

GATHERING OF EAGLES

Firsts in Flight



Rock Brett led his squadron in the first employment of the Composite Air Strike Force, the Air Force's first mobile strike capability for rapidly moving units anywhere in the world. This employment, which included the first operational day/night transatlantic refueling mission by fighters, helped resolve the 1958 Lebanese Crisis and pave the way for today's AEF deployments. Prior to this, Brett flew during the first days of the Berlin Airlift. He later flew more than 200 combat missions in Korea and Vietnam and retired as a lieutenant general.

Eileen Collins is the first woman space shuttle pilot and the first woman shuttle commander. Prior to these feats, she was only the second woman to graduate from the Air Force's test pilot curriculum. She became an astronaut in 1991 and first served in orbiter engineering support. After piloting the Discovery in 1995, Collins piloted the Atlantis in 1997. Her third space flight in 1999 marked her advancement to Shuttle commander, when she led mission STS-93 aboard the Columbia.



In 1981, **Crip Crippen** piloted STS-1, the first orbital test flight of the shuttle program. Earlier in his career, he supported three Skylab missions and the Apollo-Soyuz mission. He also commanded three other shuttle flights, and was the director of the Kennedy Space Center. As a naval aviator and astronaut, Crippen has logged 6,500 flying hours, 565 hours in space, orbited the earth 374 times and traveled 9.4 million miles. He is also in the Astronaut Hall of Fame.



Scott Crossfield made history in 1953 as the first person to fly more than twice the speed of sound. He reached the milestone of Mach 2, over 1,320 miles per hour, in the Douglas D-558-II Skyrocket. Taken aloft by a Boeing P2B Superfortress "mothership," he dropped clear at 32,000 feet and climbed to 72,000 feet to begin his historic flight. Crossfield served his nation for 40 more years as a test pilot, rocket designer and Congressional adviser.

Ross Milton led vast armadas of bombers on some of World War II's most famous missions, including the first successful daylight raid on Berlin. As part of the Eighth Air Force, he led missions against the Gelsenkirchen refinery and the ball bearing industry at Schweinfurt, the latter of which involved 291 bombers dropping 2,800 bombs. On March 6, 1944, he led 730 bombers on their historic raid on Berlin. Milton later served as the U.S. representative to NATO's Military Committee.



In 1942, **Florene Watson** was selected as one of the first members of the Women's Auxiliary Ferrying Squadron (WAFS), later known as the Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP). As a WASP, she freed up male pilots for combat and greatly contributed to the war effort. She later became the first 601st WAFS commander at Love Field, Texas. By war's end, she had flown almost every aircraft made for the U.S. Army Air Forces, including her favorite, the North American P-51 Mustang.



Bertrand Piccard captained the first hot air balloon team to circumnavigate the globe non-stop. On March 1, 1999, he took off in the Breitling Orbiter III balloon from Switzerland and landed in Egypt 19 days later after a 45,633-kilometer flight. The flight set seven world records, including the record for the longest flight in duration and distance. He was subsequently awarded the Legion d'Honneur, Olympic Order and Gold Medal of the French Ministry of Youth and Sport.



Chuck DeBellevue is America's top ace from the Vietnam War and the first Air Force weapons systems officer to become an ace. He scored the first of four victories with Steve Ritchie, the Air Force's first Vietnam ace, at the onset of Operation Linebacker in 1972. He became the second Air Force ace when he downed two MiGs in two minutes on Sept. 9. DeBellevue later became a pilot, commanded a wing at Edwards Air Force Base, Calif., and retired in 1998 as the last U.S. ace on active duty.

The Gathering of Eagles program is a special aviation event that traces its origins back to 1980, when retired Brig. Gen. Paul Tibbets was invited to visit the Air Command and Staff College to share some of his experiences with the students. This visit became the genesis for the annual Gathering of Eagles.

The first official Gathering of Eagles occurred in 1982 when ACSC energized the faculty and students to develop an aviation heritage program for the graduating class. The ACSC faculty, along with four officers from the class, was chartered to design a program that encouraged the study of aviation history and emphasize the contributions

of aviation pioneers.

The ACSC commandant endorsed their efforts and presented it to the Air University commander. They became the first of many ACSC commandants and AU commanders to support the Gathering of Eagles program.

