

FIFTEENTH AIR FORCE
60 YEARS OF DISTINGUISHED
SERVICE TO OUR COUNTRY
NOVEMBER 1, 1943 - OCTOBER 1, 2003



GENERAL NATHAN TWINING
IN SPECIAL RECOGNITION OF THOSE WHO
SERVED WITH HIM

OUR LIFE MEMBERS . . . WE SALUTE YOU

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 Gen Russell E. Dougherty
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 Gen Tony Robertson
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SORTIE

FIFTEENTH AIR FORCE



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OUR LATEST NEWS

COVER: After 60 years of distinguished service to our country, Fifteenth Air Force was deactivated on Oct 1, 2003. The following information relative to that decision was reported in an AMC press release:



Light, lean and agile. In a word, expeditionary. On Oct 1, 2003, AMC will once again adapt to a changing environment. Today the world is a much smaller and dangerous place. As an organization, we must streamline operations and leverage technology to respond.

Highlighting the importance of forward operations, 15th and 21st Air Forces will be redesignated as Expeditionary Mobility Task Forces, or EMTFs, taking over the lead of AMC's four subordinate Air Mobility Operations Groups. AMC's staff directorates will transform to an "A-staff," adopting a common, joint organizational structure as they continue to focus on "train, organize, and equip." And, at the heart of it all, 18th Air Force will stand up as AMC's warfighting component utilizing the Tanker Airlift Control Center as its air operations center.

This isn't the first time AMC has seen change. The activation of Air Mobility Command in 1992 was a tremendous milestone in the evolution of America's Air Mobility Team. I had the honor of serving as the first commander of the TACC and have since seen its roles and responsibilities increase over time. This restructuring maximizes those capabilities as we stand up one operations center under a single, three-star Numbered Air Force command element charged with presenting forces to our Combatant Commanders across the globe.

A three-star general will command 18 AF and a one-star general will lead the TACC, each located at Scott AFB, Illinois. Each EMTF will fall under the command of a one-star general who will report directly to the NAF Commander

The result will be a single commander charged with the tasking and execution of all air mobility missions. AMC's wings and groups based in the continental United

States, as well as the EMTFs with their subordinate AMOGs at Travis AFB, California; Hickam AFB, Hawaii; McGuire AFB, NJ and Ramstein Air Base, Germany, will report to 18 AF.

We will retain the heritage of the 15 AF at Travis AFB and the 21 AF at McGuire AFB. The lineage and honors of these proud organizations will continue in the EMTFs, which will perform the mission of leading operations within our global en route system.

As a former NAF commander and as the AMC commander, I have watched the role of the Numbered Air Forces diminish over time. This reorganization returns them to their historical roots of executing global mobility operations and eliminates functions redundant to the AMC staff.

The activation of 18 AF takes us to the future of NAF warfighting roles. It gives us a clean reporting chain, reconnects the disconnects and puts the Numbered Air Force in operational control. It places responsibility for warfighting directly with the 18 AF commander.

This reorganization should be transparent outside of our command, but will have a remarkable impact on our efficiency. The greatest effect will be on our headquarters staff, which will convert to an "A-Staff" structure. For example, the headquarters will stand up an "A-7" directorate combining both civil engineers and services. For the first time, Mission Support Group Commanders in the field will have a central point of contact in the staff for these key functions. The AMC staff will emerge as a true headquarters to train, organize, and equip, leaving global operations to the 18 AF

The time is right for this reorganization, especially as we face the demands of the Global War on Terrorism. We must have a command structure that is light, lean, and more effective to meet the demands of the Combatant Commanders. America's mobility forces are transforming and, at the same time, retaining our proud heritage.

Courtesy: An AMC press release with AMC Commander General John W. Handy's by-line.



CHIEF'S CORNER

Fifteenth Air Force was deactivated on 1 Oct 2003. For those of us at the Association, this marks the end of a relationship that, for many of us, spans 30 or more years - both on active duty and then as officers or directors of the 15th

Air Force Association. While saddened by the deactivation of a military command which played such an important role in our lives, we know that we have been privileged to serve in the best and with the best.

As Ben will explain in his column, we are suffering alarming losses of members to death, terminal illnesses, and poor health. In addition to the pain we feel at the passing of valued comrades and close friends, we are also coping with the attendant loss of income. Your prompt response to the next renewal mailing would be greatly appreciated.

We give a final salute to Maj Gen John Becker and all the previous commanders, who have been supportive friends of us all. Thank you for keeping us part of the Fighting Fifteenth for all these years.

Dick

SMALL TALK

LOSS OF MEMBERS: For over 22 years, I have looked forward to the receipt of mail from our members and opened each envelope with great anticipation as members have shared their stories, pictures, and the events of their lives in the years since the war. It has always been my special privilege to have so many kind and supportive "pen pals". Since the beginning of this year, the character of our mail has changed and almost every delivery brings the sad news of another dear comrade who is no longer with us. We do not enter a name in the TAPS column unless confirmed by family or friends, so the column doesn't really reflect the losses that we are experiencing.



Thanks For the Memories

We are receiving an increasing volume of returned mail marked "Not deliverable as addressed - no forwarding address available". These cases are almost always the result of death or major health problems. Sometimes we receive confirmation months or even years later. Often we are never notified and we continue to carry the person in our "MIA" file. This file and our deceased file are growing almost with the passing of each day. I write to widows almost every night.

Less this sound like a "swan song", please know that we are doing all we can to maintain a membership base sufficient to sustain our continued operation. But we do this with the full knowledge that, realistically, as a WW II organization, we cannot continue for many more years. We have managed to keep it together for 22 years and God willing, we will carry on. This past week I received a copy of *Vanguard*, a publication of the Veterans Administration. It stated that veterans are now dying at the alarming rate of 1,800 a day.

We pray for each of you every day and especially for our widows. God bless you and keep you. Thank you for all you have done and continue to do for me.

Ben



SORTIE is published on behalf of the members of the Fifteenth Air Force Association, a nonprofit organization dedicated to the preservation of the history and heritage of the Fifteenth Air Force and to the sacred memory of its honored dead.

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TAPS

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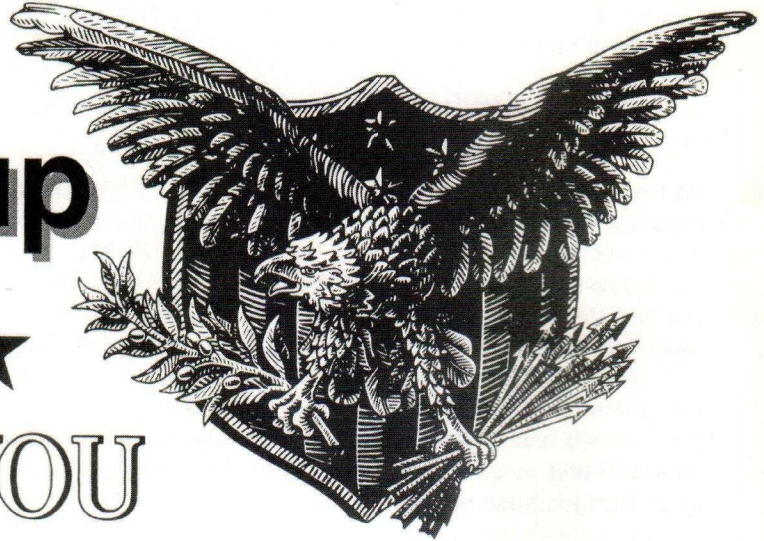
Rest In Honored Glory

OUR HONOR ROLL

465th Bomb Group



WE SALUTE YOU



For outstanding performance of duty in armed conflict with the enemy. During the intensive aerial campaign against the Axis oil and communications centers, the 465th Bombardment Group was ordered to attack and destroy the Florisdorf Oil Refinery and Marshalling Yards at Vienna, Austria. A successful completion of this important mission would deprive the enemy of vitally needed gas and oil supplies for her mechanized ground forces and her air force at a most critical period in the war. Although sustained operations to targets deep in enemy territory had grounded many of the Group's aircraft, the ground crews labored tirelessly and efficiently throughout the night prior to the attack, to insure that their aircraft were in the best possible mechanical condition for the operation.

On 8 July 1944, twenty-two (22) B-24 type aircraft, heavily loaded with maximum tonnage, were airborne and set course for their destination. Mechanical difficulties forced eight (8) of the bombers to return to base thus seriously weakening the defensive formation. Undaunted by the seemingly overwhelming odds, molding the remaining ships into a tight formation, the gallant crews continued on course.

Approaching the target, the formation encountered an extremely heavy anti-aircraft barrage which in-

flicted severe damage on the Group before it reached the objective. Heedless of the intense and heavy enemy fire, displaying superior coordination, and outstanding professional skill, the courageous crews brought their aircraft through for a highly successful bombing run, inflicting damage to vital enemy installations and supplies.

