



“You have other museums that are fancier, but they don’t have the variety of airplanes and displays.”

Another unique feature was that Liberal was the training grounds for more than 10,000 who were in flight crews on B-24s. According to Welch, more than 18,400 B-24s were made, the most of any military aircraft in history on the planet.

“The B-24 was a difficult airplane to fly, more difficult than most,” Welch said. “But it was faster and carried a heavier payload than the B-17. On the other hand, the way it was made faster, the airplane itself was less sturdy. It was safe, but it wasn’t quite as tough. The people who flew the B-24 knew that. The pilots on this airplane were probably 21. There were a lot of people in the airplane that were 19. They took off knowing what they faced, knowing there was a good probability they would not come back, and they kept going. What is it that provides that motivation? They were raised as American boys.”

Times have changed, and the American military might is second to none, especially in the air, but Welch said that the commitment of the American soldier is just as strong.

“We’re not facing, as far as from the air, an opponent anything as formidable as the Germans,” he said. “If you look at the American soldier, airman, seaman and marine today, they are just as committed as the crews I talked about, and they are without a doubt the best trained military force the world has ever seen.

“We think the American youth is not quite as committed or have the American values, and that might be true of some, but I can tell you a large share of the American youth is every bit as committed and working hard to do better.”

While other countries may be catching up to the U.S. with their technology, 30 military air forces around the world still use American-made airplanes. But the commitment of the American military personnel gives the U.S. a tactical advantage.

“I sometimes say the three greatest air forces in the world are the U.S. Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps. Any other is well below those three. The quality of the aircraft themselves, we don’t have quite the edge because technology goes international much faster than it used to. Russians build planes about as good as ours. The Chinese build planes about as good as ours. We have people who are innovative, independent, they think, and they’ve been working with machinery, driving cars all their life, and they are very trainable. Plus, we put a huge amount of effort into training, far more than the Russians and Chinese. It is the combination of combat experience, commitment to training and quality of the aircraft itself that gives us a tremendous edge.”

While the Mid-America Air Museum celebrated the history of flight, Welch said the future will continue to see advancements.

“It gets more and more effective,” he said. “Almost all the technology in those airplanes were pushed from military aircrafts’ development. The jet engine, jet transport, aerodynamics — the civilian airline industry has benefited tremendously. We are without any parallel the world leader with developing civilian transport airplanes. The motivation came from the needs of the military.”

Thanks to demands of the military, the U.S. is the only country on the planet that relies more on flight than on trains.

“There is only one reason for that,” Welch said. “Americans love airplanes.”

