

## 2015 SECDEF Cultural Resources Management Award – Individual (Michael A. Smolek)

### Introduction

Michael A. Smolek is employed by Naval Facilities Engineering Command (NAVFAC) Washington, in the Public Works Department's Environmental Division at Patuxent (Pax) River Naval Air Station (NAS), Maryland. He serves as the Cultural Resources Manager for Pax River and the regional archaeologist for Naval District Washington. NAS Pax River is host to the Naval Air Systems Command headquarters and the Naval Air Warfare Center – Aircraft Division, whose primary mission is naval aviation research, development, test, acquisition, and evaluation (RDTA&E).

### Background

The NAS Pax River complex encompasses 19 properties in 5 Maryland counties and covers approximately 15,000 acres – most of it waterfront property on the shores of the Chesapeake Bay – with thousands more acres of Navy-controlled water ranges. This geographic spread adds further complexity to an already complex and diverse set of cultural resources, which range from abundant prehistoric archaeological sites to 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century colonial sites, shipwrecks and other underwater archaeological sites, as well as significant architectural resources spanning from the 18<sup>th</sup> through 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, including historic structures pre-dating the Navy's arrival, a number of large military structures (such as aircraft hangars, anechoic chambers, and aircraft catapults), many unique facilities and structures designed specifically for aviation-related RDT&E work (such as centrifugal gun testers, firing tunnels, and cold-fire research ranges) and historic landscapes (including two entire airfields). All constructed facilities on each of the Pax River Complex's 19 properties have been evaluated for National Register eligibility, as have the majority of the 221 identified archaeological sites. Those sites that have not yet been evaluated are being addressed systematically, with several sites being evaluated each year, based on priorities reflective of relative threats of disturbance due to mission-related activities.

While Mr. Smolek serves primarily as the cultural resources manager for the Pax River complex (with one of the Navy's busiest airfields), he also serves collateral duty as the regional archaeologist for an entire Navy region (Naval District Washington or NDW), supporting numerous other Navy and Marine Corps facilities in the greater Washington, DC area.

Above and beyond his extensive professional training and experience as an archaeologist, Mr. Smolek brings to the job an uncommon set of personal knowledge and skills that afford him an impressive capability for mission orientation and stakeholder interaction at this world class aviation facility. Mike not only holds a private pilot's license and owns and flies his own aircraft, but he's also built his very own helicopter. These special talents prove quite useful when working closely with customers who are aviators and airfield managers!

### Summary of Accomplishments

During the course of FY2013 and FY2014, Mr. Smolek singlehandedly managed the cultural resource program at one of the Navy's most active and culturally diverse air stations. Not only did he succeed in managing such a demanding program, but as the installation's first professional archaeologist, he contributed numerous and substantial improvements to an already well-established program, which is no easy feat.

At the foundation of his program is good, solid planning. It begins with a fully compliant integrated cultural resources management plan (ICRMP) that Mike faithfully keeps updated, to incorporate the results of all new resource surveys and evaluations, changes in statutory/regulatory requirements, adjustments in mission, and changes to organizations goals and objectives. The CRM program requirements have been woven into the fabric of our Environmental Management System (EMS) – with processes, deadlines, and other considerations formalized. Historic preservation requirements are integrated into the NEPA program and facilities management processes through the use of a Planning and Environmental Checklist, to which Mike has added or updated numerous questions related to proper consideration of cultural resources. Any project that disturbs soil (with the potential to impact archaeological sites) or occurs within the area of potential effect (APE) of, or modifies, historic structures is reviewed. This entails routine review of several hundred projects annually and a very detailed review of dozens more, along with the required NHPA Section 106 correspondence to Maryland's SHPO. Mike has managed to substantially increase program effectiveness by ensuring his early involvement in the facility management process. He accomplished this by establishing his presence on a number of facility planning workgroups and committees and cementing excellent working relationships with a wide variety of stakeholders, including project planners, facility coordinators, master planners, real property managers, civil engineers, program managers, utilities engineers, and military test pilots and planners.