Leaving the objective, their formation was aggressively attacked by approximately twenty-five (25) enemy fighters. In the ensuing fierce aerial battle, maintaining a perfect formation to enhance the effective defensive fire, the gallant gunners of the Group accounted for seven (7) enemy aircraft destroyed and three (3) damaged, with their own losses held to a minimum of one (1) bomber.

Later reconnaissance revealed that the Florisdorf area was rendered inoperational at a time when the war was approaching a critical stage. By the outstanding gallantry, airmanship, and grim determination of the combat crews, together with the outstanding technical skill and devotion to duty of the ground personnel, **the 465th Bombardment Group has reflected great credit upon itself and the Armed Forces of the United States of America.**

By command of Major General Twining

Where Do They Get Young Men Like These?

Jim Lacey, war correspondent for *Time* magazine embedded with the 101st Airborne, reflects on the young men who serve in our armed forces. War came early for the 1st Brigade of the 101st Airborne when an otherwise quiet night in the Kuwaiti desert was shattered by thunderous close-quarters grenade blasts. Sgt Hasan Akbar, a US soldier, had thrown grenades into an officers' tent, killing two and wounding a dozen others. Adding to the immediate confusion was the piercing scream of SCUD alarms, which kicked in the second Akbar's grenade exploded. For a moment, it was a scene of near panic and total chaos. Just minutes after the explosions, a perimeter was established around the area of the attack, medics were treating the wounded, and calls for evacuation vehicles and helicopters were already being sent out. Remarkably, the very people who should have been organizing all of this were the ones lying on the stretchers, seriously wounded. It fell to junior officers and untested sergeants to take charge and lead. Without hesitation everyone stepped up and unfalteringly did just that. I stood in amazement as two captains (Townlee Hendrick and Tony Jones) directed the evacuation of the wounded, established a hasty defense, and helped to organize a search for the culprit. They did all this despite bleeding heavily from their wounds. For over six hours, these two men ran things while refusing to be evacuated until they were sure all of the men in their command were safe.

Two days later Capt Jones left the hospital and hitchhiked back to the unit. He had heard a rumor that it was about to move into Iraq and he wanted to be there. As Jones - dressed only in boots, a hospital gown, and a flak vest - limped toward headquarters, Col Hodges, the 1st Brigade's commander, announced, "I see that Captain Jones has returned to us in full martial splendor." The colonel later said that he was tempted to send Jones to the unit surgeon for further evaluation, but that he didn't feel he had the right to tell another man not to fight. Hodges himself had elected to leave two grenade fragments in his arm so that he could return to his command as quickly as possible. The war had not even begun and already I was aware that I had fallen in with a special breed of men. Over the next four weeks, nothing I saw would alter this impression.

Bravery inspires men, but brains and quick thinking win wars. In one particularly tense moment, a company of U.S. soldiers was preparing to guard the Mosque of Ali - one of the most sacred Muslim sites - when agitators in what had been a friendly crowd started shouting that they were going to storm the mosque. In an instant, the Iraqis began to chant and a riot seemed imminent. A couple of nervous soldiers slid their weapons into fire mode, and I thought we were only moments away from a slaughter. These soldiers had just fought an all-night battle. They were exhausted, tense, and prepared to crush any riot with violence of their own. But they were also professionals, and so, when their battalion commander, Chris Hughes, ordered them to take a knee, point their weapons to the ground, and start smiling, that is exactly what they did. Calm returned. By placing his men in the most non-threatening posture possible, Hughes had sapped the crowd of its aggression. Quick thinking and iron discipline had reversed an ugly situation and averted disaster. Since then, I have often wondered how we created an army of men who could fight with ruthless savagery all night and then respond so easily to an order to "smile" while under impending threat. Ours has always been an army like no other, because our soldiers reflect a society unlike any other. They are pitiless when confronted by armed enemy fighters and yet full of compassion for civilians and even defeated enemies. American soldiers immediately began saving Iraqi lives at the conclusion of any fight. Medics later said that the Iraqi wounded they treated were astounded by our compassion. They expected they would be left to suffer or die. It was American soldiers who handed over food to hungry Iraqis, who gave their own medical supplies to Iraqi doctors, and who brought water to the thirsty. It was American soldiers who went door-to-door in a slum because a girl was rumored to have been injured in the fighting; when they found her, they called in a helicopter to take her to an Army hospital. Yet, it was these same soldiers who stormed to Baghdad in only a couple of weeks, accepted the surrender of three Iraqi Army divisions, massacred any Republican Guard unit that stood and fought, and disposed of a dictator and a regime with ruthless efficiency. There is no other army - and there are no other soldiers - in the world capable of such merciless fighting and possessed of such compassion for their fellow man. No society except America could have produced them.

Before I end this I want to point out one other quality of the American soldier - his sense of justice. After a grueling fight, a company of infantrymen was resting and opening their first mail delivery of the war. One of the young soldiers had received a care package and was sharing the home-baked cookies with his friends. A photographer with a heavy French accent asked if he could have one. The soldier looked him over and said there would be no cookies for Frenchmen. The photographer then protested that he was half Italian. Without missing a beat, the soldier broke a cookie in half and gave it to him. It was a perfect moment and a perfect reflection of the American soldier. **Jim Lacey**

Where do they get young men like these? Only from America and God bless them all.

Ben

MAIL CALL ★ MAIL CALL ★ MAIL CALL

Gentlemen:

It is with sadness that I report the last flight of Lt Col James W. Patton who died in Hiawatha, Kansas on 28 April 2003. Thank you for the support of the veterans of WW II. Lt Col Patton was extremely proud of his membership in the 15th AF and 463rd Bomb Group Associations. He is missed by all his fellow veterans, friends, and our family.

James A. Patton (463 BG)
Hiawatha, KS

Greetings:

Enclosed is my check for membership in your Association. I am interested in finding anyone who might have known my fiancee SSGT Robert Charles Kerns. He was a photographer and was assigned to the 460th Bomb Group, 763rd Squadron. Regrettably, Robert was lost on a mission over Poland on Sept 13, 1944. The plane was "Ole Repulsive". Anyone who might have known Bob and/or have information about Robert E. Reed, Henry Sullivan, Francis Coyle, Bill Franklin, or Bob Kennedy, please contact me at 1001 Colonial Dr, Apt A-5, Marietta, OH 45750.

Katie Hartshorn (460 BG)
Marietta, OH

15th Air Force Association:

This is to inform you of the death of my father, Joseph B. Cadwalader, on July 5, 2003. He was a SSGT in the 455th Bomb Group, 740th Squadron. He was the ball turret gunner aboard the "Linda Ann". My father always looked forward to your publication and I'm so glad that he was able to attend the 455th dedication ceremony at Arlington Cemetery a few years ago.

Sandy Whidden (455 BG)
Braddock Hgts, MD

Dear Ben:

The May issue of *Sortie* has arrived and I have gone through it page by page and am always interested in the stories. My first conclusion about this latest issue is that there is something missing from the front page. It seems to me that a small caption under each photo would be better than nothing. I always check the "OUR CREWS" page for one from the 459th BG, but hardly ever see any. Perhaps it is because nobody sends you something. Therefore, I am enclosing a combat crew photo from the 459th that you may use. Thanks for the reunion notices in the past issues. We have heard from many via this notice.

John Devney (459 BG)
Rochester, NY

15th Air Force Association:

I am sorry to report that my husband, Howard J. Edgreen, died on Feb 5, 2003 after he had open heart surgery.

Lucille L. Edgreen (450 BG)
Port Allegany, PA

Dear Sir:

My husband, L. Edward Hollandsworth, has enjoyed your magazine for many years. He now has Alzheimers and doesn't read anymore, but still tells everyone he did 25 missions as a ball turret gunner in a B-24. He's very proud of that memory!

Mrs. L.E. Hollandsworth (465 BG)
Salem, VA

Ed's Note: Please tell him that all of us are proud of him and appreciate his service to our country. God bless you.

Dear Ben:

I just received the latest *Sortie* and noted our crew photo from the 454 BG, 739 BS was included. Would it be possible to receive ten additional copies as I would like to send a copy to the other living crew members and to the families of the deceased members. I have enclosed a check to cover your expenses. I always enjoy reading the *Sortie*. Thank you for all you do for the organization.

Theodore Campbell (454 BG)
Marietta, GA

Dear Ben:

I am sorry to inform you that Carl Zoccoli passed away on July 24, 2002. He was proud of his service in the 483rd Bomb Group and the 15th Air Force.

Frances Zoccoli (483 BG)
Forked River, NJ

Dear Ben:

I just finished reading the latest *Sortie* and showed it to a friend who decided he would love to have a 15th AF cap. He's also an enlisted man with the 8th AF. So enclosed is a check for a gift from me to him.

