first hops at Kitty Hawk, then decided those didn't quite make the grade either. But after further review, as they say in the NFL, we're going to do a short tribute anyway. Not today on that, either, but we could get remotivated—or not—any day now. ➔

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