



# American Fighter Aces

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## *and Friends*

The Bulletin of the American Fighter Aces Association

April 2018 | Volume 35, No 2



**Dick Fleischer: Thunderbolt Over New Guinea**



## Association President's Message

Dear Aces, Friends, Survivors, and Honorees:

Our Ace's Association was founded in 1960, recognizing the 1450 combat pilots that qualified as Aces for action in World War I, WW II. Korea and Vietnam. In individual combat they contributed to the security of our country in times of war. Since that day, membership in the Association has continued to inspire patriotism and set a high example for our youth in America.

Our mission each year is to remind our public of the commitment the pilots had, to remain confident and courageous. It seemed to always be one on one or against the odds, playing the hand they were dealt. Betting it all. The Association's commitment transcends time and continues to be the direction we want to go.

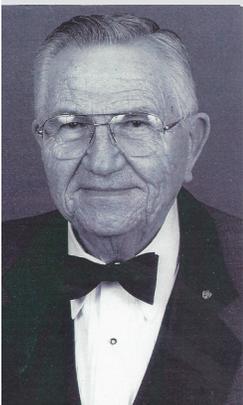
I have a large number of helpers in getting the Association's day's work done and I owe many a "Thank You" for their efforts. The Board of Directors officers give continually of their time on committees and are joined by Friends and volunteers to participate in study groups. In order to continue our mission of the future as an educational organization a few changes will have to be made and will require help of some strong donors to get good results. I encourage our Friends of the AFAA to help us in advice, suggestions and recruited a larger membership for support.

Thanks again for all the help we are getting and that includes the new team from the Museum of Flight. I am very encouraged about the future. Daily, I "Count my many Blessings". Have a great April and its many flowers.

Respectfully,

Colonel Dean Caswell USMC (Ret)

April 2018



AMERICAN

# FIGHTER ACES & FRIENDS BULLETIN

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in conjunction with The Museum of Flight.

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**Cover:** Second Lieutenant Richard H. Fleischer proudly proclaims his qualified aviator status before going off to war (Courtesy of Richard Fleischer)



## Museum President's Message

Dear Aces, Friends, Survivors and Honorees:

The Museum of Flight was built by and for our community. It is a showcase of our technological achievements and of our shared histories. Visitors from around the world come here and learn about society's challenges and triumphs, trials and errors, and smooth takeoffs and rough landings. It is a place for inspiration, reflection, and remembrance. With this in mind, it is with a great sense of honor and privilege that I share information about The Museum of Flight's upcoming initiative to pay respect to all veterans of the Vietnam War. Project Welcome Home is The Museum's campaign to build a Vietnam Veterans Commemorative Park at our Seattle campus in 2018. The Museum of Flight has assembled an expert team of local veterans to guide Project Welcome Home to completion. Led by Museum Trustee Jim Farmer, the committee represents several branches of the United States military, all of whom have first-hand experience with the Vietnam War and the aftermath that veterans faced when they arrived back home.

Our B-52G, known as *Midnight Express* has already been repainted in its former Vietnam-era livery, and is waiting at Paine Field in Everett to be brought down later this year to be installed as the centerpiece of this new park. The plane will be joined by a statue depicting a returning airman honoring veterans who served in all military branches between 1964 and 1975. The park will also feature an exhibit about the dozens of types of planes and helicopters flown during the war. This project is a key part our mission to help our community learn, contemplate and remember.

These displays will be the centerpiece of the Vietnam Veterans Commemorative Park that will start an important conversation within our community about the Vietnam War and the veterans from all branches of the U.S. military who served between 1964 and 1975. The new park will be a much-needed venue for veterans to share their stories, and will be free to the public. In the months leading up to the park's opening, the Museum is adding new Vietnam-related exhibit pieces and hosting public programs that will tell a more complete story of the Vietnam War. The Vietnam Veterans Commemorative Park will be unlike anything we've ever created at the Museum and it will allow us to honor the 58,220 Americans who gave their lives and more than 3 million who returned home.

I invite you to be part of this project. Please visit [Museumofflight.org/WelcomeHome](http://Museumofflight.org/WelcomeHome) for updates and come to the Park when you are in the area. It promises to be a powerful addition to our campus, but even more, and an overdue place for our community to share and to heal.

Sincerely,

Matt Hayes  
CEO and President  
The Museum of Flight

April 2018





# ACE BIRTHDAYS

MAY - JULY

<u>Name</u>	<u>Birthdate</u>
David C. Wilhelm	May 15, 1919
Donald M. McPherson	May 25, 1922
Lester L. Arasmith	June 9, 1924
Robert B. Carlson	June 17, 1921
Richard S. Ritchie	June 25, 1942
Henry Buttelmann	June 26, 1929
Richard G. Candelaria	July 14, 1922
Clarence A. Borley	July 17, 1924
Dean Caswell	July 24, 1922
Lester E. Gray Jr.	July 27, 1922



## 2018 AFAA Reunion September 20-23, Dallas, Texas

Join us this September for the Annual Fighter Aces Reunion in Dallas, Texas.

The Reunion will be held September 20-23 at the Centerport Marriot hotel near the south entrance of the Dallas/Fortworth Airport.

The agenda will be in the same format as previous years with arrival on Thursday, Board meeting and dinner Thursday evening, local area events on Friday, Business meeting and Mixer on Saturday morning, and the Banquet on Saturday evening.

Registration for the Reunion will be in the July 2018 Bulletin. In the meantime, if you have any questions contact Ken Cordier at ken.cordier@sbcglobal.net or 214-942-3337.

We hope to see you this September!

# JOIN THE FRIENDS OF THE AMERICAN FIGHTER ACES

(Auxiliary of the American Fighter Aces Association)

### **BASIC MEMBERS receive:**

- Membership card, certificate, lapel pin and decal (pin and decal with initial year's membership only).
- Subscription to the quarterly American Fighter Aces Bulletin, featuring articles by the Aces and others.
- Free admission to the Museum of Flight in Seattle, Washington — "Home of the Fighter Aces"
- A 15% discount on all AFAA items sold through the Museum Store and AFAA website

**All this for just \$40.00 a year (\$45.00 Foreign)**

THE HIGHER LEVEL MEMBERSHIPS BELOW OFFER THE FOLLOWING ADDITIONAL BENEFITS:

### **BASIC II MEMBERS receive:**

- Ten photographs with biographical sketches of American Fighter Aces, (8" x 10" format), suitable for framing, with five personally autographed by the Ace pictured.

**\$50.00 a year (\$55.00 Foreign)**

### **FAMILY MEMBERSHIPS receive:**

- Free family admission to the Museum of Flight

**\$60.00 a year (\$65.00 Foreign)**

### **PATRON MEMBERS receive:**

- A beautiful 550 page hardbound American Fighter Aces Album featuring biographical sketches and photos of all the Aces

**\$500.00 a year**

### **LIFETIME MEMBERS receive:**

- 600 photographs with biographical sketches of American Fighter Aces (8" x 10" format), with more than 300 personally signed by the Ace.

**\$1000.00 (one time payment)**

**Sign up online by visiting our website**  
**[www.AmericanFighterAces.org](http://www.AmericanFighterAces.org)**

### FRIENDS OF THE AMERICAN FIGHTER ACES MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

I AGREE TO ABIDE BY THE CONSTITUTION & BYLAWS OF THE AMERICAN FIGHTER ACES ASSOCIATION. Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_

