



TRAVIS AIR MUSEUM NEWS

A publication of the Travis Air Force Base Historical Society

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General James Doolittle and the 15th Air Force.

By Gary Leiser

General James Doolittle was the first commander of the 15th Air Force. He served in this position from the activation of 15th AF at Tunis, Tunisia on November 1, 1943 until he was appointed commander of 8th AF in England on January 3, 1944.



Doolittle awards purple heart to Sgt. William N. Fitzpatrick, 15th AF.

It is difficult to assess Doolittle's significance to 15th AF strictly within the two months during which it was under his command. Even in his memoirs he says almost nothing about it. The man who really molded 15th AF and gave it a "personality" was Nathan Twining, who succeeded Doolittle and commanded 15th AF for the remainder of the war.

It could nevertheless be said that Doolittle laid the basis for the organization, management and combat operations of 15th AF, all of which Twining inherited. For Doolittle, 15th AF was an extension of 12th AF, the next evolutionary step in its progression. Between November 8, 1942 and May 13, 1943, Doolittle had command of 12th AF, the main American air element, composed of both bombers and fighters, in the drive against Axis forces in north Africa. Operating from Algeria and then Tunisia, and frequently flying missions himself, he became a master of air interdiction in this campaign. After the surrender of enemy forces in North Africa on May 13, he turned the full weight of 12th AF against Pantelleria, Sicily and Italy proper and even struck Germany. His forces participated in the first bombing of Rome, helping to topple Mussolini's regime.

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Comments and questions about the NEWS may be addressed to Editor, Travis Air Force Museum NEWS, PO Box 1565, Travis AFB, CA 94535

TRAVIS AIR MUSEUM Mission Statement

The purpose of the Museum is to portray the history of Travis Air Force Base's contribution to the development of airlift in the Pacific.

It's primary objectives are:

- To provide and maintain an aviation and aerospace, educational, scientific, cultural, historical and inspirational facility for the general public.
- To provide to youth, students and scholars historical research facilities and inspirational exhibits.
- To serve as a meeting place and forum for aerospace oriented organizations and individuals for the benefit of all Northern California.

* In accordance with AFD 64-1,
Air Force History and Museum Program.

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VOLUNTEERS NEEDED HERE!

DOOLITTLE CONTINUED

In September, as Allied troops were moving up the Italian peninsula, the US Joint Chiefs of Staff decided to create a new strategic air force, the 15th, in the Mediterranean. Constituted primarily from aircraft and personnel from 12th AF, its chief task was to participate in the combined bomber offensive (with 8th AF and the Royal Air Force) against Germany. Having crafted 12th AF into a potent force, above all for destroying Axis logistics and supply center, Doolittle was the logical commander for an air force that was devoted to such a mission. Moreover, he already knew the men, machines, and theater of operations. For Doolittle and his men, the transition from 12th AF to 15th AF was smooth if not imperceptible. For them, it was essentially a redesignation. When 15th AF stood up at Tunis, that city was already the location of Headquarters, 12th AF. Indeed, Doolittle did not even change offices when he became commander of 15th AF. This finally occurred a month later, on December 1, when 15th AF moved to Bari, on the Adriatic Sea near the "heel" of Italy, in order to increase its range over Europe. Bari then remained the headquarters of 15th AF until the end of the war.

The significance of Doolittle to 15th AF lies mainly in his being the commander of its predecessor, 12th AF. The wealth of experience, especially combat experience, that he and his men brought from 12th AF allowed 15th AF to hit the ground running.

Rpt. Tailwind, July 14, 1995.

PRESIDENT'S RAMBLINGS

By Earl Johnson

Things are looking up!

*F*or about two and one-half years, security at Travis AFB has caused Museum attendance to be drastically reduced. In the past few months, there has been an easing of the restrictions. A review of the Museum Guest Book for April and May shows visitors from 36 states, Guam and the District of Columbia. In addition, visitors have come from 16 countries around the world. They hail from Russia, UK, Norway to New Zealand and Australia, as well as Japan, Vietnam, Chile, South Africa and many points in between. Let us hope this is only the beginning of an ever increasing visitor attendance.



60th Air Mobility Wing commander, Colonel Kane hosted a meeting of community leaders to discuss the prospect of relocating the Museum on land with access from outside the Travis AFB "gate." The briefing, attended by several members of the Travis Historical Society board of directors, covered property location, funding possibilities and basic needs.

Congressman Mike Thompson visited the Museum in May and was given a guided tour. He expressed support for our goal of a new facility.