George A. Manuel (97 BG)
Kennewick, WA

Dear Ben:

Thank you so much for your letter of June 25, 2003 and the enclosed material on Fifteenth Air Force. I really appreciate having the information. It will be of great assistance in preparing my remarks for the Veteran's Day program at Okaloosa-Walton Community College. I am proud to have the opportunity to represent our Air Force generation this year. As I read the material you provided, I was all the more proud of the role that Fifteenth Air Force played in the World War II victory in Europe. Thanks again.

Russell J. Christesen (463 BG)
Destin, FL

Ben:

I'm sorry to say my husband Donald Askerman died Jan 15. He was always grateful for your Association.

Virginia Askerman (461 BG)
Ridgecrest, CA

≡OUR CREWS≡



465 BG 782 BS Crew. (top from left): M. Hitchak, M. Schefrin, R. Gephart, L. Unrath, & W. Johns. (bottom from left): D. Brink, R. Windom, T. Butler, S. Nicastro, & P. Stieg.



376 BG 515 BS Crew. (top left): Fred Holladay, John Butler, Padgett, Unk, Adam Bednar, Ernest Navillier, & Charles Landes. (bottom): Albert Oestricher, Harold Hess, Al Fisher, & Unk.



455 BG, 740 BS Crew. (top left): Ralph Adams, Clyde Stilson, Warren Krauter, & Don Harteks. (bottom): Al Rutan, Dean Fish, Bert Freedman, Bob Green, Fred Gaisser, & Chuck Attinger.



301BG, 353BS: (top left): Wally Meyers, Dick Hale, Charles Sandberg, James Pantling, & Eldro Flanders. (bottom): Ward Idol, Joe Elmore, Roy Barsness, Albert Stento, & John Bawel.

FIFTEENTH AIR FORCE COMMANDER'S LAST ARTICLE



Greetings Fifteenth Air Force warriors! I regret to say this is my last update. On 29 September 2003, Fifteenth Air Force will lower its flag and be re-designated the Fifteenth Expeditionary Mobility Task Force (EMTF). Through the EMTF, the history and legacy of Fifteenth Air Force will live on.

Over the years Fifteenth Air Force has seen a myriad of missions from strategic bombing to air mobility. During WW II, the brave men of Maj Gen James Doolittle and, later Maj Gen Nathan Twining, pounded enemy forces with B-17s, B-24s, P-47s, P-51s, and P-38s. Shortly after the war Fifteenth Air Force bombers forged the world's first strategic nuclear deterrent force under Strategic Air Command (SAC) using the B-36, B-47 and B-52. The mighty Fifteenth later added the air refueling mission with the KB-29, KC-97, and KC-135. But the evolution didn't stop there. In the 1960s, Fifteenth Air Force added strategic missiles and aerial reconnaissance to its growing number of missions. During the 1980s, the multiple warhead missile, B-1B, and KC-10 were added to the inventory and the 1990s saw Fifteenth Air Force as strong as ever, commanding more than 550 ICBMs, 135 long-range bombers, 259 tankers, several squadrons of command and control aircraft, and some 55,000 personnel in 18 wings around the world. These assets made a significant contribution during the Gulf War.

As the Gulf War came to an end, Fifteenth Air Force took another turn. In 1991, 15th became a tanker command, shedding its bombardment mission for the first time in its history. In 1992, 15th joined Air Mobility Command and merged its KC-135 and KC-10 tankers with the airlift assets of Twenty-Second Air Force (C-5s, C-141s, and C-130s). Fifteenth has been a part of mobility and tanker operations ever since and even expanded its mobility mission with the addition of the C-17s and two more Air Mobility Operations Groups (AMOGs).

Now, Fifteenth Air Force will continue to evolve as the Fifteenth Expeditionary Mobility Task Force. The task force will consist of the two AMOGs and will support Air Mobility Command's new warfighting construct. The 15th EMTF will report directly to Eighteenth Air Force, Air Mobility Command's warfighting numbered air force, and will make up the tip of the mobility "spear" as it projects forces during peacetime, conflict, or natural disaster. In this case, the tip of the spear is

represented by the AMOGs. The AMOGs are the future of air mobility and provide the entire military with the flexibility to project forces anywhere in the world.

The 615th Air Mobility Operations Group (615 AMOG) is Air Mobility Command's 911 response team, made up of 540 mobility experts trained, equipped, and ready to deploy with a 12-hour response anytime, anywhere. Their capabilities are tremendous, providing command and control, aircraft maintenance, cargo and passenger handling, communications, and a myriad of other capabilities to include setting up airfield operations where little or no fixed infrastructure exists. The 615 AMOG has been heavily involved in the war on terrorism, partly responsible for the transport of 79,000 troops for Operation ENDURING FREEDOM and 62,000 troops for Operation IRAQI FREEDOM. The 615 AMOG will be the 15 EMTF's mobile asset, projecting its forces as needed to meet peacetime or contingency requirements.

The 715th Air Mobility Operations Group (715 AMOG) maintains a similar capability, but from fixed locations. Headquartered at Hickam Air Force Base, Hawaii, this group operates Air Mobility Command's Pacific en route structure from eight different locations to include Hawaii, Alaska, Japan, Korea, Guam, Okinawa, Diego Garcia, and Australia. This group provides forward deployed command and control, aerial port, and aircraft maintenance to aircraft executing JCS-directed contingency, humanitarian, and joint/combined exercise missions. In the last two years the 715 AMOG controlled 151,267 missions, moved 1,911,208 passengers, and airlifted 76,179 tons of cargo. They also provided force enabler operations for Operations ENDURING FREEDOM and IRAQI FREEDOM and the North Korea deterrence option. So as you can see, these AMOGs, led by mobility experts, are poised to take the command to the next phase of expeditionary operations and the 15th EMTF will lead the way.

As Fifteenth Air Force transitions to its next role, I must say I am extremely honored and blessed to have been the last Commander. This year we culminate 60 years of history - 60 years as the best numbered air force. The airmen of Fifteenth Air Force are what made it the best and each of you should be proud of your distinguished service. While the name of Fifteenth Air Force will change, its spirit and legacy will live on in its history and with those who faithfully served. May God bless you, the Fifteenth Air Force, and God bless America.

Maj Gen John D. Becker

≡OUR SALUTE TO≡

As we close the final chapter of our Fifteenth Air Force, these words are directed at those of you who pioneered the Fighting Fifteenth and to all who contributed to our 60 years of distinguished and extraordinary service to our country. These words are to remind you of your extraordinary achievements in defense of our freedoms. You deserve the salute of a grateful nation and our hope is that these words will serve that purpose:



I am honored to extend warm congratulations to members of the Fifteenth Air Force Association on the occasion of your commemoration of 42 years of distinguished service to our country. Through these years you have served with distinction on the frontiers of our nation's defenses and today maintain the vigil that keeps the peace. Your courage, dedication, and sacrifice are well recorded in Air Force history. You can take great pride in your valiant efforts defending our nation's most cherished ideals. It is fitting that you gather to renew friendships formed in battle and to honor fallen comrades who sacrificed their lives to keep our country free. I salute you and offer my best wishes as you celebrate your proud history.
Ronald Reagan, The White House, Washington, D.C.



Dear Ben: I have your very kind and thoughtful letter and want to thank you for the invitation for Mrs. Doolittle and me to attend the Fifteenth Air Force Association gathering. We would like very much to be with you all, but I, at 88, am gradually coming unraveled, am under doctor's care, and pretty well immobilized. We do want to extend our very best wishes for a most successful affair. I will never forget the Fifteenth Air Force and will always remember the courage of those who served with such distinction under such difficult circumstances.
Gen James H. Doolittle, First Commander Fifteenth Air Force; Chairman, Board of Governors, Fifteenth Air Force Association



On this historic VE-Day, I wish to express to every individual in the Fifteenth Army Air Force my sincere gratitude for your loyal devotion to duty which contributed materially to this Allied victory. This air force has fought air battles throughout the European continent and carried the attack to the enemy in 12 countries. From the first bases on the continent of Europe, we hammered home to the enemy that no factory, no refinery, no railroad yard, no airfield, no vital bridge of any value to him, was safe from our bombs. This victory will long be remembered by the airmen who won it, by the ground echelons which sustained it, and by the many men and women of the armed forces who in different ways supported it. Our air

battles were bitterly fought, and not without cost. Our combat men paid for every victory. To those who paid the ultimate price for victory we pay homage. Their sacrifices must be remembered as we go forward to final victory and a lasting peace. To this end, we dedicate our resources and our lives.

