

\$21K raised for Julemand

By 1st Lt. Jeremy Eggers

821st Air Base Group Public Affairs

Reaching a 20-year high, residents of Thule Air Base raised nearly \$21,000 during 2003 for Operation Julemand, an annual base initiative that benefits the Qaanaaq municipality's 260 children.

Operation Julemand—Julemand is the Danish word for Santa Claus—supports a Youth Center in Qaanaaq, a city of about 900 people located 75 miles northwest of the base, and provides Christmas gifts to the district's children.

The last time Thule raised a comparable amount was 1983, when the base raised \$22,015.71. "There were many more people here back then," said Chief Petty Officer Lars Iversen, Danish Liaison Office. Base residents numbered in the thousands in the early 80's, compared to approximately 800 today. "It says a lot that we reached a near record amount this year with so few people," said Iversen.

"Operation Julemand epitomizes the spirit of the North and the true spirit of Christmas," said Master Sgt. Rick Shaffer, Thule's first sergeant and Julemand Committee president.

The fundraiser began in 1959, a time when families here and at Dundas Radio Station sent their children to school on the main base, said Iversen. The money raised was used to buy Christmas presents for those children. Providing Christmas presents to children has been a tradition ever since.

The Operation Julemand Committee, which oversees the program, uses the money raised to both purchase gifts for local children and also to provide a cash donation to



Photo by 1st Lt. Jeremy Eggers

Chief Petty Officer Lars Iversen, Danish Liaison Office, records winning numbers for the DLO's Ticket Raffle, which raised \$2,241 for Operation Julemand, Thule's program which supports children in the Qaanaaq municipality. The stack of money was raised for Julemand 2003—nearly \$21,000.

various international charities on behalf of the base. Past charities have been the Ronald McDonald House, which supports families of children with life-threatening illnesses, and Fulton Stiftelsen, a Danish sail boat that doubles as a school for troubled youth.

In recent years the cash donation has gone to Denmark's Save The Children initiative benefiting Greenland.

His Royal Highness Crown Prince Frederik of Denmark is protectorate of the Save The Children organization. After his dogsled expedition from Qaanaaq in 2000, Prince Frederik saw a need to reach out to the children in the district, said Iversen. Since then, Save the Children has used the Julemand donations to support Qaanaaq's Youth Center, a place where children can learn how to use computers, play musical instruments, and interact with others.

"The Youth Center provides a home away from home for the local children,"

said Col. Thomas Walker, Thule Air Base commander, who visited the center in October. "In the past, furniture, computers, and televisions have been purchased for the Youth Center through Save The Children. It's a great facility and we're proud to support it."

The Julemand gifts were delivered to all the villages in the Qaanaaq municipality on a space available basis free of charge by Air Greenland, which has routine flights in the district. Base personnel have traveled to Qaanaaq to hand out gifts in times past, but they were unable to make the trip this year due to inclement weather. However, the weather did not hamper the spirits of children in Qaanaaq, who opened up their Operation Julemand gifts Monday. "Our best wishes go out to all our neighbors in the Qaanaaq municipality this Christmas—we're honored to celebrate Christmas here in Santa's backyard," said Walker.

A look back at '03, the way ahead for '04

By Col. Thomas Walker

821st Air Base Group commander

Christmas trees and decorations, gift exchanges, Julemand and Gløgg: all of these show that people all around base are ready—and have been ready—for this holiday season. Another event that just happened is the Winter Solstice—December 21. That was the longest night of the year meaning that more and more light will start appearing over South Mountain leading up to the first glimpses of the sun in early February.

Realizing that a person can take things like the sun and daylight for granted is something I never thought possible. Without a doubt, Thule gives people an opportunity to gain a new appreciation for so many things, as well as for friends, and most of all, for family. For me, I've gained a whole new perspective.

Preparing for Christmas this year has been very different for my wife and two children as well as for me. This is the first time I've been away from my family during Christmas and I continue to be amazed by all the little things I remember from previous years that only now seem to surface.

When I talk to my family and hear how they are trying to carry on the same traditions, I realize that my wife has stepped into my traditional role, doing things like getting the tree ready for the kids to decorate or putting up the lights on the house.