Not all is good, however. There is a serious need for Museum Gift Shop volunteers. During the past five years, we have been able to keep the Gift Shop open for four or five days each week. Since November, we have lost three volunteers for assorted reasons and this has limited store hours. Gift Shop proceeds provide a major portion of the Travis AFB Museum's funding. Do you or someone you know have a day (four to six hours) or two to volunteer!

CURATOR'S CORNER



By Gary Leiser

Recently, there have been several important changes in personnel at the Museum. Lt. Col. Ed Bruce, who came to the Museum in October 1999 and served as

director, retired in April 2000. In the same month, MSgt Richard Lester returned to his unit and subsequently retired in May. MSgt Lester had served in the Museum for some six years, longer than anyone in recent memory. We wish to thank them both for their notable contributions to this institution and also wish them well in their new careers. Meanwhile, in April, MSgt Michael Omler came to the museum from the 60th Aircraft Generation Squadron. He, TSgt Hoover, and myself currently constitute the Museum staff.

During the past quarter, volunteers and staff members were busy with a number of projects. Cory Graham has been working on turning our outdoor observation "shed" into an observation hangar complete with checkerboard roof. Bill Lancaster and Ned Fall moved the observation shed from the aircraft display area to the picnic grounds. Ben Reed and Don Austin worked on repairing the right aileron of our C-119. Joe Tattersall fabricated missiles for our F-4. Ben, Don and Joe also touched up the paint on our B-29 and made gun covers for it. Dave Humphry worked on the 2K loader and jeep as well as the shop doors. Jim Hill made our Link Trainer operational. Harry Ahlman kept the supplies flowing for the work force. Jim Martin inspected the aircraft collection several times a week. And Justin Rosaaen and Don Austin removed a motor cowling of the C-123 for repair. Heinz Eggers and Denell Burks continued to work on the history of Travis display. MSgt Omler and TSgt Hoover built a long wall to replace the partitions in the engine room and to create a work area for building displays. Jim Houk has submitted a design for a Korean War exhibit. We hope to have

it built by September. Related to this, we are seeking help to repair a 1/3 scale model of an F-86. Please call the museum if you have expertise in fiberglass and could assist us.

In other activities, in April the Museum hosted a reunion of members of Consairways, which operated from the base in WW II. In May it hosted the ice breaker for the 15th Air Force Commanders' Conference. *Parade Magazine*, the Sunday newspaper supplement, featured the Museum's B-29 in a story for the Memorial Day weekend. The Wing Director of Staff designed a "unit" coin that includes the



Museum. It is available for \$7 in the gift shop.

The official "unveiling" of our recently restored AT-17 was held on June 6. Above is a photo of the AT-17 and our Restoration Crew extraordinaire. Bravo! Salute! Thank you.

As for progress on a new museum, for FY 2001 the base has budgeted funds for the necessary environmental studies of the proposed site. Meanwhile, the Museum has received a number of donations including a print of the Wright Brothers' flight from Lt. Col. Rory Gardner, a South African AF uniform from Ralph Lewis, a copy of the *New York Times* dated August 7, 1949 (when the atomic bomb was dropped on Japan) from Lee Stetson, and assorted old local newspapers from Leah Anderson. It also received a generous donation of \$1,000 from Wayne Hahner to improve the lighting inside the museum. And finally, the Museum has contributed in small ways to a current exhibit at the Vacaville Museum and to the Solano County Sesquicentennial.

FAIRFIELD AIR FORCE STATION

By Donald J.
MacMaster

Visitors on Travis AFB who drive along Ragsdale Street toward the South Gate often inquire about the ominous mounds of earth seen in good number to the west. Although little history of them has been recorded, these silos, once called “igloos,” were the heart of the mission of



Fairfield Air Force Station (AFS) from 1953 to 1962 during the Cold War.

Fairfield AFS was home for the 3083rd Aviation Depot Group, a division of the then Air Material Command, and its purpose was to support the Strategic Air Command Wing, located a short distance away along the Travis flight line, with nuclear weapons for its B-52s.