**Maj General Nathan Twining
Commander Fifteenth Air Force**



There's no future in a present without a past - excerpts from keynote address at our first reunion in 1983: Our heritage is important because we are important. Indeed, like any legacy or tradition, our heritage is something carried from one generation to another - something which gives us the facts of our past, so that we might

better know who we are and where we are going. From those World War II days when B-24's and B-17's filled the skies over Europe to the Cold War period - then the Atlas, Minutemen, and the Titans, along with their aircraft brethren, stood guard over our democracy - it was you, the members of 15th Air Force, who were there. We who have been part of 15th Air Force have much to be thankful for. For we are indeed fortunate that our heritage is so strong - that those golden orange wings of our insignia carry with them the power of our past. I am confident that with your continuing efforts, those who follow us will be just as fortunate.

**General James P. Mullins
Commander Fifteenth Air Force
Founder Fifteenth Air Force Association**



We need to be reminded of the great sacrifices, the steadfast dedication, and the heroism of those who fought so long and hard to bring freedom and peace back to the war-ravaged nations of Europe. It is appropriate that we honor our WW II veterans because tonight we are able to celebrate in a free and democratic nation

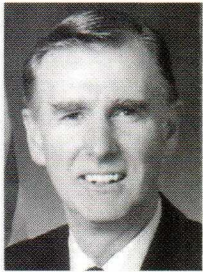
because of people like you. You were there - in Tunisia and in Italy - building a foundation of dedication, professionalism, heroism, and a record of accomplishment that has stood the test of time. From that foundation, Fifteenth Air Force has grown and evolved into what it has become today. We have learned from you and we take great pride in our heritage - the heritage that you gave us.

**Lt General James E. Light Jr
Commander Fifteenth Air Force**

≡ THE FIGHTING FIFTEENTH ≡

In recognition of the fiftieth anniversary of the magnificent efforts of the members of the United States Army Air Forces' Fifteenth Air Force as they achieved one of the strategic air power's greatest triumphs - the destruction of the oil fields of Ploesti - in spite of fierce and determined defenses which took a heavy toll. This five month aerial campaign, carried out by the fighters and bombers of the Fifteenth, sustained by the ground echelons, severely curtailed the gasoline and oil supply of the Axis aggressors and directly led to their eventual defeat.

The Air Force Association Special award to Fifteenth Air Force



I look forward to seeing you at our Las Vegas Reunion in April. It promises to be a very special time as we celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the U.S. Air Force. I know that you have made significant contributions to that distinguished record of service, and I hope we have the opportunity to share some of your historic

accounts and enjoy our special fellowship.

This is my last entry in the *Sortie* as Commander of Air Mobility Command, but I will always be a member of the Fifteenth Air Force Association. That's because the work that the men and women of Fifteenth Air Force have done over the past 55 years has written the history of our time - from North Africa in 1943 to Northern and Southern Iraq today - we've been there. And like you, I'm proud of all of it, from our B-24 tail gunners to our KC-10 boom operators. It's because what we do really counted then and it counts now and it will count 25 years from now. The President has nominated Lt Gen Tony Robertson as my successor - that's two in a row from Fifteenth Air Force and a great choice for our country. May God bless the Fifteenth Air Force Association, its members, and your families.

General Walt Kross
Commander Fifteenth Air Force



Everyday as I walk to my office and pass the 15th Air Force "Wall of Fame", my pace slows as I read the names and look into the faces of the 21 legendary commanders who preceded me. To walk in the enormous shoes of men like Doolittle and Twining, and most recently, Kross and Fister is, at the same time, both tremendously humbling and tremendously exciting.

It has been my honor and pleasure to serve with the most dedicated and self-sacrificing groups of patriots that I have known. They continue the superior performance that Fifteenth Air Force has demonstrated since its activation over fifty years ago...my heart will always be with Fifteenth Air Force...On Memorial Day and every day, I am grateful to each of you for your service to our Air Force and to our nation. Your legacy lives on in the spirit of those who have served, and will continue to serve, after you. God bless you and God bless the United States of America.

General Tony Robertson
Commander Fifteenth Air Force

One year ago heavy bombers of the 15th AAF made their first attack on Ploesti, then the greatest single source of oil for German armed forces, virtually opening one of the most important battles of World War II. The first bombers from Italy to make the run over Ploesti dropped nearly 450 tons of explosives. At the time of the first blow by the Fifteenth, refineries at Ploesti were capable of producing 709,000 tons of crude oil per month, a figure estimated to be approximately one-third of the total Axis output. The Ploesti battle ended with three successive strikes in August - Ploesti oil was no longer a factor in the war. The victory was costly. Of the 65,413 men over the target during the operation, 2,277 were lost or missing, and 270 aircraft went down from enemy fire. But it proved to be a turning point in strategic warfare. **Well done, 15th AAF.**

Clipping from Stars and Stripes, April 1945

In a salute to each of you and especially for our comrades who gave the last measure of devotion, we quote the words of our Fifteenth Air Force Memorial - 1993:

Dedicated to all who have served in the Fifteenth Air Force;

In honor of and in memory of our comrades who died in defense of our country;

In tribute to all who have served during our fifty year history to keep our country free;

In recognition of those who serve today in the same great traditions of duty, honor, and country; and

In trust as our legacy for those who will follow in our footsteps - Guarding a heritage - Defending tomorrow.

We salute you. God bless each of you who served in the Fighting Fifteenth.

Finally, our hope and wish for the re-activated 18th Air Force and its men and women is that they will also contribute 60 years of extraordinary and distinguished service to the legacy of our beloved United States Air Force.

Ben

≡ OUR WAR STORIES ≡

SHORT BURSTS

HEROES ALL

"An entire crew of the 450 BG has been awarded the Silver Star for gallantry in action. This uniquely honored crew is commanded by Lt Bryant Smick. On May 24, 1944, "Sweet Chariot" took off on a mission to bomb an airdrome at Wiener Neustadt, Austria. Fifteen minutes prior to the target, 30 to 40 ME-109s dove down on their box in fierce head-on attacks. Lt Smick's ship was singled out and hopelessly crippled. The assault blew holes in 3 propellers and disabled the hydraulics, rendering flaps, brakes, and turrets inoperative and tore large holes in the wings and fuselage. The Liberator's gunners fought a bloody 40 minute duel with the enemy fighters. A vicious burst of 109 fire pierced the tail and wounded Sgt Rapoza. Two 20mm shells tore through his left shoulder, and at the same time hit one of his guns. But though one arm hung useless at his side and his turret system was shot out, he worked the turret manually and fired unceasingly with his one good arm. Sgt Dowdy, the ball gunner, was also struck in the arm, but clung to his guns. The right waist gunner, Sgt Brown, continued his fire after receiving a bad wound. Meantime, Sgt Russell, the other waist gunner, had been blasting away at Jerry when his guns suddenly jammed. Then he was hit. The impact of the bullet spun him around, and recovering from the shock, he discovered Brown slumped at his guns. Despite intense pain, Sgt Russell took over the position and destroyed two fighters before he passed out. Altogether, these gallant gunners accounted for five Nazis. After the fighters left, "Sweet Chariot" went on to bomb the target and was subjected to a terrific flak barrage. At bombs-away, the bomb doors wouldn't close, so Lt Fulmer, the navigator, crawled out along the cat-walk, slick with hydraulic fluid, and tried to manually crank the doors closed. But they had been partially shot away. Then Lt Sorensen, the co-pilot, Lt Pontz, the bombardier, and Lt Fulmer went back to the waist and administered first-aid to the wounded gunners in the midst of a flak barrage.

By bringing the plane home, Lt Smick and Lt Sorensen displayed superb airmanship, and courage in regaining control of the aircraft after the controls had jammed, and in safely landing without the use of flaps or brakes. The Silver Star citation stresses the extraordinary individual heroism.

Courtesy: Newspaper clipping from Sam Stein.

WHAT GOES AROUND COMES AROUND!

American soldiers who have been returned to the States after liberation from German prison camps will be assigned to operate enemy prisoner of war camps in the United States. That was announced recently by Maj Gen Thomas A. Terry, who declared, "American officers and enlisted men who have experienced captivity and detention by the enemy are considered to be eminently qualified for these duties."

Courtesy: *Sortie*, 13 May 1945

UNCOMMON VALOR

Though suffering 18 wounds, Lt James Lowrie, 456 BG B-24 bombardier, stripped off his flying suit and crawled across a narrow catwalk in heavy smoke to jettison the bomb load of his plane which was badly damaged while bombing Ploesti. The plane was losing altitude rapidly and his heroic action probably prevented the plane from crashing in enemy territory. Lt Lowrie's bombsight was shattered and 11 pieces were embedded in his body when the first flak struck the B-24. Flak fragments also hit him, four in his right hand and three in his legs. Lowrie, still conscious, realized the plane was dropping fast. The interphone had been shot away so he shed his flying suit and crawled over the catwalk to the pilot, who agreed that the bombs should be dropped. The salvo handle had been shot away, so Lt Lowrie crawled to the bomb bay and with the aid of the navigator, jettisoned the bombs by an emergency release, then stayed on to map a course to friendly territory.