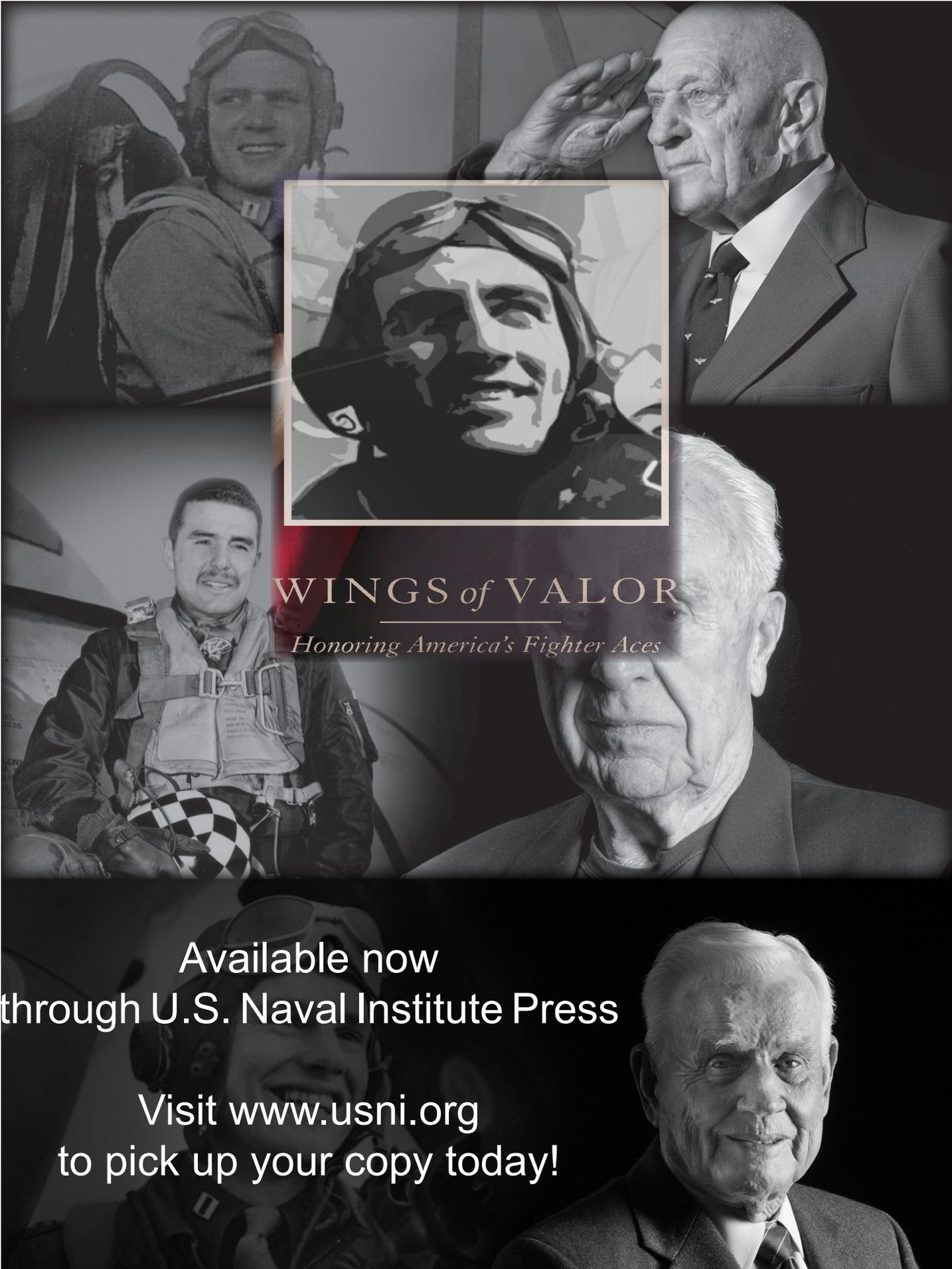
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 \_\_\_ Renewal              Street/PO Box \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_ Change of Address    City/State/Zip \_\_\_\_\_  
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## Ace Profile

### Dick Fleischer: Thunderbolt Over New Guinea

By Jon Guttman



*An ambition realized: Dick Fleischer poses proudly beside his P-47D, showing off an ace's quintet of enemy flags below the cockpit. (Courtesy of Richard Fleischer)*

When one thinks of American fighters in the southwest Pacific during World War II, the first that comes to mind is usually the Lockheed P-38 Lightning, the long-range, twin-boom twin-engine thoroughbred that produced the United States' first and second ranking aces, Richard I. Bong with 40 victories and Thomas G. McGuire with 38...among many others. In mid-1943, however, a powerful heavyweight contender appeared in New Guinea to challenge the P-38's supremacy. The 348th Fighter Group introduced the Republic P-47 Thunderbolt, or "Jug," and its pilots--from the commander on down-- were keen to show what their oversized mounts could do. Among them was Dick Fleischer.

Richard Henry Fleischer was born in Lorain, Ohio on September 6, 1919, less than a year after World War I ended, and its aerial legacy beckoned at an early age. "When I was 10 years old I enjoyed reading magazines of World War I," he said. "Some of the stories were fiction, but I liked the real stories of the Red Baron and the other aces, and I always thought I would like to fly. In 1940 I read some advertising that the Army was accepting people with two years of college, not four, and I decided that was for me."

After attending Northeastern University and Bentley College in Boston, Massachusetts, Fleischer joined the U.S. Army Reserve in September 1941. As he remembers "I applied, but they didn't call me up right away. Still we were getting drafted and at least I'd get into something I wanted when the time came. Finally, in February 1942 I was called, along with others who were also going to be cadets. There were pictures of seven to nine of us in the Boston paper. Then we were on the train to San Antonio, Texas. They really weren't prepared yet. They were still building barracks for us. We needed to stay on the high ground because the rain was turning the low ground into mud. A few weeks later we finally got Army clothes. Then I was shipped off to Corsicana, an independent school where civilian instructors were paid by the Army to give us primary training. I managed to pass that, but I was the last in Primary to solo. A case of strep throat put me in the hospital for a week to 10 days. Finally I was taken to an auxiliary field." Once there, his instructor said "I want you to fly around and make three landings. I'll tell you if you need to go around again." Dick completed the three landings and then asked him, 'When do you think I'll be able to solo?' The instructor's response was short and to the point 'What do you think you just did?' When he went on to Basic training, the instructor, without knowing the circumstances, relayed "I see in Primary you were the last man to solo. You're going to be the first in this class." Dick then soloed in the Vultee BT-13 Vibrator...and from then on he "... always wanted to be first in the class."

A member of the Class of 42-H at Foster Field, Texas, Fleischer qualified as a pilot with a second lieutenant's commission on October 9, 1942, at which point he had accumulated 229 flying hours...and then he got married. "There was this high school girl of mine," he said, "and after I got my commission I figured I'd be going overseas soon. They frowned on us getting married, but I did it and from then on I sent half of my pay



to my spouse."

"After I graduated," Fleischer continued, "I was assigned to Bradley Field, Connecticut, to train on the P-47. They just gave me a book of instructions and I had to take it from there! I always seemed to be behind the Thunderbolt—it responded quicker than I wanted it to."

Fleischer had ample time to master the big, powerful "Jug," adding 206.2 hours of pursuit time to his logbook. Although he expected to ship out to Europe, he was assigned to the 340th Squadron of the 348th Fighter Group, newly formed to introduce the Thunderbolt to the Fifth Air Force in Papua New Guinea. Departing at the end of July 1943, the group settled into Durand Drome near Port Moresby, also known as "17-Mile Drome."

"Lieutenant Colonel Neel E. Kearby was our group leader," Fleischer said. "I thought he was a very smart guy. I never flew with him. He always took up guys who were having trouble, to help them get the hang of things."

Underlying Kearby's outstanding leadership was an obsession with demonstrating the P-47's capabilities to V Fighter Command and, later, to use it as his vehicle to become the American ace of aces. The latter ambition put him and his Jug in direct competition with several rapidly rising Lockheed P-38 Lightning pilots, such as Lt. Col. Thomas J. Lynch and Captains Tommy McGuire and Dick Bong. Kearby quickly learned to use the P-47D's turbocharged radial engine to seek higher altitudes from which to dive on and away from Japanese aircraft, and soon his entire group was taking a steady toll on its adversaries. Kearby's peak came on October 11, 1943, when he shot down six enemy fighters and was awarded the Medal of Honor.

"My chief mechanic was a musician," Fleischer recounted. "I used to play the sax a bit myself. When it came to personalizing my P-47, it was my crew chief who did it. He said, 'What do you like?' Well, some people put the names of their wives or girlfriends on the nose, but I didn't think it would be right to put my spouse's name there—I was concerned about the cracks people might make at her expense. So I told him, 'I'd like *Solid Citizen*.'"

Fleischer's first operational sorties were less than promising. "In August we were escorting Douglas C-47s dropping supplies to troops at the front and I had trouble with my belly tank," he recalled. "The P-47's biggest problem was its range.

For long range missions we carried 150 gallons in an auxiliary fuel tank under each wing and a 75-gallon tank under the belly. If they wouldn't drop they badly affected handling. I had to leave formation and return home and I was over the mountains of New Guinea—up to 12 or 15,000 feet. When I got back I went to the medic and said, 'Doc, my mouth was dry—I couldn't even swallow.' And he just said: 'That's fair. But you still could fly. You didn't panic.' From then on I got better with every mission I flew. I also learned to be constantly alert for the enemy. I was always glad when I could see them. Surprise isn't good."

On October 1, 1943, Captain Hervey B. Carpenter took over command of the 340th Squadron from Captain Charles H. MacDonald, who was transferred to the P-38-equipped 475th Fighter Group. "Carpenter was a pretty conservative guy, but I liked him," Fleischer said. "He's what the ladies would call a sweet guy."

On November 17, Kearby was moved to an administrative post on V Fighter Command and promoted to full colonel, although in practice he, like the similarly transferred Major Dick Bong, was given

what amounted to a roving commission to keep flying combat missions on the side, usually alongside the 348th. "I think he thought of the 340th Fighter Squadron as something like the black sheep of the group," Fleischer commented. "Kearby flew mostly with the 341st and the 342nd." Command of the 348th Group went to Kearby's deputy, Lt. Col. Robert R. Rowland.

On December 15, 1943, 1,600 troopers of the 112th Cavalry Regiment landed at Arawe in southwestern New Britain, although it was only a diversionary move to distract Japanese attention from the Allies' next major objective, Cape Gloucester, where Marines landed on December 26. By then the 348th Fighter Group and its Thunderbolts were an established force to be reckoned with and had moved from Durand Drome to Finschhafen. Fleischer had risen in rank to first lieutenant by then, but had yet to add to his group's growing tally until December 27, when the 341st Fighter Squadron was ordered to Arawe, where patrol torpedo boats were under attack by Mitsubishi A6M3 Zero fighters. During the ensuing dogfight reports of more Japanese heading for Arawe brought another 16 P-47D-2s of the 340th Squadron into the area.