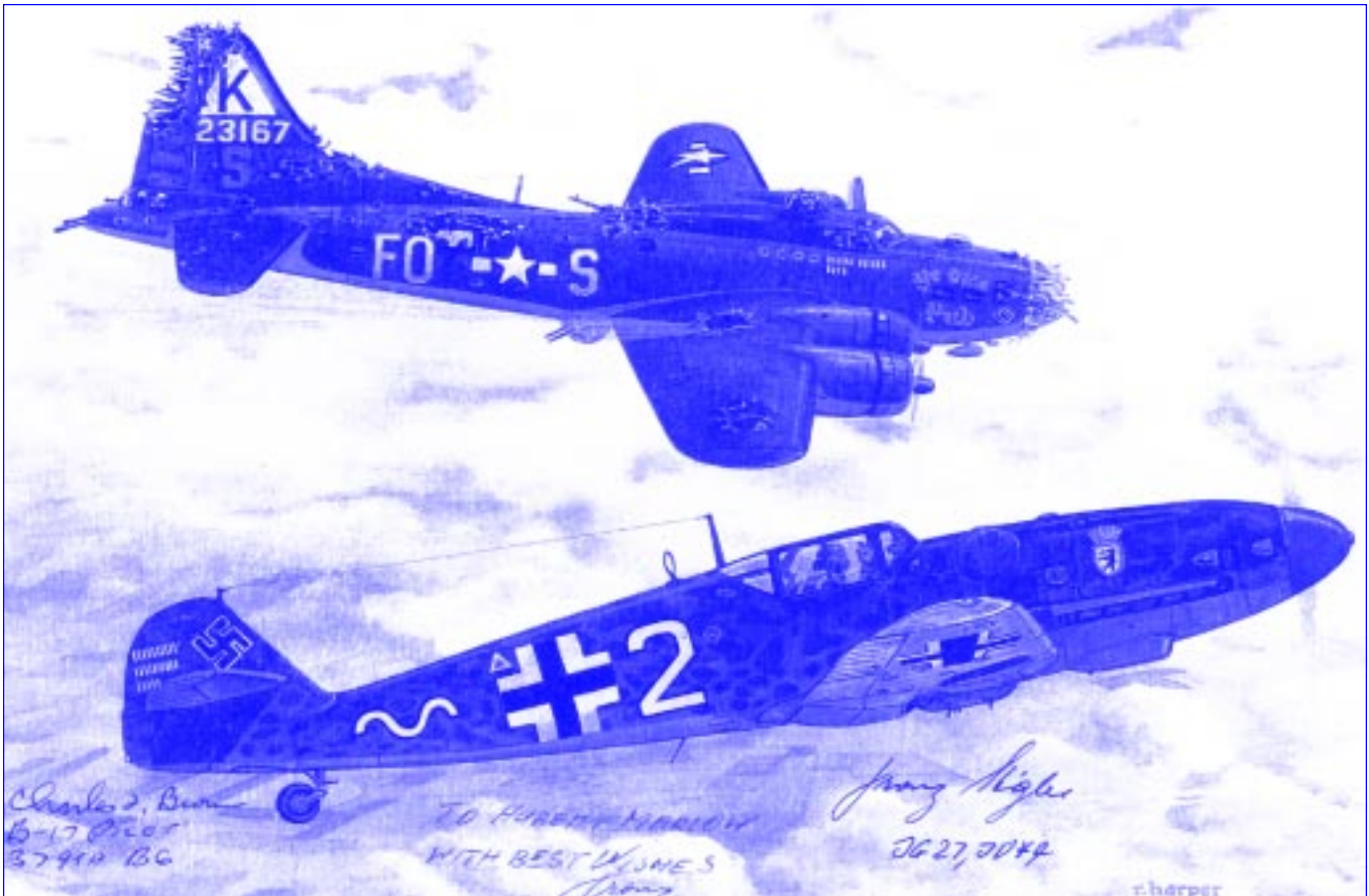
Secrecy and security were the primary characteristics of the Station, which covered 512 acres. The main work section encompassed a broad area along the Station's southern border and was known as the “Q” area. The “Q” was surrounded by four chain-linked fences topped by a crown of barbed wire, one of which was electrified, and a perimeter road. I recall that sometimes owls or a fox would make contact with the electrified fence. They were instantly killed and this would cause the fence to short out. One night four migrant workers traveling north and attracted by our lights managed to make their way across a section of the “hot” fence which was out of commission. The intruders were discovered by a patrol along the perimeter road and their presence proved a real concern. Security was the responsibil-

ity of the 3083rd Air Police Squadron which, in addition to its main gate operation, pass and identification services and general patrol, provided an elite, heavily armed and mobile combat team trained specifically for the protection of the “Q” in three shifts on a continual basis. This team also provided security for the transfer of weapons from the storage igloos to the flight line, a responsibility that often occurred during the cover of night. Along with the storage igloos, some of the “Q”'s fencing can still be seen, as can a number of its buildings, one of which served as the main facility for the assembly of nuclear weapons.

Although the Station's gymnasium, mess hall and a few other buildings remain, the Base Headquarters and the barracks have been removed.