SSgt Peter Ladisic, 20 year old 456 BG B-24 tail gunner, was awarded the nation's second highest individual award, the Distinguished Service Cross. The young gunner received the award "for extraordinary heroism in action" while flying on a mission over Hungary. Sgt Ladisic, whose leg was severed at the knee when a 20MM shell from a German fighter exploded in his turret, crawled back to his guns and shot down his second fighter of the day before losing consciousness. The citation which accompanied the award said: "although in extreme pain, and suffering from shock and weakened from great loss of blood, Sgt Ladisic, with an exceptional show of intestinal fortitude, fought his way back to his position where he continued to fire at the enemy and succeeded in repelling all subsequent attacks."

Courtesy: Clipping dated 1 March 1945.

FREEFALL

Sgt Donald McDowell, 463 BG tail gunner, was an unintentional pioneer in the sport of freefall. Flying with Lt Fonteneau and Lt Drutman on 5 May 1944, he was busy throwing lead at a flock of attacking fighters when the plane exploded. The sudden explosion broke the tail section off from the rest of the fuselage. Trapped in the falling tail section, McDowell fought to get free. "While struggling to get out, I accidentally pulled my ripcord and the chute spilled out in the tail section which I was now riding to the quickly approaching ground. At about 2,000 feet, I forced the hatch open, grabbed silk in my arms, and jumped. I landed with an awful jar." Later he figured he had fallen more than 20,000 feet in the tail section before working himself free and opening his chute.

Courtesy: *History of 463 BG*.

Ed's Note: We are proud and honored to have Bryant Smick, Peter Ladisic, Joseph Rapoza, and Ted Sorensen as long time members of our Association - we salute you all.

Ben

≡OUR WAR STORIES≡

(A PILOT'S STORY continued from May 03 issue)

REVIEW: Lt Col Driskill B. Horton was a B-17 pilot in the 2d Bomb Group, 429th Bomb Squadron stationed at Mendola, Italy. On 7 July 1944, he and his crew took off to bomb a petroleum complex at Blechhammer, Germany. As they neared their target they were hit by a deadly burst of flak which resulted in major damage and caused an out-of-control spin. Horton managed to regain control and pointed the aircraft for home. Enroute they flew over Vienna and a heavy flak barrage caused further damage forcing the crew to bailout. Upon landing, Horton and his co-pilot Pete joined up and began a long and dangerous trek to freedom. They managed to cross the Austrian countryside and reached Yugoslavia where they believed their chances of survival were greater. Joining up with various Partisans, they continued their efforts to reach a pick up point for return to Italy.

HORTON CONTINUES: The Doctor gave us a lot of the history of Yugoslavia - about the atrocities and hardships they had suffered. Many had been imprisoned not only by the Germans, but by the Chetniks, who they called the Blue Guards and the White Guards. The Partisans hated the Blue and White Guards as much as the Germans.

Anyway, this Colonel really ran things. If he decided he wanted to walk through a little town, he did. It seems that if there were a few Germans there, they took off to the woods when this large group of Partisans approached unless they had armored cars and such. In fact, as we approached one little village, we heard motorcycles leaving. We came into the village center, but the Germans had just left. Then as we continued to the far side of town, hand grenades went off; the Germans were ambushing us! This battle lasted about an hour. We lost quite a few Partisans, but a lot of Germans were killed too. I was standing right beside a young woman on a donkey who was hit in the leg by a bullet. It must have been a dum-dum because the donkey sort of fell down and got back up. But this woman's leg bone was all shattered. She died a short time later; she had lost too much blood.

After this battle, we got word that there was another group of Partisans that needed help. The colonel got his people together. We were splitting up. He divided them into three groups. The older Partisans would protect the village. The younger Partisans were going with the colonel to fight the Germans. They appointed two couriers to take Pete and me to another group of Partisans. It was real sad parting with the Little Colonel and all the friends we had made. We said our farewells and shook hands with everyone at least two or three times. I guess if the colonel would have ever cried,

he would have cried then. He was very sad to leave us and we were very sad to leave him. The doctor who also acted as an interpreter went with the colonel to fight the Germans. I might add that since the war, I have contacted the doctor's mother and she said that on that day, the colonel and many of our friends were captured. They were surrounded by a large group of Germans, and the Little Colonel's entire group was executed. I could hardly believe that this entire group could ever be captured; they might all be killed, but I didn't think they could be captured. But the doctor's mother wrote that the day after they left us, they were all liquidated.

We walked all night and all day with the two couriers the colonel had assigned us. We kept changing couriers. They had a system worked out where we would travel with one set of couriers and then we would meet another set, and they would change pouches and we would walk with the new ones. We finally met up with a very large group of Partisans, maybe 200 to 250 men. They were very well organized and most importantly, had some meat, butter, and cheese. It was the best food we had eaten in a long time. There wasn't very much, but it was enough to make us feel better. This particular day we were on a mountain top and another group of Partisans came in. We were leaning against a tree, and Pete said to me, "Gee, I'd give \$100 for a hamburger." One of the new Partisans jumped up and said, "What are you SOB's doing here?" This Partisan was actually a P-38 pilot who had been shot down over Ploesti many months before. His hair was down over his ears and he had a big beard. He wore Serbian type clothes, even the Serbian shoes that curl up in front. We had quite a discussion with him. It seemed that he had been with the Chetniks down in Serbia. Apparently one day, the Chetniks and the Partisans got in a battle and the P-38 pilot ended up as a prisoner of the Partisans. He was headed north to Trieste to try to work his way into Italy. We convinced him to go with us. We told him we were headed to southern Yugoslavia - down near Split where we could contact the American OSS and they would probably either fly us out or get us out by boat. So he joined up with us and we stayed together the rest of the time.

One day we arrived at a Partisan "hospital". Actually it was a bunch of shelter halves tied up against trees. They had cut ferns to make beds. People were lying around suffering from different types of wounds. You could smell the place - it was absolutely the worst smell - it smelled like a bunch of dead people. I guess it was the gangrene eating away at flesh. We discovered another American pilot there. He was in very bad shape. His leg had gangrene and they were going to cut it off.

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≡OUR WAR STORIES≡

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This pilot had one of his gunners with him. He had been with him all this time. We got there just as they were going to amputate his leg. It was, of course, a very sad experience. Because we were Americans and could talk to him, we helped all we could. They didn't have any anesthesia or the tools needed to saw the bone. It was very upsetting for us all. We reluctantly left the pilot with the Partisans, and his gunner came with us.

Eventually, we came to this fair sized village. There must have been 2,000 to 3,000 Partisans there. They were very well organized. There were some British OSS people there also. While we were in this village, we met little Bill, a B-17 tail gunner who had no feet. He was only 17 years old. Several months before, during the winter, his B-17 had been shot down and he was in the tail compartment. Apparently the plane had blown up and the tail section came down by itself with him still in it and landed on the slope of a snow covered mountain which must have cushioned the impact. However, the impact was still sufficient to knock him out. He didn't know how long he laid unconscious in the cold, but he finally came to when a group of Partisans found him. His feet had frozen and apparently some Partisan doctor had amputated them to save his life. To compound his problems, one of his legs was permanently bent backward. They had hidden him for such a long period of time in a cramped place that now he couldn't straighten out his leg. He was a very sad case. We carried him with us; we weren't about to leave him. Every place we went, we took this little tail gunner.

We also met a mixed group of Brits, New Zealanders, and Australians who joined with us. Our group was getting larger as we traveled through the countryside. We now totaled thirteen; five Americans and eight Brits. We all stayed together working our way south with the hope of getting to the Island of Vis or connecting with Partisans or OSS who could arrange for a pickup by air. The OSS we did meet told us that further south the Partisans had more control of the country. They told us about a village about 75 miles south where there was another group of OSS who had radio contact with the Allies in Italy and could possibly arrange to fly us home.

One high ranking Partisan and a British OSS officer came to us and explained that they were assigning about 10 or 12 partisans to take us to another group. The Germans were moving in and they were expecting a major battle. We started packing up just before dark and made arrangements to borrow a two-wheeled vehicle to carry little Bill. We definitely were not going to leave him there. Pete's ankles and mine were both in good shape and we were now able to wear our GI boots. The cart to carry little Bill didn't work out, however. The terrain we were traveling over was too

rough. We abandoned the cart, and carried Bill on our backs. He only weighed about 85 or 90 lbs; he was easy to carry. Every 15 or 20 minutes we would swap off and someone else would carry him. He more or less became our mascot. He gave us something to work for; carrying him was an honor.