Contributing to this solid foundation, Mike has also been a strong advocate for proper document management and the preservation of historic records. Over the past two years, he has diligently collected and meticulously catalogued an astonishing numbers of photos, drawings, news articles, command histories, and technical reports, chronicling the history of aviation RDT&E at NAS Patuxent River. He has salvaged numerous important original records from file “purges” at various activities throughout the installation, preventing their irrecoverable loss and, with the help of an intern, organized the document vault in Public Works, rediscovering, cataloguing, and protecting original construction drawings of historic structures and landscapes. He has worked closely with Asset Management staff to correct and update property records for thousands of facilities – correcting data on construction dates and types, National Register eligibility, etc. His efforts in this area have contributed significantly to other programs, in addition to the CRM program. Not only do these records facilitate efficient impact assessments and mitigation plans for legal compliance, but they’ve also helped to identify former hazardous waste disposal sites for Installation Restoration Program (IRP) cleanups and long forgotten historic ranges and disposal areas for cleanup of potential unexploded ordnance (UXO). He’s been working closely with staff in the Munitions Response Program (MRP) to coordinate CRM interests with their UXO survey work on water ranges and identify potential underwater archaeological resources by sharing remote sensing data with state underwater archaeologists.

In addition to performing a full set of CRM duties at his Pax River duty station, Mike also serves as NDW’s regional archaeologist, providing the crucial field support, technical guidance, and experience to deal with emergencies like unanticipated discoveries of archaeological resources during construction projects or serious legal challenges that pose the risk of unacceptable project delays or excessive cost overruns. Recent examples of such situations include the discovery of a nearly intact prehistoric resource procurement camp in a construction site at Joint Base Anacostia-Bolling (that escaped detection during earlier reconnaissance level surveys) and resolution of a resource damage claim from inadvertent construction impacts to a known shell midden archaeological site on private land leased for a Navy range station along the Potomac River. He provides the flexibility necessary to handle these situations quickly and efficiently, when time does not allow for the procurement and execution of standard contracted field services. At times, this adds a considerable burden to his already heavy workload, but his availability is an invaluable asset to the entire Region.

Mr. Smolek works very closely with curators at our official curation facility, the Maryland Archaeological Conservation (MAC) Laboratory, to ensure proper

management of our Navy collections. The Navy's artifacts and records, predominantly from NAS Patuxent River and its Webster Field Annex, represent one of the largest collections in the MAC Lab. Mike helped sponsor an important DoD Legacy Resources Management Program project for the digital recording of artifacts and associated records in the collection, making them available online and more readily accessible to researchers, thus facilitating object loans and information sharing.

Through diligent use of the Navy's online planning, programming, and budgeting tools (EPR Web), Mike has ensured a steady stream of reliable funding for management of the CRM program at Pax River. Most notably, he's executed a "gap analysis" strategy for locating archaeological resources and identifying areas that still need reconnaissance level field surveys and then focusing survey efforts in those areas. An additional 330 acres were archaeologically surveyed in FY2013 and FY2014. He then prioritized identified sites for further evaluation and a determination of National Register eligibility. When construction project schedules are accelerated or unanticipated projects emerge, he's been able to reprioritize survey efforts and direct field work to the areas of greatest need. Through this systematic process, he has freed up over 300 acres of developable land for this continually growing air station over the past two years, while still protecting the most important cultural assets.

With the assistance of an NDW historic architect and regional CRM, Mike took the lead in consultations and negotiations for the renovation and reconfiguration of four large National Register eligible hangars, involving the redesign and replacement of large hangar doors, windows, lean-to's, and modernization to meet new anti-terrorism/force protection (ATFP) standards. Careful negotiation of these complex actions and successful resolution of historic preservation concerns allowed these important structures to be economically rehabilitated to Secretary of Interior Standards while continuing to perform their vital aircraft maintenance support roles well into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Mr. Smolek has also demonstrated the unique ability to develop and execute meaningful mitigation strategies to offset potential or actual adverse effects, including more creative and cost effective solutions than simple recordation, such as development of oral histories from retired and aging aviation technology pioneers and preparation of interpretive materials to make the history more accessible to the public.