"I was at Finschhafen with Blue Flight, we were



*Republic P-47D-2 42-8053 arrives at Durand Drome, New Guinea for delivery to the 348th Fighter Squadron. The white tail marking was meant to prevent recognition errors against the predominantly radial engine opposition the Thunderbolt was expected to face.*  
(U.S. Air Force)



just hanging around,” Fleischer recalled. “Then they scrambled us, reporting a big mass of enemy planes southwest of New Britain. One of the guys didn’t get off. The other three of us took off [with]no information on altitude but we did get the direction. Brownie [Captain Meade M. Brown] said he was leading. We were climbing all the time, rising through layers of clouds at 10,000 feet. When we arrived over Arawe, I saw the PT boats just scootin’ around, being attacked by these dive bombers.”

What Fleischer’s flight also spotted was a dozen Aichi D3A2 dive bombers (Allied codename Val) at 1,000 feet apparently making for the PT boats. “I had been flying with the outfit for months and hadn’t got anything,” Fleischer said. “Now I was gonna get something if the whole Japanese air force was down there. I radioed: ‘I’ve got my eye on ‘em and I’m not taking it off. I’m goin’ down.’ When I got in there, I told ‘em to ‘Come on down, there’s a lot of ‘em here!’ At that point they came down and joined me. Brownie got one.”

Brown’s fire at 100 yards’ distance blew the lead dive bomber out of the sky. Three Vals turned away but Fleischer went after them and destroyed two of them in a single pass. Lieutenant Myron M. Hnatio similarly accounted for two in quick succession. He then turned to engage four Zeros coming down on him, shot one down in the sea and then disengaged and returned to base, his own plane having been hit.

“Even while I concentrated on the Vals,” said Fleischer, “I spotted 15 or 20 fighters above us, but they didn’t come down at all.” That was because the rest of the 340th Squadron was engaging them, claiming eight fighters and another Val. The squadron’s total bag for the day came to 16.



*A P-47D of the 348th Group in 1944, when the unit’s supremacy over New Guinea was fully established. (U.S. Air Force)*

“I got two on my third time pass,” Fleischer said. “I had great camera shots. Brownie got two, and there were three for Hnatio. As we came home we all kind of spread out and were doing victory rolls. I felt like I was finally on my way to acedom and I would jokingly tell people, ‘I could see it now, Rickenbacker and Fleischer...Fleischer and Rickenbacker!’ Captain Max R. Wiecks had put me down for a Silver Star for my part in that action, but Colonel Rowland thought it

should only go to the flight leader who initiated it, so he gave it to Brownie. I didn’t like Rowland. I thought Brownie was a good pilot, but not a good leader.

“Later the Navy found eight Vals in the water off Arawe, and decades later someone diving found a Val under 80 feet of water. He asked me if I could identify the number on the Jap plane. I told him, ‘I didn’t know the number of the plane I flew!’”

This latest of a total of seven Japanese air raids on the Arawe beachhead had been launched from Rabaul, where Rear Adm. Ryunosuke Kusaka’s 11th Air Fleet had 100 fighters and 50 bombers available. According to the Japanese records, 15 D3A2s from the 552nd and 582nd *Kokutais* (naval air groups) and 38 A6M3s, probably from the 201st *Kokutai*, were dispatched on December 27, of which seven planes did not return. If the Americans had exaggerated their success, the Japanese handily outdid them at it, claiming 14 aerial victories and four probables, as well as sinking two “special transports” and two torpedo boats. In actuality, a bomb that failed to explode had damaged PT-138, the 341st Fighter Squadron lost two Thunderbolts--1st Lt. Milburn S. Henderson going missing an action and a wounded 1st Lt. James E. Lynch Jr. was rescued by a PT boat after ditching off Arawe--while two of the 240th Squadron’s P-47s were damaged.

On January 2, 1944 the Allies landed at Saidor, and the 348th subsequently moved up to its airfield. A month later, on February 3, Fleischer downed a “Hamp” (a Zero variant with clipped wingtips) southwest of Wewak at 1115 hours, for his third victory. It is more likely that his victim was a Nakajima Ki.43 *Hayabusa* (peregrine falcon) army fighter, codenamed Oscar by the Allies, because the 248th *Koku Sentai* (air regiment) reported 1st Lt. Keiji Koga killed in action over But (southwest of Wewak) that day.

At that point the airfields at and near Wewak were the Fifth Air Force’s latest targets for elimination. “Wewak was a big base,” Fleischer recalled. “There were about 40,000 troops in the area, but all it was an airstrip.”

The 348th Group suffered a stunning loss on March 5 when the redoubtable Neel Kearby went missing. While leading Major Samuel V. Blair of the 341st Squadron and Captain William D. Dunham of the 342nd on a sweep, he spotted four Kawasaki Ki.48 twin-engine light army bombers of the 75th *Koku Sentai* (air regiment) flying low off Dagua and the trio promptly shot down three, one of them falling into the sea. Having raised his score to 22, Kearby swung his P-47 around to attack the remaining bomber when three Nakajima Ki.43 fighters (Allied codename Oscar) of the 77th *Sentai* dived on him. Dunham and Blair claimed two of his attackers but the third hit Kearby’s plane around the cockpit. The 77th *Sentai* recorded one of its planes



heavily damaged while crediting P-47s to Warrant Officer Koichi Mitoma and Sergeant Hiroshi Aoyagi. In fact only Kearby's Thunderbolt was seriously damaged and he was probably wounded as he tried to make his way back to Saidor. He had flown about 100 miles when he is believed to have been attacked by another Ki.43 of the 33rd *Sentai*, which credited a P-47 to Sgt. Maj. Shironushi Kumagaya. According to local natives, Kearby bailed out of his crippled plane, but his parachute caught in the trees and he bled to death before he could get himself free. His body was not found until 1947 and after being identified, was interred in his native Texas in 1949. The vertical



Colonel Neel E. Kearby poses aboard his P-47, displaying 15 victories. The Medal of Honor recipient was obsessed with showing what the Thunderbolt could do—and with outdoing Lockheed P-38 ace Richard Bong. (U.S. Air Force)

stabilizer and rudder of his P-47D-4 *Fiery Ginger IV* were also recovered and are preserved at the National Museum of the USAF near Dayton, Ohio.

Kearby's loss left Fleischer with conflicting thoughts as to what could have happened. "I blamed the two guys with him," he said, but also admitted that Kearby, undoubtedly in his eagerness to advance his scoring, had violated some of his own fighting dicta on that occasion. "He told us, never let your indicated speed go under 250, and if you did, you'd better have altitude to dive get that speed back by diving. If you were attacked, he said, you needed 300 to 400 mph to get out. It was also careless to go in for another pass; he got one and he was getting the other one when he was jumped.

We always had to keep an eye out for the enemy, who always seemed to be at a higher altitude. One time four of us were over Wewak, we were just flying along and all of a sudden I saw two Tonys [Kawasaki Ki.61 fighters] 1,000 feet below and behind us. I kept looking down and sure enough there were other Japs above us and they jumped us. After we fought our way out I wondered Damn it, why can't we be on top? Why can't we be at 30,000 feet?"

Fleischer was leading Blue Flight in a new P-47D-16 on March 11 when the 340th engaged

some 30 to 35 Japanese army fighters over Wewak at 1105 hours. "We were escorting B-24s that day, we were spread out by flights and I was leading the last one. Usually when we were out in force like this the Japs would fly away from us. This day they were quite a bit higher—and we were at 20,000 to 25,000 feet. Suddenly I saw black smoke come out of one—one pilot, one plane, making a dive at our foursome. He was at 5 o'clock position to where we were and coming straight for me. I turned up at him, put my sights right on his engine and started firing. He went right over the top of me and I could see oil on his plane. He went into a dive and when I turned he was still in that long dive. He bailed out. I didn't see where the plane went and I didn't see his chute come open until he'd fallen to about 10,000 feet. That was probably smart of him to wait until he'd gotten far enough away from us. I got away from one that had jumped me—I dived full speed and then came up again. I looked up and saw a formation at 5,000 to 7,000 feet or so and went after them again. I just tailed the last one. I just let go and he dove into the sea. Then I headed home. I was completely out of ammunition."

Fleischer's first Oscar went down over Wewak, while the other splashed off Kairuru Island. He also saw a squadron mate, 1st Lt. Michael Dikovitsky, drive another Oscar into the sea for his third victory of an eventual five. Hnatio achieved acedom with his fifth victory that day, as had Fleischer, having contributed two to the total of 14 victories credited to the 340th Squadron at a cost of three planes damaged.

Behind those numbers, however, was evidence that these Japanese were among the most skillful and aggressive the 348th had encountered over New Guinea thus far, as well as a testament to the lifesaving durability of its P-47s. "Major Carpenter was shot up pretty good," Fleischer recalled. "He could not make it to Saidor, instead going to a small advanced airstrip. He landed there and so did I, and he asked to borrow my plane. I let him fly mine back and I took a ride in a Douglas A-20."

"First Lieutenant William M. Chase got several hits. He made it back, but he pointed out his shot-up plane to me and said: 'They're junking it—they're not going to repair it.'