Fairfield AFS was eventually overtaken by technology. As the Cold War continued, long-range missiles became SAC's chief method of delivering nuclear weapons and thus the need for Fairfield AFS as a storage and distribution facility was diminished. When it closed in 1962, its land reverted to Travis AFB.

AN ACT OF CHIVALRY IN WORLD WAR



“The Ultimate Honor”

The planes above were painted by Robert L. Harper, at that time an air intelligence officer in England, who helped remove casualties from the B-17. The complete details of the mission and post mission activities are covered in the narratives “The 13 Minute Gap” and “The 13 Minute Gap—Revisited” by Charles L. Brown, the B-17 pilot.

By Hubert Marlow

On December 20, 1943, the 379th Bomb Group (H) of the Eighth Bomber Command (U.S. Eighth Air Force) attacked Bremen, Germany. During that attack, Lt. Charles Brown from Weston, West Virginia, flying B-17F number 42-3167, witnessed an extraordinary act of chivalry by Franz Stiegler, the pilot of a Bf-109, who had taken off to attack him.

As Brown guided his B-17, Ye Olde Pub, toward the target, an aircraft factory, it was buffeted by flak.

“Suddenly,” he later recounted, “the nose of the B-17 was mangled by flak. Then three of the four engines were damaged. The entire left stabilizer and left elevator were gone, ninety percent of the rudder was gone, and part of the top of the vertical stabilizer was gone. I quickly pulled out of formation so we wouldn’t damage our other planes if we exploded. It didn’t take long for the Germans to pounce on us. Eight fighters came at us from the front and seven more from the rear and we were in no condition to fight them off. I headed straight at one of them. I had

given up. I really didn't think we would get through this one. I had the plane in a tightening circle when I blacked out. Our oxygen system had been shot up."

Brown's plane then plunged from 25,000 feet to 200 feet at which point he regained consciousness. Incredibly, Ye Olde Pub was flying straight and level directly over a German airfield. At that moment, Oberleutenant (1Lt) Franz Stiegler, who had been on the ground reloading his guns, spotted Brown's mortally wounded aircraft. He leaped into his Bf-109 and took off in pursuit. Eager to score a kill, Stiegler closed in from the rear to within ten feet of the B-17.

As Stiegler described the encounter, **"The B-17 was like a sieve. There was blood everywhere. I could see the crew trying to help their wounded. The tail gunner was slumped over his gun, his blood streaming down its barrel. Through the gaping hole in the fuselage, I could see crewmen working frantically to save a comrade whose leg was blown off. I thought to myself, 'How can I shoot something like that? It would be like shooting a man in a parachute.' When I was flying in North Africa, my commander said, 'You are a fighter pilot. If I ever hear of you shooting someone in a parachute, I'll shoot you myself.'"**

Stiegler then flew wingtip-to-wingtip with the crippled bomber, close enough for the two enemies to see each other clearly. The German pilot escorted the struggling B-17 to the North Sea. Then, to Brown's amazement, he saluted, put his plane into a crisp roll and flew away, allowing Brown to make it back to a British airfield.

On board the B-17 were Brown and nine other crewmen, four of whom were wounded and one was dead. Brown had a bullet in his right shoulder but it was not discovered until 40 years later. Stiegler, who was shot down 17 times, is one of only 1,200 of Germany's 30,000 fighter pilots to survive the war. During the war, he shot down 28 aircraft. Originally from Regensburg, Bavaria, he now lives in Canada.

Years later, while attending a meeting of the American Pilots Association, Brown was asked if anything interesting had happened to him in the war. He replied, **"I think I was saluted by a German Luftwaffe pilot one time."**

Brown had not thought about this for years, but subsequently began to search for the German pilot. With the assistance of Lt Gen Adolf Galland he made an inquiry via the German Fighter Pilots Association and Stiegler responded. The two men eventually met in Seattle. On December 20, before encountering Brown, Stiegler had already shot down two B-17s. For a third, he would have been awarded the Knights Cross. Had the German Military discovered that he had let Brown's aircraft escape, he would have been court-martialed and shot.

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WHEN MINES WERE CALLED PEANUTS

By Maynard Andersen

In 1945 I was a navigator in the 373rd Bomb Squadron of the 308th Bomb Group of 14th Air Force, the Flying Tigers. We were stationed at Luliang, China, which was about 40 miles from Kunming. The latter was the final destination of the Burma Road--although that road actually continued north to Chengtu, China.

Our mission, called the "Peanut Mission," was to drop mines against Japanese shipping in the South China Sea or in navigable rivers in China. On the morning of February 25, 1944, we were given a briefing for a "Peanut" mission to the Yangtze River. We were instructed to fly north, make a diversionary turn towards Hangkow, north of the Tungtin Lake region, and then continue north to a narrow gorge of the Yangste.