I'm sure all of us will remember this Christmas for the rest of our lives. That being the case, I believe it's within us to decide if that memory is going to be a good or a bad one. Take a few moments to reflect on what's bright in your life. What are you thankful for—family, friends, coworkers, health, sunlight, freedom? Taking the time to appreciate all that we have can only serve to ease the thoughts of all that we are giving up and sacrificing.

Let's continue to be thankful for all those engaged in the Global War on Terrorism. We have members of our Armed Forces still engaged in combat



Photo by 1st Lt. Jeremy Eggers

The New Year will bring new fitness standards to the Air Force. Here, Col. Stephen Meigs, AFSPC/SG, talks with Henrik Juhl, Health and Wellness Center director, about the new standards, which consist of a run, push-ups, and sit-ups. However, Thule is slated to continue using the Ergometry test due to the base's austere conditions. Meigs visited Thule Dec. 18 to tour facilities.

in Afghanistan and Iraq and tremendous progress is being made. Across the globe, people continue to celebrate the capture of Saddam Hussein. While this was a great moment and certainly a big step towards building a democratic Iraq, the world's senior leadership remains cautiously optimistic and reminds us that there is still much work to be done.

We're doing our part here as well. We've played (and continue to play) a key role in providing combat capabilities to commanders in the field. Through the Ballistic Missile Early Warning System radar, the 12th Space Warning Squadron is able to provide "top of the world" missile warning coverage and space surveillance that ensures the United State and our allies have potential-threat information in a timely manner.

Detachment 3, 22d Space Operations Squadron—also known as POGO, "the golf balls at the end of the

runway," and Santa's Workshop—is instrumental in providing critical satellite command and control for polar orbiting satellites. It's important to reflect on what it means to be here at Thule and how we all are part of the team that provides security to the United States and her allies.

This year has been very interesting as the United States, Denmark, and Greenland continue to look for common ground on Thule's future. Negotiations are ongoing, and we are very optimistic about coming to a resolution that's a win-win solution for all parties. The one thing I'm confident of is that we will continue the excellent spirit of cooperation that exists here among Greenlanders, Danes, Americans, and Canadians—that's what "Team Thule" is all about.

Team Thule is more than a slogan; it's the way of life in the high arctic. To not function as a team means potential loss of life, resources and mission failure—that's not an option. And besides, being a team player is more fun!

We're sure to see our tempo increase as we swing into the New Year and see the days grow longer. We'll have many distinguished visitors here, OPERATION BOXTOP will bring back our Canadian friends, and it isn't much longer until the construction and port seasons begin again. All of this and more will ensure that Thule never becomes a boring place.

As you consider your New Year's resolution, think about renewing your commitment to "making Thule a better place." As the tempo picks up remember that sometimes returning to the basics is just the prescription for ensuring that we all move forward. For me, I use the A-B-Cs. Anticipate, Be prepared, and Communicate—up, down, and sideways. It's simple and it works!

To all the members of Team Thule, I'd like to offer thanks for all you do and for a fantastic 2003. As we move into 2004, be safe, dress warm, and take care of each other. Happy Holidays!

Chaplain visits aviator's 'mecca' for flight's 100-year anniversary

By Chaplain Buddy Walker
821st Air Base Group Chaplain

The dream was there. I can remember discussing it with friends who work the line at our own Angelina Country Airport years ago. I recall talking it up with F-15 pilots on the ramp at Tyndall Air Force Base where I spent the first years of the new Century. Wouldn't it be cool, I'd pondered, to travel back to where it all started, celebrating the 100th anniversary of mechanized flight on the spot where it occurred? Dreams become goals, as the two bicycle makers from Dayton demonstrated to all of us; but the good folks at Air Force assignments sure know how to add drama to the scene, as June 2003 found me stepping off a jet for a one year remote in Greenland. So much for the big celebration on Kill Devil Hills, N.C.

Yet, somewhere between luck, I seized an opportunity for my pilgrimage to aviation's holy land. I'd be arriving there roughly a month before the huge, much touted international event itself, but hey, I'd be there, and the satisfaction of steeping myself in this place of beginnings meant as much to me personally as standing among crowds on 17 December.