It was hard going, but our morale was high. Of course, we stayed up in the mountains. These Partisans knew little trails which made walking a little easier. We actually weren't too cautious. The Partisans seemed to think it was safe. Several times we heard German vehicles down in the valley. When we did, we would be quiet, and let them continue on their way. We traveled constantly and stopped as little as possible. We would stop at farm houses and commandeer food. Some were very reluctant to give us even a piece of bread; others would give us the clothes off their back. Quite often we would go into these little villages and the old women would get down and kiss our feet when they found out we were Americans and Brits.

We eventually arrived in the town the OSS had sent us to. There were a lot of high ranking Partisan officers in this village, but they were not very interested in us. They had their own problems. However, there were two British OSS officers there and a couple of British sergeants who seemed to be the big wheels of the town.

One day we were visiting with the British major and his sergeant and saw a metal container in a bag and we asked them what it was. They said it was a radio. We asked them if we could use it to call Italy. They said no - it had been broken when they parachuted in and was damaged beyond repair. We looked at it and the major was correct - it was banged up pretty badly. Several of our Brits got to looking at it and one of them was a radio ham. In fact, he told us he thought he could fix it. So he began tearing into this thing with what little tools he could find. In no time at all, he had it operating! We were receiving music, aircraft, and all sorts of broadcasts. This radio had quite a span of frequencies, but we didn't know for sure if we were capable of transmitting. I remembered the frequency of our tower back in Italy. Our Brit ham set this thing up to transmit and we made several calls in the blind. We worked the dial back and forth and we finally got someone. At first, we thought it was an aircraft, but we discovered we had contact with an allied airway traffic control. He was barely coming in. I explained to him what our situation was - that we were in Yugoslavia and that we would like to contact someone from the 15th Air Force to try to get us back to our base. He didn't know what to say. He took down our names, ranks, serial numbers, organizations, etc. Then he gave us a primary frequency and some alternate frequencies and told us to call back in an hour.

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≡ OUR WAR STORIES ≡

(continued from page 14)

We waited until our appointed time and sure enough this fellow came back with his "CQ, CQ". We listened for him to transmit an identifying number he had given us in the previous contact. We received it loud and clear and we answered him. He told us he needed more information, and that he had some questions to ask us. Just a short time before we were shot down, we were required to fill out a form with some questions and answers that would help identify us in the event we were in the very situation we were now experiencing. I remember one question was who was my favorite friend in high school - questions of this nature. He asked these questions and I gave him the correct responses to the ones that were now on file at my Group. Then he said we would have to wait until he could check out my answers. He gave us a time several hours later for a further contact.

About 2 hours later, we got "CQ, CQ" and we were given a bunch of code letters. The British OSS used their code book to decipher the message which told us they were making arrangements for a supply drop, which would include another radio and other equipment. The decoded message also stated that Pete, the P-38 pilot, both tail gunners, and I had been confirmed and our families would be notified that we were alive. Through the OSS, arrangements were made for the supply drop. They indicated that some special agents were also going to drop in, arriving the following night, if it was clear.

The British major briefed the Partisan leaders that an Allied aircraft was coming to make a drop that night. The Partisans were asked to establish defensive positions around our mountain top and at the expected drop zone. The air drop itself was all worked out with coordinates, lights on the ground, special light signals, and unique radio communication frequencies. When the airplane flew over, we flashed our lights. The airplane came back around and made the drop. They dropped a lot of equipment, food, guns, and two agents. Unfortunately, a lot of the parachutes missed our mountain top and fell in German territory. They got more of the equipment than we did. However, the two agents, both British sergeants, landed okay. One was to work with the British Major on some classified mission; the other was to help us build a landing strip. Our headquarters intended to land an aircraft on the short mountain strip we would build and pick us up for the long awaited return to Italy.

This British sergeant who was dropped in to construct the landing strip, really knew his business. He was able to locate on a map the two locations that had been photographed by aerial recon and also reconnoitered by agents on the ground. He immediately took off with some Partisans to look at both of these sites.



C-47 Air drop

The British sergeant came back quite thrilled that both strips were almost ready made; one was a natural clearing about 3,000 feet long, sloping south, and this was good because at night we usually had a breeze from the south. This meant that the aircraft could land uphill and turn around and take off downhill into the wind. So the decision was made that it would be much safer and better to use this larger clearing to start the airfield.

The next morning we left before daybreak - Pete, myself, the P-38 pilot, the one tail gunner, our Brits, and over 100 Partisans. The sergeant seemed to be well organized. He started by cutting the larger trees in the area. We would saw them off at the base so the aircraft could run over them. The larger rocks were rolled off the strip. We were making real good headway, but late in the afternoon, we heard a German plane and all of us ducked for cover. It flew right over where we had been cutting. Then some Stukas came in and strafed the area. They didn't drop any bombs, and they didn't kill anyone, but we realized immediately that this airstrip had been compromised and we couldn't use it.

So after a real hard day of work, we went back to the village and had a council of war. The sergeant briefed us that we were going to have to work out new procedures and would be forced to use the smaller strip. This strip was approximately 2,000 ft long and about 150 ft wide. It sloped to the north. We would just cut the big trees from this strip and leave the small trees until the last day. We did not want the Germans to detect this strip from the air. When the OSS made strips like this, they usually had just four or five days before they expected to use them. We cut the large trees immediately. We worked all the first day on it. We were very careful not to leave any outlines that would be apparent from the air. On the second day, we got a lot more done.

By Lt Col Driskill B. Horton courtesy of Erwin Eckert
(to be concluded in the next issue)

≡ OUR LEGACY ≡

On Oct 22, 1943, Gen Eisenhower announced the activation of Fifteenth Air Force to be effective Nov 1 with headquarters at Tunis, North Africa under the command of the legendary Gen Jimmy Doolittle. It was formed to attack what Winston Churchill called the soft underbelly of the Axis powers and he was an early advocate for establishing the Fifteenth. Fifteenth flew its first combat mission on the day it was activated, attacking a naval base at La Spezia and communications targets north of Rome.

In December, the operations were moved to newly liberated air bases in Italy and the headquarters relocated to Bari where it remained until the end of the war. A month later, Gen Doolittle was reassigned to England as Eighth Air Force commander and Gen Nathan Twining assumed command of Fifteenth Air Force.

While Fifteenth received little notice from war correspondence who apparently preferred England to the muddy fields of Italy, we had the full attention of the Germans. Albert Speer, the architect of Hitler's industrial base, said in his memoirs, "I could see omens of the war's end almost every day in the blue southern sky when, flying provocatively low, the bombers of the American Fifteenth Air Force crossed the Alps from their Italian bases to attack German industrial targets."

Speer proved to be a prophet as military historians are increasingly recognizing the critical importance of Fifteenth's attack on Nazi oil which many attribute to shorting the war by a year or more. Without the oil, denied them by the Fifteenth's attacks, the Nazi war machine ground to an early halt. Germany surrendered May 7, 1945.

After the war, Fifteenth was inactivated but only for a few months. With the onset of the Cold War, Fifteenth was reactivated as the first operational numbered air force of the new Strategic Air Command. It was headquartered at Colorado Springs with its first postwar commander, Maj Gen Charles Born. On Nov 7, 1949, Fifteenth Air Force moved its headquarters to March Air Force Base at Riverside, CA under the command of Maj Gen Rosy O'Donnell. Fifteenth Air Force headquarters remained at March for 42 years until it moved in 1993 to Travis AFB in northern CA.

As we have seen, the Fifteenth was off to a roaring start - Eisenhower, Churchill, Doolittle, Twining - victory in Europe - and then a major component of the new Strategic Air Command. What happened in the sixty years between our activation in Tunis and our deactivation at Travis?

Obviously, space constraints do not permit an historical chronology of those years - even the highlights are too numerous to enumerate. I hope that the following lists and short summaries will provide you a measure of the importance of this command and significance of your service. Join me as we take a quick stroll through the past 60 years.

To appreciate your many years of distinguished service to our country, I think a roll call of our history will tell a compelling story.

First, a list of the 24 distinguished Americans who have served as Fifteenth Air Force commander during the 60 years reads like a chapter from our nation's history: Jimmy Doolittle, Nathan Twining, Charles Born, Leon Johnson, Rosy O'Donnell, Walt Sweeney, Archie Old, Bill Martin, Jack Catton, P.K. Carlton, Bill Pitts, Bryan Shotts, Jim Mullins, Jack Murphy, Jim Light, Dick Burpee, Bob Beckel, John Jackson, Walt Kross, Bruce Fister, Tony Robertson, John Sams, Walter Hogle, and John Becker.