Throughout the years, numerous Gathering of Eagles team members, faculty advisers and ACSC graduates have dedicated their time to the success of the program. Their mission, to bring distinguished aviation pioneers from across the world to ACSC, ensures valuable lessons learned from the Eagles will be carried forward into the next century.



Air Command and Staff College's 22nd annual Gathering of Eagles program, "Firsts in Flight," celebrates the 100th anniversary of powered flight. High-quality, collector edition lithographs, individually signed by each of the Eagles are available for \$150. To purchase a litho, e-mail Maj. Andrew Schlachter at andrew.schlachter@maxwell.af.mil.



Duke Cunningham was America's first pilot ace of the Vietnam War. On Jan. 19, 1972, he claimed his first victory over a MiG-21 – the first MiG downing in two years. His second victory came on May 8 when he destroyed a MiG-17 trailing his wingman. Two days later, at the onset of Operation Linebacker, Cunningham claimed three more victories over MiGs in a single day – another first. Today, Cunningham is serving his seventh term in the House of Representatives, representing California.



Tex Hill was the first North American P-51 Mustang pilot to down a Japanese Oscar. Hill's time in China as part of Claire Chennault's American Volunteer Group, better known as the "Flying Tigers," contributed to his total of more than 18 victories. Having served in both the Navy and U.S. Army Air Forces, Hill, at age 31, became the youngest brigadier general in Air National Guard history. He retired in 1968 from the Air Force Reserve with more than 150 combat hours.

Joe Kittinger is the first person to parachute from above 100,000 feet and the first to cross the Atlantic Ocean solo in a balloon. Kittinger's 1960 leap from 102,800 feet established records for highest manned balloon flight, longest parachute jump and longest free fall. During the Vietnam War, he downed a MiG-21 and was later shot down and held at the infamous "Hanoi Hilton." Kittinger has flown 16,000 hours and is a member of the National Aviation Hall of Fame.



On Dec. 23, 1989, **Dick Rutan** became the first man to circumnavigate the globe non-stop without refueling. The flight encountered typhoons, turbulence and an engine failure, but nine days and 26,700 miles later, the Voyager, along with co-pilot Jeana Yeager, completed the flight.



Rutan's Air Force career includes more than 325 missions in Vietnam, many as a "Misty" forward air controller. Rutan is the recipient of the Presidential Citizen's Medal and is a member of the National Aviation Hall of Fame.



Bud Mahurin was the first U.S. Army Air Force's double ace in World War II's European theater. He totaled 19-3/4 victories there and an additional victory in the Pacific. He also had the distinction of bailing out in both theaters. Mahurin later scored 3-1/2 victories in Korea before being shot down, making him the only Air Force pilot with victories in Europe, the Pacific and Korea. After 16 months of confinement, his willingness to discuss his POW experiences has greatly influenced today's survival courses.

Chuck Yeager is best known for being the first person to fly supersonic. On Oct. 14, 1947, Yeager flew the secret Bell XS-1 at Mach 1.06 (760.5 miles per hour). However, his distinguished career also involves reaching double-ace status, flying North American P-51 Mustangs during World War II. In 1973, Yeager became the first active duty member inducted into the National Aviation Hall of Fame. He also earned a special peacetime Medal of Honor for his achievements.



Pat Brady was the first Army "Dustoff" pilot to receive the Medal of Honor. While in Vietnam, Brady overcame intense enemy fire and miserable weather to evacuate 51 soldiers. Using three different helicopters that were hit 400 times, his name became synonymous for a dangerous rescue mission. Brady also developed tactical and foul-weather flying techniques never before executed in combat, flew more than 2,000 combat missions and rescued more than 5,000 soldiers. He retired as a major general in 1993.



Buddy Archer is the first and only ace of the legendary Tuskegee Airmen, with five victories in the North American P-51 Mustang. As one of the famed "red-tailed angels," Archer flew 169 missions over 11 countries, including gaining three victories during a single battle over Hungary. After World War II, he flew in combat again in Korea and served in numerous positions throughout Europe and state-side. Archer has received the Distinguished Flying Cross and citations from three presidents.