First Lieutenant Lloyd H. Zaage had the best story. His plane was in the worst shape and as he was heading home, a fighter attacked him and there was nothing he could do about it—his controls were kind of flopping around and all he could do was try to fly straight. At one point the Jap flew up alongside him, probably wondering what was holding that Jug up. He took a look at Zaage and then went back and shot him again. Finally he pulled away and Zaage made it back. Zaage was a good pilot, but that experience broke his nerve. He told me afterward, 'I'm not going to fly combat anymore,' and soon afterward he was transferred out."



Even allowing for at least two of the Thunderbolts being written off, the Japanese managed to exaggerate their achievements in the fight. The 33rd *Sentai* claimed six P-47s (one uncertain) for two moderately damaged Ki.43s, while the 77th logged four planes heavily damaged and one partly damaged while claiming two P-47s, one of which was the 13th victory for its leading ace, Captain Yoshiro Kuwabara. The next day Kuwabara went missing, last seen engaging a P-38, a loss as painful to the 77th *Sentai* as Neel Kearby's had been for the 348th Fighter Group.

On April 30 Major Max Wiecks took over command of the 340th Fighter Squadron from Carpenter, whose two confirmed victories on March 11 had brought his final tally to three. On June 3 at 1120, hours 16 P-47s of the 340th Squadron were patrolling the newly won American beachhead on Biak Island when they spotted 15 Japanese fighters attacking American barges and dived to their defense. Fleischer, now a captain, was leading Flight Officer Roy Martin when he said "a PBY was yelling for help," and they spotted four dark green Oscars strafing the barges and attacking a Consolidated PBY-5A flying boat. Dropping their external tanks, they got on the tails of two Oscars, but the other two turned into their attack to engage them head-on.

Fleischer, whose P-47 boasted eight .50-caliber machine guns to the Ki.43's two 12.7mm weapons, fired a burst into both adversaries before they flashed past. He looked back long enough to see them break away and down, then went after his original prey, which was escaping into some low overcast. He recalls "There were four or five of them, not in a very good formation. When I fought off the first two my original target went down, and I got on his tail. He went into a cloud, but I followed him in. I never fired at that guy before I saw the red balls on his plane. I never considered myself a real good shot—I had to get close. We were flying along, but after a few seconds we broke into clear sky again. I got some good air shots, black smoke came out of his engine, he seemed to stop in midair. I fired all guns pointblank and saw it spin into the sea."

Martin, meanwhile, dispatched the remaining Oscar. As the four P-47s reformed and headed for home, they claimed a total of five enemy fighters without loss. Their opponents were probably from the 24th *Sentai*, based at Kau airfield, Halmahera, which recorded the deaths of 1st Lt. Hiroshi Maruyama and Sgt. Maj. Sadashige Kotaki off Biak that day. On June 25, after having lost 10 of its 40 pilots since May 27, the 24th *Sentai* was withdrawn to Langoan airfield, Menado, Celebes, to reconstitute.

"I got orders to come home in the first week of October," Fleischer noted. "I have never had leave since we left the States in May 1943 and 35 days later we arrived in Brisbane. After that there was no leave. Every 30 days we'd get 10 days in Sydney, Australia, but those leaves were never

counted. I thought I was better off at the front than recuperating in Sydney—that's when you get real homesick. When I got out I had points for 19 months and two months' pay when I got out in December."

Fleischer returned to the United States for Christmas of 1944, having been credited with six victories and having been awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross with two oak leaves, five Air Medals and nine oak leaf clusters. "When I came back I served for a time in Carlsbad, New Mexico, training Chinese airmen dropping bombs. I also flew North American P-51 Mustangs in Florida and concluded that if I had combat to do over again, I'd still take the Jug."

"My spouse had told me that when the war was over: 'You're finished with flying—you get out. You've used up all of your guardians angels.' Well, while I was flying Mustangs in Florida I came out of a fast dive with an ear problem. That settled it."

After the war Fleischer worked in the insurance business, being an insurance broker in Pasadena, California when he retired in 1981 and subsequently moved to Utah. "A fellow and I were just traveling, engaged in sales. We managed to see a lot of the country, including Utah. It's not like I turned into a Mormon or anything, but we liked the area. The people were good. So when I came home I sold the house in Pasadena for big money and moved to this little town in Utah."

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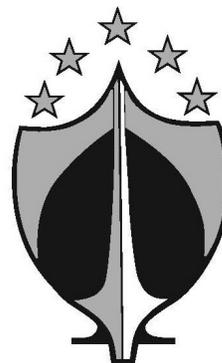
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## 2017 AFAA Scholarship Recipients

### **Daxton Allsop**



My name is Daxton Allsop, and I am a finance major at Brigham Young University. I am passionate about all things finance and am preparing myself to go into the workforce. This coming summer I will be starting an internship with a prestigious private equity fund, and I am excited to learn as much as I can about the industry. After graduating, I plan on working for a few years in the financial industry before returning for more school to get my MBA. I am excited for what the future holds. When I am not in the texts books or in the office, I am usually attempting to summit a mountain, beating my personal record on the mountain bike trail, or finding fresh powder to ski. I enjoy exploring the outdoors and pushing myself physically. I am grateful to my great-grandfather Alden Rigby who served our country faithfully as an Ace Fighter Pilot, and I am grateful to the AFAA for their generosity in this scholarship.

### **Madison Aponte**

I am a junior at Castleton University in Vermont. At Castleton, I am part of the honor's program and a member of Phi Beta. I am majoring in Criminal Justice and minoring in both Women and Gender Studies and Communications. In the Women and Gender Studies department, I am a member of Iota Iota Iota. I am a three year member of the Castleton Women's Varsity soccer team and am captain of the team. I am incredibly thankful for this scholarship as it helps me to pursue and achieve my goals.



### **Sage Bitter**



Sage Bitter is currently an astrophysics major at The University of California Los Angeles. She enjoys spending her time exploring the city, practicing yoga, and spending time with friends. In the future she hopes to be involved with NASA's space program and be a part of an era of space exploration and research.

### **Katelyn Borley**

I am so honored to receive the AFAA Scholarship this year, as it will help me greatly to further my education! I will be sure to put it to good use. I am a first-year student at the University of British Columbia pursuing a B.Sc. in computer science. I plan to apply for my school's co-op program in my second year, so I can work in my intended field while pursuing my degree. When I'm not busy programming, I greatly enjoy getting out in nature and going for hikes with my camera and some close friends. I also aspire to be a writer and am currently working on a science fiction novel I hope to publish before the end of my first year. I dream of traveling in Canada and the states as a writer after I graduate college.



### **John Chick**



I was born and raised on our family ranch in Blanco Texas, where I graduated second in my class at Blanco High School. In high school, I played football, ran track, and was Vice President of the National Honor Society. In my spare time, I enjoy traveling abroad and experiencing different cultures. I also love surfing, kayaking, fishing, and hunting. I am currently in my 4th year as an Engineering student at Texas A&M where I am majoring in Petroleum Engineering. I hope to make a difference in the world by finding safe and cost-effective ways to extract oil and gas from our earth. My goal is to work for a petroleum company. I had the privilege to intern with Shell Oil Company and Hilcorp this past summer as a production engineer and drilling engineer. My grandfather, Lt Col Lewis W. Chick, attended Texas A&M in the 1930's which makes it even more special for



me. He later became an Ace Fighter Pilot during World War Two. My grandfather's bravery and courage has always inspired me to reach for the stars and be the best I can be. He continues to inspire me even after his death. I am extremely excited to embark on this next journey of my life and will continue to work hard to be successful in college and in life. I am extremely grateful to be a recipient of the American Fighter Aces Association Scholarship this year - Thank you!

---

## Gretchen Farkas



I am so incredibly thankful to have been chosen as a recipient for one of the American Fighter Aces Scholarships for 2017. The financial assistance will help immensely in allowing me to continue my education. I am currently a sophomore at Carroll College in Helena, Montana where I am majoring in Public Health. I love learning about how to help others create healthy lifestyles for themselves and I am excited to explore the different possibilities this career path offers. Thank you again for your support and generosity in allowing me to take another step closer to my future goals.

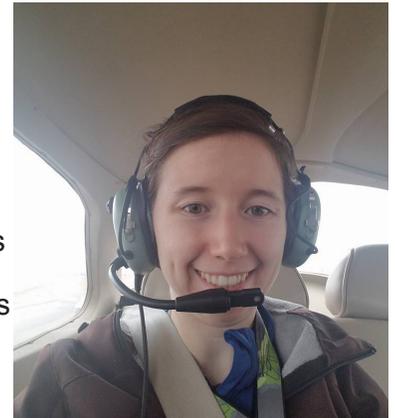
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## Ellen Jetland

Recently, I was accepted into Idaho State University's Unmanned Aerial Systems Technician program. I will be attending this coming fall to get my technician certificate and also to work on my Bachelors in Unmanned Aerial Systems Operations. My hope after I completed both programs is to become a professional UAS operator to help with animal and forest conversation. My absolute dream is to become a UAS operator for an organization called Air Shepherd from the Lindberg Foundation were they use drones to fight poachers in Africa.