And so, I sat in the back seat of an airliner as we descended toward Norfolk, Virginia, closest commercial airport to where it all began. A 5-year-old boy bounced in the window seat one row up from me, chattering away at all the marvels outside his window to a very patient dad close by. As we made our final approach to ORV, the boy gave his father...and all of us...a play-by-play of every re-



Photo by Chaplain Buddy Walker

This bronze plaque is the location of where the Wright Flyer lifted off making the first flight Dec. 17, 1903.



Photo by Chaplain Buddy Walker

Chaplain Buddy Walker, 821st Air Base Group chaplain, poses near a monument to Wilbur and Orville Wright at Kill Devil Hills, North Carolina. Walker made a pilgrimage to the site of the first flight Nov. 22. The chaplain is an aviation enthusiast and pilot.

configuration he witnessed while flaps, foilers, spoilers, speed brakes and ailerons flopped, rose, waved and performed for the tiny traveler.

"Why'd that thing open on the wing daddy? What's that thing moving inside there dad?"

And inevitably, the classic response to any parent's attempted answer: "WHY?!"

Exiting the aircraft minutes later, I couldn't resist pointing out, that dad had the makings of an aerospace engineer sitting with him.

"You have no idea," he groaned. "You ought to see what he does with his toys...takes 'em apart, remakes them with other things."

I remembered a couple of young boys in 19th Century Dayton who puzzled over and played with the toy rotor prop their father gave them, and how proud Bishop Wright had been, seeing them tinkering and practicing with it. I wondered what mark this little one might make in aero developments some day.

Well flying commercially to Norfolk was a breeze compared to inventing a steerable, self-propelled heavier-than-air craft capable of carrying a person; but I think renting a car and finding the roads to Kittyhawk might run a close second on the difficulty scale. I got lost. Temporarily surrendering my "man card," I stopped and asked directions three times before finally getting out of Virginia and into North Carolina. Later that night as I relaxed at the bed & breakfast, I was reading one of my biographies on the Wright family. I laughed as I learned that Orville had suffered the same frustrations in 1900 the first time he'd set

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Thousands gather for re-enactment

By Staff Sgt. C. Todd Lopez
Air Force Print News

KILL DEVIL HILLS, N.C.—More than 34,200 people stood in mud, the cold and rain, and under gray sky to witness the climax of a yearlong celebration.

The event was not even something original or new, but something that had been done before—exactly 100 years before.

The crowd gathered to watch a re-enactment of Orville and Wilbur Wright's first powered flight that took place Dec. 17, 1903, at 10:35 a.m. at that very location—now a national park in the brothers' honor. The re-enactment was the finale of the centennial of flight celebration that consisted of aviation-related events held in locations across the United States.

The centerpiece of the re-enactment was a reproduction of the Wright brothers' original 1903 flyer. The 605-pound, 440-foot-wide aircraft of mostly wood, fabric and aluminum, was equipped with a four-cylinder, 12-horsepower engine and two handcrafted wooden propellers. The craft was exact in every detail to the Wright brothers' original flyer and was built by The Wright Experience, of Warrenton, Va.

The goal of the Experimental Aviation Association, the organization that commissioned construction of the aircraft, was to re-enact the Wright brothers' original flight exactly 100 years after it happened. They hoped to use an exact reproduction of the craft, fly it in the same location the brothers had and conduct the flight at exactly the same time the Wright brothers had.

Unfortunately, the weather was not the same as the Wright brothers had a century before. Weather was the one factor in the equation that the association, who had been so precise in



Photo by Chaplain Buddy Walker

Chaplain Buddy Walker poses near a replica of the Wright Flyer, the aircraft that launched the world into the age of flight. Members of the Experimental Aviation Association, which commissioned the new Wright Flyer, attempted to fly the plane on the exact time the Wright brothers did 100 years earlier, but Mother Nature had other ideas.

all other regards, was unable to control. The crowd in the bleachers was disappointed when they learned the craft would not fly at 10:35, because of a lack of wind. The muddy, 800-foot-wide circular field where the flight was to take place remained empty.