Two former commanders, Gen Doolittle and Gen Johnson, were recipients of the Medal of Honor. One of our former commanders, Gen Nathan Twining, became Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Aug 1957. Fifteenth Air Force even served as an important link in the lineage of Air Mobility Command. Four former Fifteenth Air Force commanders also commanded Air Mobility Command or its predecessor, Military Airlift Command: Gen Jack Catton, Aug 1969; Gen P. K. Carlton, Sept 1972; Gen Walt Kross, July 1996; and Gen Tony Robertson, Aug 1998.

I am confident that there is no other command in any branch of the military that has been blessed with a more distinguished list of commanders than ours.

WARS: WW II, Korea, Vietnam, Gulf War, Bosnia, Afghanistan, and Iraq.

OPERATIONS: Operation Strangle, Operation Frantic, Young Tiger, Arc Light, Linebacker, Desert Shield, Desert Storm, Enduring Freedom, and Iraqi Freedom.

SOME KEY TARGETS: Ploesti, Berlin, Wiener Neustadt, Regensburg, Bucharest, Blechhammer, Vienna, the bridges over the Yalu, Inchon, Wonsan, Hanoi, Haiphong, Ho Chi Minh Trail, and Khe Sanh.

BOMBERS: B-17, B-24, B-25, B-26, B-29, B-50, B-36, B-47, B-52, and B-1.

ICBMS: Atlas, Titan, Minuteman, and Peacekeeper. At one time Fifteenth had sole command responsibility for all of the land-based ICBMs of the free world.

AERIAL TANKERS: KB-29, KC-97, KC-135, and KC-10.

FIGHTERS: P-51, P-38, and P-47.

RECON AIRCRAFT: F-5, RC-135, U-2, and SR-71. At one time Fifteenth had sole command responsibility for all of the airborne RECON operations of the Department of Defense - in fact, security restrictions still in place prevent describing in full detail the awesome national security responsibilities we had in this highly sensitive area.

AIRLIFTERS: C-141, C-5, C-9, C-130, and C-17.

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≡OUR LEGACY≡

MISSIONS:

Fighter Operations, Tactical Bombardment, Strategic Bombardment, Tactical Reconnaissance, Strategic Reconnaissance, ICBM Operations, Air Refueling, and Airlift and Mobility.

Early Warning/Deep Space Surveillance

Pave Paws (Beale)

BMEWS (Clear AFS Alaska)

Cobra Dane (Shemya)

Deep space surveillance (Stallion in New Mexico)

Airborne Command Control responsibilities for the Strategic Air Command at Offutt.

THE COST OF FREEDOM:

Of the 3,544 B-24s delivered in theater to Fifteenth Air Force during WW II, 1,756 were lost in combat. Of the 1,407 B-17s delivered, 624 were lost in combat. An additional 400 fighters were lost in combat. According to statistics released by Gen Twining at the end of combat, a total of 3,370 aircraft were lost due to all sources - combat, weather, accidents, etc.

2,703 combat crewmen were killed in action (KIA); 12,359 were reported as missing in action (MIA); and 2,553 were wounded in action (WIA). 5,998 airmen were successfully returned during the war either through release from POW camps or by Partisan and OSS action after bailout over enemy territory.

Our airmen in WW II received the following decorations: 2 Medals of Honor; 2 Distinguished Service Crosses; 13 Distinguished Service Medals; 939 Silver Stars; 46 Legions of Merit; 11,984 Distinguished Flying Crosses; 729 Soldiers Medals; 2,741 Bronze Stars; and 163,651 Air Medals.

GEN TWINING'S ASSESSMENT OF YOUR SERVICE:

"The Fifteenth Air Force in its 18 months of service in the European Theater of World War II made a tremendous contribution to the complete and overwhelming defeat of the Nazi enemy.

It destroyed all gasoline production within its range in southern Europe; It destroyed 6,286 enemy aircraft in the air and on the ground; It contributed to the attainment of total air supremacy in the skies of Europe by knocking out all major aircraft factories in its sphere; It crippled the enemy's transportation system over half of once occupied Europe by repeated attacks by bombers and fighters; It came on many occasions to the aid of hard-pressed ground forces or spearheaded the advance of the armies of our Allies; It dropped 309,126 tons of bombs on enemy targets in 12 countries of Europe including major military installations in eight capital cities; And its combat personnel made 151,029 heavy bomber sorties and 89,397 fighter sorties against the enemy."

Gen Nathan Twining

CONCLUSION:

Fifteenth Air Force has a distinguished history of extraordinary service to our country. But Fifteenth Air Force was not its commanders, or its missions, or its targets, or its airplanes and missiles. Fifteenth Air Force was the hundreds of thousands of men and women who have served the command faithfully and with great devotion to duty - all too often giving the last full measure of that devotion. And we salute and recognize and honor and remember each one who served our country in the Fifteenth Air Force. God Bless them one and all.

Most people live their entire lives without doing anything that's really important - that saves lives, that protects a way of life, that frees an enslaved people - that keeps our country free and preserves our independence. You did all of those things and you are important.

This is our legacy - be proud that you are an important part of it - and be grateful that you had the opportunity to serve your country and fellowman in such a distinguished and meaningful way. Know that your life has had meaning, purpose, and importance because you served in our Fifteenth Air Force.

A few personal comments on the deactivation of Fifteenth Air Force. Today, you hear a lot of military leaders referring to their command as the "tip of the spear". I applaud its use as an effective motivating factor - it's tantamount to the "we are number one" chant of sports teams. But let's put those claims into historical perspective. For an extended number of years, Fifteenth Air Force had in its command: all of the long range strategic missiles of the Free World; all of the strategic reconnaissance assets of the United States; almost half of the nuclear armed, long range strategic bombers in the Strategic Air Command; and we were on both airborne and ground alert around the world 24/7. We could respond within minutes of a Presidential order to unleash our power. During those years, Fifteenth Air Force was arguably the most powerful military command in history - both before and since. We could launch a force that would make "shock and awe", as impressive as it was, look like a children's 4th of July celebration. Many said that just the power vested in Fifteenth Air Force could bring on a "nuclear winter" in all parts of the world. For many years, we were not the "tip" of any spear - we were THE spear of the United States of America - a most powerful legacy to leave to those who will follow--**Guarding a Heritage - Defending Tomorrow.**

I am certain that in recounting our history in this short-hand fashion, I have failed to list some important events and significant operations. Any omissions are inadvertent and a result of a compression of both time and space.

As I reviewed your service, even though I have written about it for 23 years, I was deeply moved and impressed. God bless each of you - thank you for your service. **Ben**

THE HERITAGE OF FIFTEENTH AIR FORCE



Bombs Away!

FIFTEENTH MAKES THE DIFFERENCE

Since the beginning of the European war, the German army had made extensive and successful use of armored vehicles. After the debacle at Stalingrad, the Germans greatly expanded production of Panzer tanks, tank destroyers, and self-propelled guns. They turned out almost 9,000 units during the first half of 1944 and showed promise of attaining a rate of 2,500 per month by December 1944.

To Allied air commanders, the surest way to victory and to deprive the enemy of armor and heavy equipment was to destroy fuel and lubricants. However, in August, General Spaatz ordered Eighth and Fifteenth Air Forces to bomb ordnance depots and tank assembly plants whenever possible giving these targets priority second only to oil. It would be clearly impossible to keep the enemy from obtaining guns and ammunition, since the German armament industry was both huge and efficient, but it was hoped that a systematic bombardment of key factories might deprive the enemy of critically needed Panzers and self-propelled guns.

From August to November 1944, the strategic air forces waged a rather inconclusive offensive against German ordnance depots and tank assembly plants. Eighth and the RAF launched extensive campaigns against plants in Germany and Fifteenth hit Panzer plants at St. Valentin, Steyr, and the Skoda works at Pilsen. During October, Fifteenth crews also struck the sprawling ordnance depot in Vienna and factories at Graz, Linz, and Milan.

It was clear by the end of October that the offensive was not decisively affecting the re-equipment of the German armies. Even though above ground buildings had been destroyed, underground production of armor continued without major interruption. General Marshall visited the ETO

during October and laid plans for an all-out offensive to bring the war to an early conclusion. If the German army could be forced into surrender within a few months, it mattered little how many tanks were produced in the interim. The effort against armor was virtually abandoned by the first of November. Tanks and ordnance depots received little attention for the next three months.

Since the beginning of the oil offensive, the Fifteenth Air Force had dropped 27,000 tons on Nazi oil producing targets and the campaign had been more effective in terms of destruction than most Allied experts had dared to hope. Yet thousands of workers (often slave labor) worked around the clock to make repairs and the bombing campaign had to be continued without interruption, often attacking the same targets repeatedly.