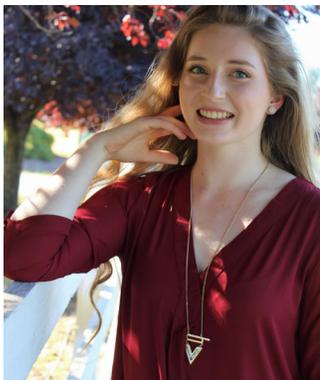
While I am not busy with school, I participate in World War II reenactments with an organization in the Pacific Northwest were we do tactical and public display events to educate the public and ourselves about the history of WWII so it can be preserved for future generations. Besides reenacting, I also enjoy doing Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu were I am currently working on getting my blue belt.

Again, thank you American Fighter Aces Association support for college education so students like me can pursue our educational goals!



---

## Kimberly Larson



Hi, I'm Kimberly Larson and I am extremely honored and grateful to be receiving a scholarship from the American Fighter Aces Association, which will help me be able to focus wholeheartedly on getting the most out of my college education. I am currently a freshman at the University of Southern California and am majoring in Biomedical Engineering and planning on pursuing a dance minor, with the aspiration of being accepted into medical or physical therapy school. In my free time I love to dance, whether it be ballet, jazz, contemporary, or tap, and enjoy hiking back home in Everett, Washington. I am also the freshman representative of the Associated Students of Biomedical Engineering and part of a community health and information outreach club at USC.

I love to learn, and with the aid of this scholarship the financial burden of college is lessened and I can continue to dedicate myself to gaining a quality education so that I can make a positive impact on the world. Thank you so much to the association, and through my time here at college at beyond, I hope to embody the courage, dedication, and service of the American Fighter Aces and continue on the legacy for years to come.

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## Natalie Malek

Natalie is a third year student at the University of California, Irvine, pursuing a Bachelor of Science in Biomedical Engineering. She aspires to attend graduate school and devote her career to developing novel medical technologies for the advancement of health care around the world. In addition to being a full-time student and an undergraduate researcher, Natalie enjoys jogging, playing recreational sports, and spending time with friends and family.





## Germain Medina Jr.

I was born in a farming town, Watsonville California where strawberries are grown. I attended Aptos High School and graduated in the top 10% of my class in 2016. I attended UC Davis for a quarter, but transferred to Cabrillo College, a community college after realizing that would be a better choice for me and my family. My goal is to become a medical doctor. I'd like to thank the AFAA donors and everyone else involved in the scholarship organization and I happily accept this kind opportunity to receive financial assistance from the AFAA Scholarship . I hope that one day I can also assist students who are in need of help with pursuing their dreams in their education. Thank you for helping me pursue my goals. I will work hard and use the scholarship money for things that I need for school and my college tuition. Thank you very much and it means a lot to me. Your organization has helped me continue to pursue my dreams and ambitions in my life. Thank you once again and I hope that you enjoy everyday in your future.



## Rachel Singleton



I'm so excited to receive this scholarship! I am a sophomore at Boise State University pursuing a degree in Applied Mathematics with a Computer Science minor. My hope is that after I graduate, I will be able to go to graduate school to specialize in a type of math such as data science or computing. This scholarship is going to help me further my education - as part of a history class I am taking this spring, I will be going to Europe for a culminating trip to visit locations we studied. Although I don't know exactly what my future career is going to be, I hope that whatever I do makes a difference in the lives of other people and is related to engineering as that is the type of math I like to do. I am so glad this organization exists to keep the spirit of American Fighter Aces alive. It has helped me learn more about my great-grandfather who was a Fighter Ace in World War II. Thank you for your generous gift. I know it will make a difference as I go forward in my education.

## Cameron Spitznagel

My name is Cameron Spitznagel. I was born in 1999 in Santa Maria, California, and quickly moved all over the United States. I went to High School at Samuel Clemens High School in Schertz, Texas, and am going to the University of Texas at San Antonio for a Cybersecurity degree.



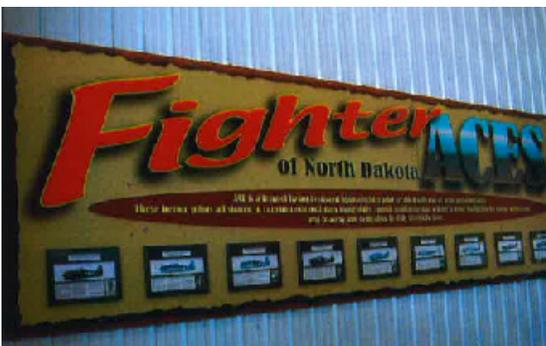
*If you know anyone interested in applying for an AFAA scholarship send them to <http://www.americanfighteraces.org/scholarship.htm>*

## Pilots and the Plains

By: Seth Margolis      Photos: Ozzie Groethe

What is old is new again at the Fargo Air Museum as their 17 year old Fighter Aces of North Dakota exhibit has been updated and refurbished. The exhibit was refreshed through the hard work of artist and designer John Valo and his team made up of Matt Bartelt, Leo Ostendorf, Osborne (Ozzie) Groethe, and Dennis Larson. John and Ozzie had developed the first incarnation of the exhibit too.

The new display features dynamic and colorful information combined with the existing plaques to make a truly exciting exhibit. Visitors can view the biographies of Aces such as Maj 'Scrappy' Blumer and Capt. Norman E. Olson, learn about the Aces' CGM, and gain a better understanding of what it means to be a Fighter Ace.



*Matt Bartel, ATC at Fargo International Airport and grandson of Ace Percy Bartlet, USN and AVG Flt. Leader, and Dennis Larson, former Director of the Fargo Air Museum*



## News of the Aces

### Aces and Friends Luncheon, Oct 13, 2017

By: Honoree, Col. Lee Forbes Photos: Will Deatruck

The South Texas Chapter of the American Fighter Aces Association (AFAA) held its 2017 Quarterly Luncheon/Meeting on Friday, October 13, at the Petroleum Club in San Antonio, TX. This was a special gathering that celebrated the successful Aces Reunion held in San Antonio this past September 7-10, the first event hosted by the newly elected President of the AFAA, Marine Ace, Col. Dean Caswell, as well as the attendance of visiting fellow Honoree, Col. Gene Deatruck, USAF (Ret). Following a delicious lunch I introduced our senior Ace, Acettes, Honorees, Friends of the Aces, and several Guests, including our Distinguished Guest, Air Education and Training Command (AETC), Command Chief, Juliet Gudgel, USAF.

Ace, Col. Dean Caswell, USMC (Ret) served on board the USS Bunker Hill during WWII as a member of VMF-221 (PTO) flying the F4U Corsair. He has 7 confirmed victories and survived a Kamikaze attack on his carrier. He is the current President of the AFAA. His decorations include: The Silver Star, 2 Distinguished Flying Crosses, and 5 Air Medals. He has flown combat in WWII, Korea, and Vietnam and holds the distinction as being the only surviving WWII USMC Ace. His wife Mary, is an Acette. She was the widow of the late WWII Ace, Col. Archie Donahue, USMC, (Ret) who flew the F4F Wildcat and F4U Corsair. Col. Donahue held the Navy Cross, 3 Distinguished Flying Crosses and 5 Air Medals. He had 14 confirmed victories. Colonel Caswell and Mary, live in Austin, TX. Mary was joined by fellow Acette, Madeline Welch, who is the widow of WWII P-38 Ace, Col. Darrell Welch, USAF (Ret) who had 5 confirmed victories. He was the holder of the Silver Star, Legion of Merit, Distinguished Flying Cross and 12 Air Medals. She resides in San Antonio, TX.



*Honoree Ollie Crawford and Ace Dean Caswell*

There were six Honorees in attendance: Col. Ward Boyce, USAF (Ret), former Executive Director of the AFAA, and current member of the AFAA Board of Directors (BOD); Lt. Col. Dick Cole, USAF (Ret) and sole surviving Doolittle Raider and his guest and daughter, Ms. Cindy Chal; Mr. Ollie Crawford, former President of the Air Force Association and organizer of the Air Force Memorial in Arlington, VA ; Col. Gene Deatruck, USAF (Ret), former Commander of the Air Force Test Pilot School and his son, Mr. Will Deatruck, Senior Engineer with the Northrop-Grumman Corporation in San Diego, CA; Mr. Cliff Neve, who is the current Secretary of the AFAA. He lives in Houston, TX; and myself, Col. Lee Forbes, USAF (Ret). I'm the current POC for the South Texas Chapter of the AFAA Community Relations Program.



*Ollie Crawford, Gene Deatruck, and Whitey Feightner*

Before introducing our Friends of the Aces, Mr. Ollie Crawford asked to say few words about Col. Deatruck. He said that he'd known Gene Deatruck as a close friend for over 50 years. They first became acquainted when he was working in Washington, DC and Gene was assigned to the Pentagon and they subsequently followed each other's careers over the years. He thinks Gene may be best known as the Air Force pilot who in 1966 spotted USN Lt Dieter Dingler on a sandbar in a shallow river in Laos waving a piece of white parachute. At that time Gene was the Commander of the 1st Air Commando Squadron in Vietnam and was flying an A-1 Skyraider aircraft on a mission over Laos when he spotted Dingler. His wingman wanted to leave the area thinking it was trap. Gene persisted and called in a "Jolly Green" rescue helicopter in spite of the danger and Lt Dingler was successfully rescued and returned to the safety of a USAF Hospital in Vietnam. Lt Dingler was also an A-1 Skyraider pilot stationed aboard the USS Ranger. He and his wingman were on a bombing mission a few months earlier and were diverted from a target in Vietnam because of weather and vectored to an alternate target

in Laos. His airplane was shot down by AAA and he was captured by the Pathet Lao and held with six other prisoners. He later escaped but was recaptured and severely beaten. Later he escaped again and evaded in the jungle for several weeks until spotted by Gene Deatruck. When he was picked up he weighed only 97 pounds. His will to survive earned him a Navy Cross and other medals. Upon his arrival at the USAF Hospital in Vietnam, the staff said he wouldn't have lasted another day had it not been for Gene spotting him on that sandbar in the river in Laos that fateful day.