But, like the Wright brothers themselves, the aircrew was persistent. Around noon, the reproduction Wright flyer rolled out into the field. After nearly a half-hour of preparations and several attempts to start the craft's twin propellers, the two-stroke motor sputtered to a start. The crowd exploded into cheers.

Several minutes later, the ground crew pushed the craft down the 180 feet of wooden rail that had been laid across the muddy field.

Near the end of the rail, the nose of the flyer lifted up and the craft lifted nearly six inches off the ground.

Unfortunately, the wind was not strong enough to take the aircraft on the 12-second flight the Wright brothers experienced 100 years ago.

The crew did not consider their attempt a failure. They later said they had flown the craft several times before, preparing for the event. Their efforts, the lessons they had learned in trying, the event attendance and the approval of the crowd meant they had been successful.

"I'm not disappointed at all," said Ken Hyde, the flyer's builder. "I would have liked like to have shown people we could fly. I would have liked to have flown [it]. But we have created an awareness of the Wright brothers here."

Hyde said the crowds have been amazing the past four days.

"It's amazing the number of people who have come here to join us," he said.

**Clueless? Don't have time to watch Ch.16 to figure out what's happening at Thule?
ACCESS THE THULE BASE CALENDAR ON YOUR E-MAIL
For more information, call Staff Sgt. Venessa Hernandez at 3415.**

It was a dark and stormy night

First Storm III of the year makes everybody a believer

By 1st Lt. Jeremy Eggers

821st Air Base Group Public Affairs

There are at least two stories out there about people who have died during Thule's violent storms. There are probably more, but the two I've heard happened "years and years ago" or "sometime in the 60's." One has to do with a guy who started freaking out because his building was shaking during a particularly violent storm. He evacuated thinking the building was about to collapse, and nobody has heard or seen from him since—apparently, the wind swept him away.

Another story has to do with a man leaving his dormitory in the middle of a storm to walk to a flattop across the road. Residents found his body at the bottom of the outside stairs after the storm had abated. Doctors ruled that the man died of asphyxiation caused by the storm's high winds.

Those are the types of stories that have become Thule legends—fantastic,

far-fetched stories that just don't seem possible.

And then you experience your first Storm III and all the sudden you become a believer. You watch the winds whip through the streets, blowing snow so dense you can't see the light across the street. You look out the window and it looks like you're flying through a cloud. Maybe weather like this could huff and puff and blow a flattop down. Maybe that guy was swept away by the wind.

"You've got to respect the storm," said Phil Eddy, Thule's chief weather forecaster. People here earned respect for Thule's extreme weather Dec. 4, when the first Storm III of the 2003-04 storm season hit main base at about 9:30 a.m.

During the storm winds on base peaked around 104 miles per hour and the winds off base peaked around 139 miles per hour. Many who watched the Thule weather channel to monitor temperature, wind speed and wind chill noticed that some areas weren't registering any wind. "The blowing snow clogs up the anemometers and eventually, so much snow is packed on them that they freeze up. Peak winds

on base were probably more like 140 miles per hour and 160 miles per hour off base," said Eddy.

Even those estimated winds are nothing compared to the highest recorded wind on Thule—207 miles per hour March 8, 1972.

Temperature typically plays a key role in predicting storms. The temperature the day before the storm was approximately -13 degrees Fahrenheit compared with +16 degrees Fahrenheit at one point during the storm. The temperature spread can be explained by wind blowing air masses off the top of the ice cap, 10,000 feet at its high point, down to Thule's elevation of about 200 feet.

"Air warms up about 3 degrees Fahrenheit every 1,000 feet it descends," said Eddy. Air at 10,000 feet will be approximately 30 degrees (F) warmer by the time it reaches sea level, which is one reason why a sudden increase in temperature can be indicative of a storm.

At Storm II, all personnel are directed to return to their dormitories to wait out the storm and only emergency personnel are allowed to out. At Storm III, people go outside only in the most desperate of circumstances.

"We typically see about three Storm III's each year and six Storm II's," said Eddy. "We haven't had any 'real' Storm III's for about five years, though."