During the first weeks of December, Eighth experienced bad weather and could only provide limited support to the Allied effort against oil. Fortunately, Fifteenth Air Force was able to continue a sustained effort. The Fifteenth sent approximately 450 heavy bombers against Blechhammer North, Blechhammer South, Odertal, and Floridsdorf on 2 December and bombed the synthetic plant at Moosbierbaum on the 11th. On the 12th Fifteenth attacked Blechhammer South again, and Brux and Linz on the 16th.

On 16 December, the Germans launched their last major offensive of the war against our troops in the Ardennes - commonly referred to as the Battle of the Bulge. The enemy's Ardennes offensive was possible only by garnering every drop of fuel that could be found over a period of weeks and this effort provided only a five day supply. Due to the outstanding success of Fifteenth's oil campaign, this last desperate gamble depended for its ultimate success on the capture of Allied stores. When this failed, the enemy's limited fuel supplies were exhausted and the Panzers stopped in their tracks. Trucks were abandoned on the roads. The flow of supplies came to a halt and the offensive was lost. German soldiers, who were not captured, began the long walk home. Their leaders knew that their best efforts had ultimately failed - not because their tanks were destroyed - not because their soldiers were overrun - but because Allied strategic forces had destroyed their fuel. When the final chapter was written, the insistence of General Spaatz and General Twining on continuing the campaign against oil proved to be one of the most decisive decisions of the war.

Fifteenth Air Force - its air crews and ground support personnel had made a major difference.

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To Be Continued

OUR LIFE MEMBERS . . . WE SALUTE YOU (Continued from page 2)

Col Charles W. Painter	L/Col John P. Roberts	H.D. Smith	1Lt Leland Ray Swanson	Douglass B. Webendorfer
George T. Panichas	Terry L. Ross	MSGT Richard E. Smith	Harold M. Swartz	Robert J. Weber
Charles Pappas	1Lt Irving Rubin	TSgt Dan O. Smith	Col John R. Sweeney	Joseph J. Weiner
Rev Eugene E. Parker	1Lt John C. Rucigay	Ted Smith	Al Sykes	Capt Thomas D. Weldin
Col Merton L. Parks	Jack L. Ruehlman	Norman W. Smith	TSgt Angelo P. Synodis	Maj Nimrod Wells
William A. Parsons	1Lt G. Robert Ruff	SSgt Stephen Smith	Victor C. Tannehill	1Lt Robert Westaway
L/Col Harry J. Pascoe	Capt Robert B. Russell	Garel E. Smith	Harry "Doug" Tanner	L/Col Thomas N. Weygandt
M.C. Patrick	Walter A. Sabo	W.P. Smith	Ralph Tash	Col William J. White
Col John V. Patterson	Allan T. Sagraves	Maj Kenneth T. Smith	Joseph P. Tassone	CMSgt Charles R. White
Theodore C. Pawlikowski	L/Col John R. Sanders	L/Col James M. Snyder	Col D. Dave Taylor	Maj Robert R. White
Robert C. Payne	Capt William W. Sanders	1Lt Ed Soderstrom	Howard Teifke	Maj Richard T. Wibalda
TSgt Ernest J. Pellington	SSgt Gerald W. Sanderson	L/Col Fred A. Sommer	SSgt Alexandro M. Tejada	Col Floyd E. Wikstrom
Dan F. Penrod	FO Anthony Santomango	SSgt Alex J. Sonkoly	Frank Tellis	Kenneth L. Wilcox
MSGT James S. Peters	1Lt William Santoro	Maj Warren Sortomme	Capt Reginald Thayer	Lt Col H.A. Wilkes
MSGT Donald H. Phillips	Maj Donald W. Saunders	Col S.C. Sowder	Col Austin K. Thomas	Col Sherman W. Wilkins
Anthony J. Picardi	Col Vincent T. Scarano	Al Sparkman	1Lt John W. Thomas	Col Richard G. Wilkinson
CMSgt Edward W. Pierce	Walter K. Schaffner	Eldred J. Specht	Thomas S. Thomas	Irvin W. Williams
TSgt Archie Piirainen	Col John S. Schifferer	L/Col John C. Speight	L.C. Thompson	L/Col Paul R. Williams
1Lt Z.H. Pilcher	L/Col Horst R. Schoene	Maj Reed Sprinkel	Capt Edward D. Thompson	Fred B. Wilmot
Dennis R. Pixler	Capt Robert W. Schuetz	1Lt Robert P. St Germain	Col James D. Thompson	L/Col Clarence F. Wilson
Col Martin E. Plocher	Dr Harold F. Schuknecht	Robert R. Stansbury	Capt Lester R. Thurston Jr	Neal E. Wilson
Harold A. Pollman	Col Philip L. Schultz	Col Ralph Starks	Maj Forrest T. Tolson	Kennard Wilson
Petar M. Popovic	L/Col Gerald K. Schuman	Mrs Lou Starks	Harold T. Toomey	1Lt Robert I. Wilson
Walter A. Porteous	Jack L. Schwartz	Maj Alonzo L. Starkey Jr.	L/Col Loyd F. Towers	A.R. Winter
Kenneth Porter	L/Col John J. Scott	L/Col Dayton A. Starnes	Garrell J. Triplett	L/Col James W. Wirth
Judge Donald E. Powers	Gerald H. Seacat	Charles H. Steffens	John C. Troxell	Dr T. William Witalis
Harold V. Powers	SSgt Robert S. Seidel	Samuel Stein	Capt George E. Tudor	Theodore H. Wolf
Capt William T. Pridmore	Donald L. Seiler	TSgt Norman M. Steinhauer	Emil P. Uhor	SSgt William C. Wolfinger
Anthony V. Quarato	Maj Holger A. Selling	H. Wallace Steinmetz	Capt Robert F. Van Every	Richard W. Wood
Marvin W. Quinlan	TSgt Warren E. Shaffer	Lt William Stelte	G.R. Van Natten	Capt Robert L. Wood
Ralph W. Raines	Courtney D. Shanken	John P. Stephen	Robert E. Van Velkinburgh	L/Col Sumner R. Woods
William R. Rains	Norbert J. Sharkey	L/Col John E. Stevens	Neale E. Van Wagner	Howard P. Woodyard
Nick Rajkovich	Maj Milburne C. Sharpe	M.E. Steve Stephenson	Fr Robert Velten	L/Col William W. Wright
Col Nathaniel G. Raley	William B. Shea	William R. Stevenson	Gilberto Vera	Tom Wright
L/Col Harry M. Randel	Emmett A. Shearer	Ralph S. Stevenson	W.D. Versteegen	Benedict Yedlin
George W. Rands	Dale L. Shebilsky	Col Albert G. Stewart	Dr Carlos Vest	Capt John A. Young
Col Carl E. Rankin	James G. Sheehan	Clifton J. Stewart	Robert F. Vest	1Lt Perry E. Zaback
Col Arthur L. Rawlings	Thomas A. Sheehan	Bert E. Stigberg	Maj Allen Neal Vickrey	Owen R. Zachritz
MSGT Chester L. Ray	Robert W. Shinnick	Clifford W. Stone	Frank E. Vodarick	Duane C. Zeits
Robert E. Ream	John Shlapak	Roger R. Storm	Richard J. Von Schritlz	Robert B. Zetterstrom
Fredrich E. Redcher	Roy Sievers	Thomas H. Story	L/Col John F. Waguespack	Richard A. Zirm
Robert H. Redfield	TSgt Orv Sill	Fred Stowell II	Col Eugene N. Waldher	
Ted W. Remick	L/Col John W. Simeroth	1Lt Carl A. Stracka	Jack B. Walker	
MSGT Eugene J. Remmell	Bernd Simon	Capt John E. Strang	Col Robert E. Walker	
Capt Gordon E. Reno	Col Jerry L. Sinclair	Raymond Strautman	Col Jack G. Walker	
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Capt Harley W. Rhodehamel	Capt Revis G. Sirmon	Capt Donald Strutz	L/Col Bruce W. Waltz	
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 W. W. Wright, 450 BG
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=== REUNIONS ===

2 BG: Covington, KY. Oct 9-12, 2003. Edwin S. Hodges, 9201 La Serena Dr, Fair Oaks, CA 95628-6612.
 48 FS: Branson, MO. Oct 22-27, 2003. Joseph Onesty, 455 Galleon Way, Seal Beach, CA 90740 562-431-2901.
 450 BG: Oklahoma City, OK. Oct 9-12, 2003. Al Goodman, 2 Portside Ct, Grayslake, IL 60030. 847-543-8381.
 454 BG: Memphis, TN. Oct 14-19, 2003. Ralph Branstetter, P.O. Box 678, Wheat Ridge, CO 80034-0678.
 455 BG: Orlando, FL. Oct 8-13, 2003. 455 BG, 5100 John D. Ryan Blvd #1103, San Antonio, TX 78245-3535.



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