*Honoree Ollie Crawford, Cindy Chal & Honoree Dick Cole*

There were 16 Friends of the Fighter Aces attending: Col. Bill Jacobs (CH) USAF (Ret), Chaplain of the South Texas Chapter of the AFAA; Col. Ed Garland, USAFR (Ret), President of the South Texas Chapter of the AFAA, and his guests: Chief Master Sergeant Juliet Gudgel, USAF, AETC Command Chief and her spouse, Maj. Robb Gudge, USAF; Col. Eddie "Pick" Pickrel, USAF (Ret), Local Forces CINC of the Ralph Parr Pack of the River Rats and his guests: Capt. Julie "Goose" Rainwater, USAF, Executive Officer to Commander of the 12 Flying Training Wing and her spouse, Capt. Kyle "Vapor" Rainwater, USAF, T-38 Instructor pilot, 560 Flying Training Squadron, 12 Operations Group. Both are stationed at JBSA-Randolph, TX; Col. Bill Stewart, USAF (Ret), WWII B-29 Pilot; Lt Col. Granville Coggs (MC) USAFR (Ret) and an original Post-WWII Tuskegee Airman; Lt Col. Bill Duvall, USAF (ret); Lt Col. Bob Garland, USAF (Ret), Treasurer of the South Texas Chapter of the AFAA; Lt Col. Joe Smith, USAF (Ret); Maj. Gary

Mc Daniel, USAF (Ret); Maj. Dave Herron, ANG (Ret); Ms. Ginnie Dameron, daughter of the late WWII P-38 Ace, Col. Darrell Welch, USAF (Ret); Mr. Bob Erfurth, WWII B-24, Gunner and Armorer; Mr. Chris Mann, Vice President of the South Texas Chapter of the AFAA and Life Member of the Friends of the Fighter Aces Organization and his guests: Ms. Sue Brown, Editor of the Pleasanton Express, and high school senior, Mr. Ryan Tudyk who is a recent Friend of the Fighter Aces Organization; Mr. Bryan Miller; Ms. Liz Montalvo, San Antonio Honor Flight Program Manager and her guest, Lt Col. Jerry Auerbach; and Mr. Jeff Stephens, son of the late WWII P-51 Mustang Fighter Ace, Col. Robert Stephens, USAF, who was assigned to the 354 Fighter Group, 8 Air Force (ETO) with 13 confirmed victories. Jeff is also a Friend of the Fighter Aces.

Two other guests were: Lt Col. Rick Sinkfield, USAF (Ret), President of the San Antonio Chapter of the Tuskegee Airmen and Mr. Rick Winter, friend of Col. Caswell.

At this point, I introduced our Distinguished Guest and Speaker, Chief Master Sergeant Juliet Gudgel, USAF, Command Chief of AETC. She enlisted in the Air Force in 1992 and has spent her career in the supply, logistics, and education and training military specialties. She has served in such roles as: flight superintendent, squadron Superintendent, technical school instructor, career assistance advisor, supply chain superintendent, Air Force Material Command functional manager, and commandant of a non-commissioned officer academy. Before assuming her current position she was the Command Chief of the Air University. She was deployed in support of Operation Northern Watch, Operation Iraqi Freedom, and Operation New Dawn. She was assigned to her current position as Command Chief of AETC in August 2017. She has earned associate, bachelor, and master degrees during her career. Her major decorations include The Bronze Star, 5 Meritorious Service Medals, 3 Air Force Commendation Medals, 5 Air Force Achievement Medals, The Joint Meritorious Unit Award, The Meritorious Unit Award and 4 Air Force Outstanding Unit Awards.



*AETC Command Chief, Juliet Gudgel, USAF addressing the group*

Chief Gudge's remarks focused on her responsibilities as the senior enlisted advisor to the Commander of AETC on the state of readiness, morale and training across the Command which requires her to travel extensively to determine the health and welfare of the AETC enlisted force. Just as the Air Force is currently facing a critical shortage of pilots, the same condition is being experienced within critical enlisted specialties especially those career fields associated with aircraft maintenance. It takes years to develop experienced "maintainers" and with the end strength of the Air Force increasing, the problem is exacerbated. Frequent deployments also add to this problem as well as impacting family life during these deployments. Despite the challenges facing the Air Force the mission is still getting accomplished thanks to the professionalism, dedication, and commitment of the enlisted force. She mentioned that in her extensive travels she'd logged 2:50 hours of flying time in the F-15 and F-16. Now that she's assigned to AETC, I'll bet she'll get more flying hours in the T-38. At the conclusion of her remarks our Chapter President, Ed Garland, presented her with a one year membership in the Friends of the Fighter Aces Organization as a token of our appreciation for her taking the time from her busy schedule to speak to our Luncheon/Meeting. Congratulations Chief Gudge on being our newest Chapter Friend of the Aces.

Next Col. Caswell spoke about his vision for the Fighter Aces Association. He welcomed everyone and asked for everyone's support in helping him lead the AFAA during his time as President. He briefly outlined his vision of changes that he believes need to be made to preserve the history and legacy of the Fighter Aces in the very near future. He envisions the Association moving toward becoming a non-profit Educational Foundation organization that will be focused on developing and implementing programs that will tell the

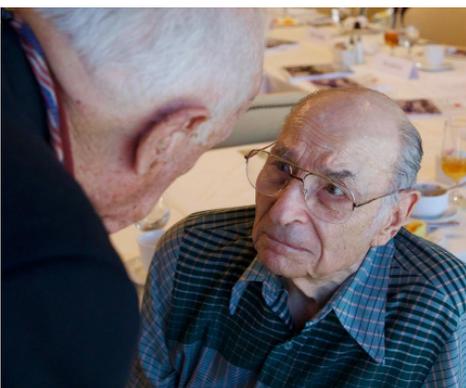


Aces story with a view toward informing young people and the public at large. This is especially critical as the Aces decline in numbers. All of this will require extensive research to look at what will be needed to make this transition. Some individuals are already looking at various options, legal requirements, and sources of possible funding. In addition, he would like to see the other AFAA Chapters re-established to help develop and carry out this new mission.

He was followed by our Chapter President, Ed Garland, who remarked about the recently concluded 2017 Aces and Friends Reunion, held at the Holiday Inn River Walk in San Antonio, TX. Ten Aces were able to attend the event. Some of the highlights being a tour of Mr. Rod Lewis' Aviation Legends warbird collection that is hangered at San Antonio Airport and a very interesting briefing by Mr. Bob Cardin, Mr. Lewis' Director of Aviation, who told the story of the recovery of the P-38 "Glacier Girl" from the Greenland ice cap in 1992 and her subsequent restoration to flying status; the Aces Symposium held at the Officers Club at JBSA-Randolph with "Happy Hour" following the event; with the capstone being the Banquet at the hotel with former Air Force Chief of Staff, Gen. Mark Welsh, USAF (Ret) giving us a memorable talk after dinner. In appreciation for General Welsh serving as our guest speaker he was designated an Honorary Fighter Ace. Ed went on to say that he had received many favorable



*Honoree, Gene Deatrick & Guest, Captain Julie "Goose" Rainwater, USAF*



*Guest Lt Colonel Jerry Auerbach*

comments the Reunion from both Aces and Friends of the Aces. Some even stated that it was one of the best reunions they had attended. He also commended the staff of the 12th Operations Group at JBSA-Randolph for taking the lead in organizing the Aces Symposium and "Happy Hour" that was held at the Officers Club. This would not have been possible without the excellent relationship that exists between the Chapter and JBSA-Randolph leadership. In fact several flying training squadron commanders and junior officers regularly attend our quarterly Luncheons/Meetings and at least two individuals that we know of are new Friends of the Aces.

Next, I asked some of our guests to say a few words about themselves. Lt Col. Auerbach said he flew B-17s during WWII while a member of the 8th Air Force and survived some pretty harrowing missions over Berlin as the war was winding down. After the War he flew transport missions during the "Berlin Airlift." He eventually ended up in Strategic Air Command flying heavy bombers before his retirement. He

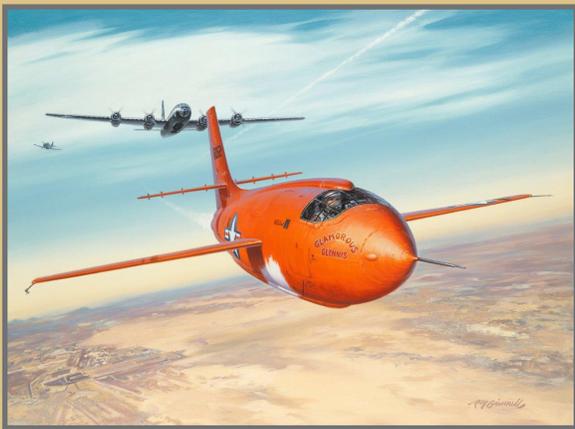
appreciated being invited to attend our Luncheon/Meeting and being around fellow aviators again. Ms. Sue Brown, the Editor of the Pleasanton Express, said she very proud to have been invited to attend and to meet such a distinguished group. She indicated that she was going to write an article about her visit for publication in an upcoming issue of the Pleasanton Express newspaper.