Eddy says "real" with a somewhat dismissive, been-there-done-that attitude, a right he's earned after nearly a decade of living here. "The Dec. 4 storm was a good one, but they can get a lot worse."

A lot worse. Kind of like that Storm III in the early 1960's that carried on for 7 days—on day 6 the main base lost power, and by the end of the storm, some 180 vehicles were damaged beyond repair.

Thule legend? "That actually happened," said Eddy. "It was our worst storm on record."



Photo by Chaplain Buddy Walker

Maj. Neil Wentz, 821st Support Squadron commander, 2nd Lt. Justin Lewis, 12th Space Warning Squadron, and Senior Airman Holly Gautreaux, 821st Security Forces Squadron, pose for a moment at Sonderstrom, where the DC-8 diverted to Dec. 4 when a Storm III hit main base.

Thule tracks Santa tonight!

By Tech. Sgt. Rob Burnett
12th Space Warning Squadron

Editor's Note: The following information was sent to schools that base personnel have worked with regarding Thule's involvement in tracking Santa. For more information, see the Web site: www.noradsanta.org.

Hello y'all! Did you know that Thule Air Base (AB) Greenland is the first base to find and track Santa Claus on his trip from the North Pole across the world? While we are clearing the airspace of other satellite, aircraft, and hot air balloons, we watch the reindeer take practice flights, play reindeer games, and conduct pre-flight checks an hour before Santa takes off.

We call Santa within 10 minutes of his departure and let him know he is cleared for final takeoff. We then track him from the North Pole, utilizing special computer software we call "STENB", which stands for Santa Track ENabled. As he leaves our radar

coverage, other satellites and radar sites continue to provide NORAD information on Santa's progress. Without our unique location, Santa's sleigh would never be able to carry him and the toys safely to all the good little boys and girls all over the world. We send NORAD real-time data regarding Santa's location, and they act as Air Traffic Controllers for the Great Jolly One. Being just south of his home and workshop at the North Pole, we are the closest radar and best guarantee for the start of a safe holiday journey.

The men and women at Thule AB have proudly had a close working relationship with Santa since the early 1950s when Santa heard about our Operation "Julemand" (the Danish word for Santa). During Operation "Julemand," the base raises money (this year over \$18,000!) to buy presents for the boys and girls in our remote part of Greenland. When our radar was built in the early 1960s, that first Christmas

Eve, we thought we were tracking a set of uncorrelated targets, until he established positive voice contact with, "HO! HO! HO!" and we knew who it was! Santa realized what a big help we could be making sure he was clear of airplanes and satellites, allowing him to carefully fly across the North Pole.

In spite of our close working relationship with Santa, the Merry Old Elf still will not tell us how he fits all those presents into his pack and sleigh. With a twinkle in his eye and chuckle from his belly, he did tell us the secret is in *how* he, Mrs. Claus, and the elves use the magic found in the love of all the children across the world. Thus, through the wonders of magic, some help from Mrs. Claus and his elves (and the men and women of 12 SWS and Thule AB), Santa is able to take care of all the good boys and girls. Merry Christmas and Happy New Year from the Air Base on the "Top of the World!"

A hand in a manger

Photo by 1st Lt. Jeremy Eggers

Lt. Col. Thomas "Dingo" Doyne, 12th Space Warning Squadron commander, sets up a nativity scene in the Thule Air Base chapel during a decorating event Dec. 6. The Thule Chapel is offering two services for Christmas:

Catholic Mass at 5 p.m. Candlelight, Carol, and Communion service at 7 p.m. All are welcome to attend.