Mike is an articulate and skillful writer who frequently authors articles and papers for the installation as well as local media. His writings foster an appreciation for aviation development and naval history among the station public and community, with tangible results in increased historic preservation compliance through better cooperation from

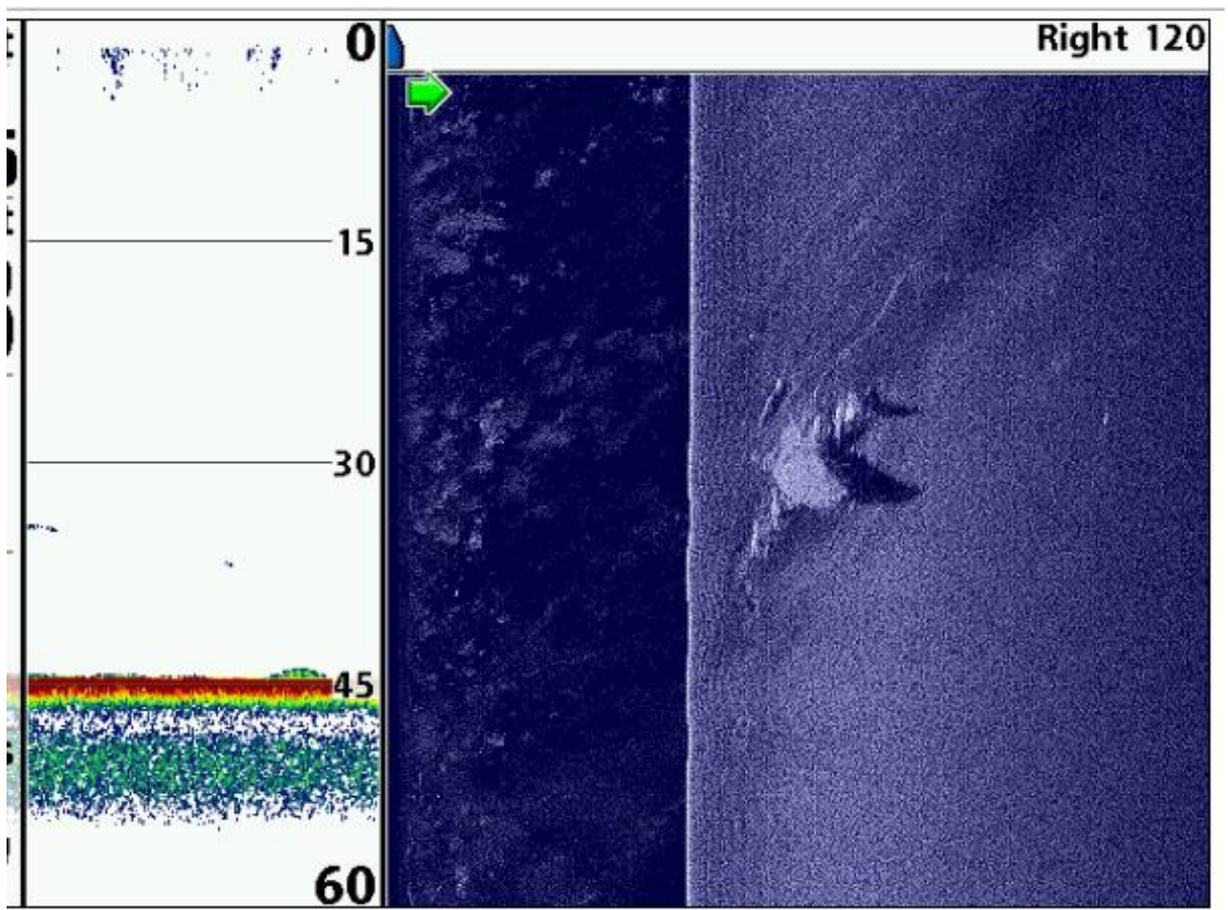
mission stakeholders. His articles have also had a positive effect on compliance with the Archaeological Resources Protection Act (ARPA), with a noticeable drop in illegal artifact collecting activities and an increase in proper reporting of archaeological discoveries by employees, residents, and visitors on the Patuxent River Naval Air Station. Additionally, he set up and staffed cultural resource management exhibits at a number of large public events, including Earth Day, Native American Heritage Month, and the NAS Spring Carnival. Further, he sponsored and supervised an Eagle Scout candidate's service project to clean and stabilize the ruins of the historic Priest's House at Webster Field Annex (WFA) and to restore degraded interpretive panels at the site.