Prior to our Luncheon/Meeting, I had asked Friend Ginnie Dameron, daughter of the late WWII P-38 Ace, Col. Darrell Welch (who was also a great joke teller) if she could share one of her Dad's favorite stories. She agreed and told the story about an elderly gentleman who went to see his heart doctor for a follow up appointment. Upon receiving the doctor's report he left the office. Several weeks later the doctor saw the elderly gentleman strutting on the street with a beautiful young lady on his arm. He motioned for him to excuse himself for a moment so he could talk to him privately. The doctor exclaimed "...what do you think you're doing? I told you to be careful, you have a heart murmur". The elderly gentleman responded by saying, "...Doctor, I was following you orders. I thought you said to be cheerful and find a hot momma!" No doubt, Ginnie is a "chip off the old block."

At that time we were approaching the end of our gathering and I asked Chaplain Bill Jacobs to lead us in a benediction. I also announced that our first Luncheon/Meeting of 2018 will be Friday, February 16. Our guests will be Brig. Gen. Steve Ritchie, USAF (Ret) the only Air Force Pilot Ace of the Vietnam War and his wife Mariana. Gen. Ritchie will be in the San Antonio area that week speaking to The Texas A & M AFROTC Detachment, The NCO Academy at JBSA- Lackland, The AFROTC Detachment at the University of Texas-San Antonio, and the 12th Operations Group Dining Out at JBSA-Randolph. Hopefully we'll have a large turnout for this special occasion



# Roy Grinnell Studio



As the Official Artist, and an Honoree, of the American Fighter Aces Association, Roy has completed close to 50 original paintings, accurately portraying the aerial combat of Aces from WWI, WWII, Vietnam and the Korean War. His book, Roy Grinnell: Artist of the Aces, contains 159 images of his wonderful artwork.

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## LAST FLIGHTS

### **James F. Low (September 10, 1925 - December 14, 2017)**



Major James Low, USAF (Ret.), 92, flew his final flight on December 14, 2017 from Davenport, FL. "Major" was born September 10, 1925 in Sausalito, CA. During World War II, he served in the U.S. Navy in the South Pacific with the 335th Fighter-Interceptor Squadron, where he was in the Battle of Okinawa. After graduating from the U.S. Air Force Aviation Cadet program, he flew F-86 fighter jets in the Korean War, where he became a Jet Ace, shooting down 9 MIGs. "Major" also served his country in Vietnam, flying F-4's, and becoming a prisoner of war. His military decorations include the Silver Star, Distinguished Flying Cross, Purple Heart, and POW Medal. He received a B.S. degree from the University of California, Berkeley. After retirement from the military, "Major" relocated to Orlando, FL, where he enjoyed a great round of golf, a lucky hand of cards, and a fine Cuban. He was preceded in death by his son, James F. Low, Jr., and is survived by his son, Jeffrey S. Low. Burial will be at Arlington

National Cemetery. (*Orlando Sentinel* on Dec. 31, 2017)

### **Honoree Lawrence Joseph Powell (May 17, 1923 - December 23, 2017)**



Lawrence Powell was born on May 17, 1923, in Chicago, Illinois. He enlisted in the Aviation Cadet Program of the U.S. Army Air Forces on January 30, 1943, and was commissioned a 2d Lt and awarded his pilot wings at Moultrie Field, Georgia, on December 5, 1943. After completing P-51 Mustang training, Lt Powell was assigned to the 505th Fighter Squadron of the 339th Fighter Group in England in June 1944. He was credited with the destruction of 2.5 enemy aircraft in aerial combat, plus 3.5 on the ground while strafing enemy airfields, before being shot down on January 14, 1945. Lt Powell was captured in Holland on January 16, and was held as a Prisoner of War until the end of the war. Powell left active duty and joined the California Air National Guard on January 19, 1947, serving with the 195th Fighter Squadron at Van Nuys ANGB, California, from January 1947 to February 1955, and then with the 146th

Fighter Bomber Group at Van Nuys from February 1955 to September 1958. Col Powell served as commander of the 195th Tactical Fighter Squadron at Van Nuys from September 1958 to February 1960, followed by service as operations officer for the 146th Tactical Fighter Group at Van Nuys from February 1960 until his retirement from the Air National Guard on May 1, 1963. (*Veterantributes.org*)

### **Fred L. "Buck" Dungan (July 21, 1921 - January 2, 2018)**



Retired Lt. Cmdr Fred Leroy (Buck) Dungan died Tuesday, January 2nd in his San Clemente home in California. Born in Los Angeles on July 27, 1921, Buck Dungan worked at Lockheed while attending college and attained his private pilot's license. He joined the Navy on December 30, 1941 for flight training and was subsequently designated a Naval Aviator and commissioned as an ensign at Corpus Christi, Texas on October 16, 1942.

Assigned initially to VF(N)-76, one of three units formed to test a radar system to be used on F6F-3 Hellcats, Dungan was sent to Hawaii for training. The squadron transferred from the USS Yorktown to the USS *Hornet* in April 1944 and participated in "Operation Flintlock," the invasion of the Marshall Islands.

Dungan scored his first victory on April 23, 1944, a Betty bomber downed in a mid-morning combat. During the "Marianas Turkey Shoot" of June 19, 1944, he was credited with at Kate bomber and Zeke fighter and another Kate probable over Guam in the mid-afternoon.

At 0300 on July 4, 1944, Dungan took off on an intruder attack on Chichi Jima's shipping. He was flying top-cover when he was bounced by three Rufe float-planes. A total of 10 Rufes were airborne, and, during a 30-minute running dogfight between northern Chichi Jima and Ani Jima, Dungan shot down four Japanese aircraft. He received a bullet in his shoulder and was forced to land on the Yorktown, ending his World War II combat flying.



Remaining in the Navy following the war, Dungan was promoted to lieutenant commander on April 1, 1953 and retired from the service in July 1963. He then entered the industrial abrasives sales business from which he retired in 1982 to work at his hobby of restoring automobiles. (AFAA Album)

## George Novotny (February 22, 1920 - January 7, 2018)



George Peter Novotny, a decorated war hero who was officially credited for shooting down eight enemy planes in World War II, died Jan. 7 at a senior living facility in Florida. He was 97.

A veteran of World War II, the Toledo native enlisted in the United State Army Air Corps, the aerial warfare service of the United States between 1926 and 1941, soon after the attack on Pearl Harbor. After completing his flight training, Mr. Novotny spent 13 months in North Africa and Italy where he flew 57 combat missions. "He is a true American war hero," said his son, George Novotny, Jr.

On January 30, 1944, Mr. Novotny and his fighter group, the 325th, shot down 37 enemy aircraft. For all of his achievements, Mr. Novotny received numerous awards, including a Distinguished Flying Cross and Congressional gold medal.

When Mr. Novotny returned to the United States, he was assigned to Oscoda Army Airfield in Michigan, where he was a flight instructor and taught the Free French Air Force fighter pilots combat techniques in P-47 aircraft until the war ended in 1945.

Born Feb. 22, 1920, in Toledo to Frank and Julia Novotny, he graduated from Waite High School in 1939 before enrolling at the now defunct De Sales College of Toledo. He played football for both his high school and college. His collegiate career ended when he chose to join the military. Throughout his time in the military, his plane number was always 27, which was the number he wore while playing football at Waite High and De Sales College.

After he left the military, Mr. Novotny worked for Capital Airlines and was then hired to work with Trans World Airlines in ground operations at what was then called the Detroit Metropolitan Airport. He retired from the airlines in 1982. At home, Mr. Novotny was a loving father and husband to his four kids and Ruth, his wife of 65 years, his son said.

During the war he named his plane "Ruthless Ruthie" after his wife. In a letter to his fiancée he wrote, "You are not with me, so I am Ruth-less, and when I am in combat, I am Ruthless!" Mr. Novotny and his wife enjoyed sitting in their living room and watching the wildlife in the backyard of their home in northern Michigan. Mr. Novotny was an avid stamp collector and maintained a stamp collection that took up an entire book shelf, his son said. He frequently shared his war stories with his children, his son, George Novotny, Jr., said. He would simulate flying an airplane with his hands, illustrating how he shot people down, George Novotny, Jr., said.

*(Published in Toledo Blade on Jan. 14, 2018 by Javonte Anderson)*

## Charles E. "Billy" Watts (November 14, 1921 - January 12, 2018)



Charles Edward "Bill" Watts went to be with the Lord Friday, January 12, 2018, after a brief illness in Baytown, TX. He was nicknamed Billy by both grandfathers, but went by Bill later in life. Born in rural Ben Wheeler, Texas, on November 14, 1921, Bill grew up on the family farm established by an ancestor, Sugar Johnson Watts in the 1850s. He attended Van public schools. His father encouraged him to follow a college career path so he studied two years at East Texas State in Commerce as America entered World War II. Bill enlisted in the Navy Air Corps at the age of 20, becoming a Fighter Ace flying an F6F Hellcat in VF-17 and VF-18 squadrons in two major operations throughout the Pacific in World War II with a tally record of 8  $\frac{3}{4}$  confirmed.