Airmen squeak by NCOs and win Quarterly Airman Appreciation Event

By Tech. Sgt. Terry Wolberg
821st Support Squadron

It was a cold December evening at Thule AB when 10 Airman and 17 NCOs met at the Thule AB Fitness and Sports Center Bowling Alley for the Quarterly TOP 4 Airman's Appreciation Event. This quarter the Top 4 chose the sport, bowling, and the TOW Club delivered a pizza assortment, for dinner. The Top 4 Events Committee made the arrangements for the event, provided the pizza, and the 821 SFS "Cop Council" paid for the Airman to bowl. Special thanks goes out to SSgt Michael Whisnant, 821 SFS, for getting the Airman participation and offering the monies from the "Cop Council" to pay for the junior bowlers. 10 members of the Top 4 bowled "No Tap" rules head-to-head with the participating Airman. After 3 grueling bowling games, the Airman prevailed by only 60 total pins in 30 total games bowled. This is just testament on how close the competition was. The traveling "Toilet Seat Trophy" will remain in the Top 4's possession for another quarter.

The evening wasn't complete without handing out the Top 4 Quarterly Look Sharp Award to 2 individuals. SrA Jeffrey Pack, 821 ABG/FM, and Amn David Schwartz, 821 SFS, tied during this quarter's Look Sharp Award. The Look Sharp Award goes to a junior enlisted member that exemplifies dress and appearance, customs and courtesies, and professionalism during the quarter. All Top 4 members are encouraged to observe, nominate, and select each quarter's recipient. The Top 4



Photo by 1st Lt. Jeremy Eggers

Airman 1st Class Louis Marceaux, 821st Security Forces Squadron, bowls during the Quarterly Airman Appreciation Event at the Bowling Center in December. The Airman won the event by 60 points.

Professional Development Committee is responsible for the Look Sharp Award Program.

Shortly after I arrived at Thule AB in January 2003, I became a member of the Thule AB Top 4. What interested me the most about the Top 4 here is that it was geared to promote the Airman of Thule through mentoring, camaraderie, and social events. I became a member of the Events Committee shortly after to further participate in these events.

In June 2003, I jumped at the opportunity to become the Chairman of

the Top 4 Events Committee. As Events Committee Chairman, I have had the opportunity to promote this event exclusively. Airman are the future of the Air Force and the Thule Top 4 has done an exceptional job promoting Espirit De Corps with the junior force.

With my tour to Thule AB coming to a close, I leave here a proud member of the Thule Top 4. SSgt Stacey Pennix, 821 ABG/FM, was recently named the new Chairman of the Top 4 Events Committee and will do an excellent job carrying on the position.

Photo by 1st Lt. Jeremy Eggers

The championship intramural basketball team: (from left)—Garry Berry, Josh Moyer, Tony Zimmer, Jeff Thomas, Jared Austin George Sconyers, Steve Keith, Corey Burnett, and Stacey Pennix.

SPTS wins intramural basketball

By 1st Lt. Jeremy Eggers

821st Air Base Group Public Affairs

Thule's winter basketball season wrapped up Dec. 16 with the SPTS/ABG team taking home the title of Base Champions with a 48-28 victory over OPS.

GC took third place after delivering a crushing blow to the Cops, 60-34.

The SPTS/ABG vs. OPS match up made for an extremely intense championship game with each team picking up the seasons only two technical fouls. In the end, the depth of SPTS/ABG paid off. "We had stand out players, but more importantly, we worked well together as a team," said Support's Tony Zimmer.

SPTS/ABG dominated the regular season finishing with a record of 8-1, their only loss being to the Cops.

OPS struggled through the regular season with only 2 wins but brought their best game in the first round of the playoffs defeating the Cops. That playoff victory ensured

OPS a shot at either first or second place. Without a doubt, OPS benefited from an injury-ridden Cops team, who otherwise had a strong showing all season long with a record of 7-2.

GC, finishing the regular season with the worst overall record of 1-8, brought their "A" game showing no mercy for the injured cops during the battle for third place.

Still recovering from a mid-season injury, Jason Winkle, arguably the Cops' best player, took to the court in hopes of saving some of the team's honor. However, a rebound gone bad took Winkle out of the game in the first half, leaving the cops with only five players for the remainder of the game. GC dominated every aspect of the game leaving only one question—where were the rest of the Cops during this final match-up?

Thule's next intramural sport is Volleyball, scheduled to begin in January.

(Staff Sgt. Mikey Whisnant contributed to this article.)

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out to find his brother among the sand dunes of the Outer Banks. I felt closer than ever to these great-grand dads of industrious Flight.