Mike has developed and nurtured important partnerships with various organizations dedicated to historic preservation, including St. Mary's College of Maryland, Historic St. Mary's City, Preservation Maryland, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the Piscataway Tribe of Maryland, Calvert Marine Museum, Jefferson Patterson Park and Museum, and the St. Mary's County Historical Society; and regulatory/advisory agencies such as the National Park Service, Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, Maryland Historical Trust, and the Historic Preservation Commission for St. Mary's County. These partnerships encourage collaboration through either informal consultations or more formal contractual arrangements and cooperative agreements. In any case, the extended expertise available to him through these partnerships greatly leverages the amount and quality of work that he's able to accomplish. Many of these relationships were forged during his off-duty hours through community service and volunteer membership on a number of boards and committees, including the county Historic Preservation Commission and the Newtowne Neck State Park Planning/Development Advisory Panel for a state park with significant archaeological resources and important ties to our local Navy installations.

The importance of these connections was illustrated recently, near the end of FY14, when a local waterman and commercial fisherman dredged up what appeared to be an aircraft landing gear in one of his fishing nets from the Patuxent River. Through the local historic preservation network, word of the discovery made its way to Mike Smolek. He reached out to his naval aviation contacts at the Naval Air Station and the Naval History and Heritage Command, who quickly identified it as the landing gear from a rare Douglas AD-1 Skyraider, affectionately known to military aviators as the "Able Dog." Archival research determined that a Skyraider crashed and was lost in the Patuxent River during a Naval Air Test Center test flight in 1951. Side scan sonar imaging surveys of the area, conducted by the Institute of Maritime History, confirmed the location of the missing Skyraider.



Recovered landing gear from Douglas AD-1 Skyraider, lost on a test flight in 1951.



Sidescan sonar image of submerged AD-1 Skyraider wreck, courtesy of Institute of Maritime History.

The landing gear is currently being stabilized and conserved at the MAC Lab for eventual display in the Patuxent River Naval Air Museum and discussions are underway with various entities about possible salvage of the aircraft or some of its parts.

Mr. Smolek is a firm believer in professional development – attending conferences, workshops, and symposia, not only for the technical information presented, but also for the invaluable networking opportunities. As available travel and training funds have diminished or disappeared in recent years, Mike continues to pursue these important opportunities in various ways – either through free online training courses and webinars, or attending conferences on personal time at his own expense, recognizing the importance of doing so.

During the course of the past two fiscal years, Mike has made significant scientific contributions and cooperated in important research initiatives. One project involved the science of chemical archaeology, in collaboration with Silas Hurry and Tim Riordan at Historic St. Mary's City, to determine the origin of 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century bricks found at Webster Field Annex (St. Inigoes) and to prove not only that their source was identical to bricks from a demolished 17<sup>th</sup> century chapel at St. Mary's City, but also that those bricks from St. Mary's City were reutilized in the construction of the chapel and Jesuit manor house at the St. Inigoes Naval facility. Future plans for the data include development of a brick typology/chronology for 17<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> century bricks in colonial Maryland, since the Navy has accumulated data from a number of well-dated and large brick structures spanning that period.

Mike also worked with Dr. Daniel P. Wagner, a consulting soil scientist and geoarchaeologist, to explore soil stratigraphy and document the presence of paleosols (ancient Pleistocene soils buried by thick layers of more recent wind-blown loess) on Navy lands in southern Maryland. The presence of these culturally significant and previously unknown buried soils is providing evidence of Paleolithic occupation in the mid-Atlantic region, and causing us to reconsider the adequacy of some of our previous archaeological survey work – having perhaps overlooked the oldest human occupation in the region.

The breadth and depth of Mike Smolek's significant work in cultural resources management at NAS Patuxent River and throughout Naval District Washington makes him a worthy candidate for recognition as an exemplary Defense Department professional.