After being discharged, he met Wanda Lee Dodson of Van, Texas. On their second date, he told her they were getting married and two months later, they exchanged their vows. They celebrated their 72nd anniversary on

December 2, 2017. He graduated from SMU in 1947 after his military service and went to work in the Production Department for Humble Oil Company, later Exxon. He lived in and around Houston working in that capacity until transferring to Baytown in 1963. Bill finished his career in the Houston Office as Labor Relations Advisor retiring in 1982. He was an active member of Grace United Methodist Church and later Cedar Bayou Grace United Methodist Church as a treasurer of both. He was a faithful member of their church, taking numerous camping trips, even touring the states with the Methodist Camping Group. He played golf until recently and was active



in the Goose Creek Country Club. He was proud of his Navy service and was active in recent years in the American Fighter Aces Association and attended the recent award ceremony at the White House for the Congressional Gold Medal awarded that group. His decorations include the Navy Cross, Distinguished Flying Cross with two gold Stars, Purple Heart, and the Air Medal with seven Gold Stars, along with two Presidential citations for serving on the *Bunker Hill* and *Hornet* aircraft carriers. (Navarre Funeral Home)

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## Billy Saves His Friend Joe

By: Cliff Neve

It is late in the day of February 16, 1945 and Lt(jg) Joseph Patterson Farrell is in trouble. He and eleven of his fellow VF-17 squadron mates have just come off the target area, an afternoon strafing attack on Hamamatsu Airfield and other targets of opportunity, Honshu, Japan. Joe radio's his friend Lt(jg) Charles E. (Billy) Watts and tells him that he believes his F6F-5 Hellcat has been hit by ground fire. Billy immediately responds by winging over close to Joe and gave the F6F a detailed look. Yep. Joe has an oil leak, an obvious stream of oil streaking back from the cowling. A quick discussion and Billy and Joe understand there is no way Joe can make it back a hundred miles offshore to the USS *Hornet*.

Billy and Joe were friends from flight school. Towards the end of their training they had been naturally separated by the needs of the Navy. Billy doing a tour with VF-18 on the *Bunker Hill*, CV-17, and Joe with VC-39 on the *Liscome Bay*, CVE-56. Joe didn't see much action as the *Liscome Bay* was torpedoed by the Japanese sub I-175 near the Gilbert Islands with heavy loss of life. Barely escaping with his life and recovered from the water, Joe was returned to Pearl Harbor where he eventually was assigned, along with Billy to VF-17 for its second cruise. On USS *Hornet*, CV-12, they were roommates and they were in the same four plane division within VF-17.

February 16 was a very busy day for Task Force 58. Planned were numerous air strikes, the first by the Navy on the Japanese home islands, centered near Tokyo. The Marines were just days away from invading Iwo Jima and a softening up of the Tokyo area airfields and shipping would hopefully keep some pressure off the island invasion.

The day awoke to very unfavorable weather. Heavy cloud cover, a ceiling at 1200' to 2500' and rain squalls all the way to shore, about 100 miles from the fleet. Even so, the Task Force, (including carriers *Hornet*, *Bennington*, *Wasp*, *Lexington*, *Cabot*, and *Belleau Wood*) launched aircraft numerous times during the day and the following day, with very good results, yet dampened by the weather.

Both Billy and Joe, their division, had participated in the morning strike to strafe airfields, but the squadron did not have much success due to the weather. Their second launch in bad weather came at 1400 hours flying into clear skies over Japan by 1515 hours and for the next hour and a half they worked over Hamamatsu Airfield and other targets of opportunity. Departing for *Hornet* and back into the weather at 1645 hours, it was soon after that Lt(jg) Farrell realized his plane had been hit.

In anticipation of these naval airstrikes, the Navy has staged submarines on lifeguard duty along the routes flown. A huge blessing for aviators in trouble, especially around these Japanese home islands. It so happened that USS *Pomfret*, SS-391, Commander John Hess, was on station at the mouth of Tokyo Bay, monitoring the lifeguard radio frequencies. *Pomfret* had just arrived in Japanese waters as part of a hunter/killer submarine wolf pack, called "Mac's Mops" which also included the boats *Piper*, *Bowfin*, *Sterlet* and *Trepang*. While on lifeguard station at the mouth of Tokyo Bay, the Navy provided fighter cover for the sub because of the close proximity to Japanese forces. Her war patrol mentioned on the 16th a 600' ceiling, solid overcast, alternate rain, snow and hail with a 20 knot wind stirring up the seas. Very difficult, uncomfortable, and unsafe conditions for a sub to be in. Her first rescue turned out to be a Japanese pilot in a raft who was determined to drown himself rather than be captured. He was spotted at 1523 hours and after 37 minutes of trying to avoid capture was finally dragged aboard the sub. It was shortly after this that Billy contacted the sub.





Billy, as were all the pilots, had been briefed with the lifeguard radio frequency and the call sign "Full Holster". With Joe in a dire straits, Billy turned to the lifeguard frequency and got an immediate response from "Full Holster". Given a heading Billy and the two other pilots of their division, Lt (jgs) Covelly and Toburnen, began their escort of Joe to the USS *Pomfret*.

With an air temperature of 42F, a water temperature not much warmer and seas of 3-4', it had come time for Joe to vacate his F6F with a successful ditching. Sunset is less than an hour away. He got out of the plane ok with Billy and the other two pilots covering him. The sub is close and on the way at flank speed as they can see the fighters circling. Overhead, Billy notices that Joe has not inflated his life raft. The dye marker is out in its vivid green color, but Joe is just floating with his Mae West inflated. Billy thinks there might be a problem with inflating the raft, so he wrestles out of his parachute harness with his life raft attached, slides his canopy back and drops it towards Joe. Pretty close, but no motion from Joe. Billy's wingman Covelly does the same thing with the same non-result from Joe.

The sub is really close, but in the rough seas and darkening sky, they can't see Joe or his dye marker. Billy immediately sizes up the situation and wings over the sub in the direction to Joe. The sub immediately changes course and almost immediately spots Joe and performs the rescue at 1812 hours, just after sunset. Billy and the other two pilots, low on fuel, having saved Farrell from certain death head off to rendezvous with the *Hornet* and a night landing, a day's duty complete.

Billy hears that Joe is ok on the sub and will fully recover. He was just really cold and had been unable to move to inflate his raft once he had hit the water.

On Feb 17, *Pomfret* picked up Ensign Robert Buchanan, an ace-in-a-day in VF-29 flying off the USS *Cabot*, in dramatic fashion, just 17500 yards off the coast of Japan. Clearly, even with fighter cover, a brave daylight rescue in enemy waters for the sub crew, including Farrell, to accomplish. Ernie Pyle, the renowned war correspondent, was on *Cabot* at this time and was so impressed with the rescue of these two Navy pilots that he wrote a column that was published March 28, 1945 honoring the Navy and the crew of the unnamed *Pomfret*.

And the fighting goes on. VF-17 with a stellar second cruise aboard *Hornet* with fighting over Japan, Okinawa, Iwo Jima and a host of other small islands in the region. Lt(jg) Watts achieves Ace status and Lt(jg) Farrell is now a submariner on the USS *Pomfret* for the duration of her fourth war patrol.

Seven weeks later, Farrell is returned to the *Hornet* and VF-17. No one had expected to ever see him again. In his time away, he had completed a submarine combat war patrol as an active member of the crew, flown from Midway Island to Pearl Harbor, flown again from Pearl to Ulithi where Admiral Nimitz chatted with him about submariner morale, and then boarded a fleet oiler bound for TF-58.1 and the *Hornet*.

Back in his quarters, he asked Billy about his gear and personal effects, which had included a case of Blatt's Beer. Well, he wasn't expected back and ace Bob Coats, VF-17 Operations Officer, had agreed with Billy that the beer was only going to spoil before they could ever find Farrell again, so the decision was made in honored Navy tradition to not waste it. The beer was gone two weeks before Farrell returned.

Billy will be the first to tell you that his efforts helping to save Lt(jg) Farrell, his friend, was just part of what any aviator would do. That this story was repeated countless times during the war in all services in all theaters. Billy's own life had been saved in November of 1943 by fellow ace Jim Billo. No matter, this story just needed to be told.

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## Call for Help Continues

This past October, the Santa Rosa fire in California took a toll on trees, farms, and homes alike; leaving nothing but destruction in its wake. One of the victims of the fire was Tony Valencia, son of Ace Lt. Eugene A. Valencia, who lost his home in the fire. Along with his home, the Valencia family lost all of their photos and memorabilia that they had of their father.

If you have any photos, documents, or any other memorabilia of Lt. Eugene Valencia that you would like to donate to the family, or would be willing to make copies of to share, please contact [afaa@museumofflight.org](mailto:afaa@museumofflight.org) or 207.768.7166 to coordinate.

Your help would be greatly appreciated so the Valencia family can try and re-piece together their father's tangible legacy.

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