Next morning, saturated with Wright readings from days before, excited as a kid at Disneyworld’s gates, I rode a bicycle, generously included with the room I’d rented right across the road from the Wright Brothers monument. Peddling through the pine forest, another historical coincidence hit me. My long-awaited day of touring the grounds where the Wright brothers tested gliders, weathered winters and hammered away at wood, metal and each other’s theories on aerodynamics; and my moment to experience who they were, gaining full affect from what they’d done, roaming the hallowed ground at Kill Devil Hills should all be done on a bike. That somehow seemed just.

Was it on one of these they imagined a mechanized way of emulating birds in banked turns, left and right: A major hurtle they conquered at Kittyhawk in 1902, making powered flight possible the next year? And how often have I ridden my bike as a boy through Lufkin’s (Texas) neighborhoods, pretending it flew on dawn patrols with the Red Baron; or broken imagined sound barriers along Hoskins Street on a Huffy? And here am I, two wheels, rusty chain, video cam in hand, gliding by the 2 reproduction wooden sheds the Dayton boys called home and hanger, to the very stone monument commemorating first flight’s liftoff point from the earth into the air.

I met many interesting people from all walks, er *flights*, of life drawn as I was to this aeronautical natal place. The significance of that 12-second hop across the sands one breezy December morning in 1903 reached deeply within this aviator’s soul, and is strikingly recurrent all around our universe. What was an idea, next an argument, then a set of sketches, become wires, linen, noisy red-hot engine and whirring props, cold wind and magic. Makes me consider deeply our legacy of the aerial realm.

One week after my Kittyhawk visit, I sat in the left seat of my old twin Cessna, and watched admiringly as Jayce and Lyndsey Childerss, children of my two best high school friends, each took their turns at flying an aircraft for the first time in their lives. We roared along over lake Rayburn before effortlessly banking left to see downtown lights swing round into the center of the windshield. I marveled at how naturally human beings take to this environment, denied us until the dawn of the 20th Century. Young aviators such as these will determine where we go in the flying of our next hundred years.

Two weeks after my personal pilgrimage to see the sacred sands of First Flight, I stepped off of a DC-8 onto Thule Air Base to resume my adventures within my aerospace family, who greeted me with hugs and handshakes as I shuffled into the terminal through sub-zero air. These amazing people watch and direct a portion of what flies in orbit around the earth, and all of us thrive and survive in this unforgiving



Photo by Chaplain Buddy Walker

This is a replica—located in the exact spot—of the rail used to launch the Wright Flyer Dec. 17, 1903. The world celebrated 100 years of flight this year. In the words of Chaplain Buddy Walker, without the Wright brothers we wouldn’t have a Thule.

arctic area because of a length of clear ground and The Airplane, fascinating new experiments to the Wrights, but for us, umbilical to Life: an air bridge which is the very link between our home here beneath the North Pole, and the rest of the planet. Funny how crucial these flying machines have become in just 100 years, and how they have aided us, altered our history, devastated, rescued and always and forever, changed our perspective of here, and there.

Remember that for many millennia flight wasn’t only a fantastic dream to our ancestors. Look up now and see not an unattainable height, but a place that calls you into its blueness and further still, even unto it’s mysterious blackness. Celebrate what human ingenuity is capable of doing.

What’s next? What can you imagine? Here’s to Orville and Wilbur, and a legacy of Life aloft.

The Lighter Side of Thule



Photos by 1st Lt. Jeremy Eggers

Above: Mikey Whisnant shows his bowling prowess during the Airman Appreciation Event. Left: On a dare, of sorts, Master Sgt. Corey Hewitt shares some blood sausage with Inge Bulck during a traditional Danish Christmas dinner.

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Col. Thomas Walker, 821st Air Base Group commander
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The editorial content is edited, prepared, and provided by the Public Affairs office of the 821st Air Base Group, 21st Space Wing, Air Force Space Command, Thule Air Base, Greenland, APO AE 09704. All photographs are Air Force photographs unless otherwise indicated. Articles can be sent to: ThuleTimes@thule.af.mil.

For more information, call (719) 474-3840, ext. 5678 or DSN 629-5678.