We took off at 1600 hours, shortly before sunset. We had a full crew--engineer, radio operator, and tail, nose, waist, ball, and turret gunners. There had been no mention of night fighters in the briefing, but we were prepared nonetheless. The bombardier and I rode in the nose section, which, as anyone familiar with the B-24 knows, is the windiest and most uncomfortable spot in the airplane. The wind around the nose turret and the open areas around the nose wheel made long rides even longer. And this mission was scheduled for nine hours.

The flight up to the lake region was uneventful. At night there was little to see except the fires on the ground that had been lit to define our line of flight. We were told this would happen once we entered enemy territory. After we entered that territory, we all began to wonder what was happening down below. We had been



Main runway at Yang Tong air base, Kweilin. Road at right leads to hostels, mess halls and headquarters 68th Wing.—Photo courtesy Philip Zarada, 21st Photo Recon Squadron.

trained at Westover Field in Massachusetts for the European Theatre and had never imagined flying a lonely night mission to a river in China. In the midst of the darkness we had to find a certain narrow place in a river and drop mines that would settle just below the surface of the water where they would lie in wait for Japanese shipping.

As we approached the lake area, there was a great deal of fog near the ground. We made our turn to the north as though heading for Hangkow, the largest city in the region. Shortly thereafter we turned east toward the Yangste River. Being a major artery, it was easy to spot. Our pilot, Dan Dodson, informed us that we were going to descend fairly rapidly and then ascend just as quickly as soon as the mines were dropped. We planned to drop five mines a short distance apart. This plan changed abruptly,

however, while we were approaching the release altitude. Suddenly the entire hillside on the right side of the airplane erupted in flashes of light like a Fourth of July celebration. Flack began to strike our aircraft. Dan yelled, "Holy hell! Drop 'em all." Our bombardier did just that and the plane rose as though we had hit a monstrous updraft.

We headed southwest immediately. I had to establish our position and the best route back to Luliang. Celestial navigation in a B-24 was no joy at any time. And at that moment, with shaky knees and standing on a stool to shoot three stars and plot a position, it was one of the most difficult things that I ever had to do. Fortunately, the sky around us was clear. We soon learned, though, that this was not the case at home at Luliang.

The big talk on the way back was from the co-pilot. He reported a flack hole that was close to his knee. The rest of the crew could talk of nothing but how everything had seemed so peaceful going up to the target. We all felt fortunate that nothing serious had occurred to us or the airplane and we assumed that we would soon get back to Luliang for a debriefing and our shot of "mission whiskey."

As we approached our base, after almost nine hours in the air, our radio operator informed the pilot that we would have to land at Kunming because of bad weather. We were in radio contact with Kunming and they informed us that they had planes stacked to 14,000 feet waiting to land and that we were to fly at an assigned altitude. They said they would give the radio operator a QDM (direction) to the station in a few minutes. The QDM that we received directed us to fly 92 degrees to Kunming, that is, directly east. I told Dan that it was impossible for us to be west of Kunming and that there must be something screwy.

He ordered the radio operator to check again. The radioman then received a second QDM reading that was just a few degrees different from the first. Consequently, Dan said that we had better take it. Not long afterwards, however, our pilot heard a pilot from one of the other aircraft in the stack yell, "You SOB! You gave us a reciprocal bearing!" Then other pilots began to chime in.

Apparently the person working in the Kunming station at that time was totally confused by all that was going on and gave the bearings of the direction FROM his station. In other words, we had flown due east, in the opposite direction of Kunming. Our engineer feared that we would not have enough gas to return to Kunming.

Our co-pilot began to call any ground station that could hear us. After some hectic and worrisome time, he finally received a response from a fighter field at Kweilin. The station operator there said he could hear our airplane south of their field. It had no landing lights, but he said they would line up some trucks and jeeps along each side of the runway to mark a path. No four-engine plane had even landed on that field.

Our pilot decided that he had no choice but to try to land. Through broken clouds we saw lights appear at the ends of the runway and then spottily along each side. This was to be the landing of our lives. Dan applied the brakes as soon as we hit the ground. There was a lot of shouting, but it was a good landing. By that time, we had been in the air for more than eleven hours—a very long and wearying time for newcomers to the 14th Air Force. The ground crew drove us to some quarters and, after some questioning and relief-type laughing, we hit the sack.

The next morning, when we looked out from the barracks, we were all shocked to realize that

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PEANUTS CONTINUED

there was no airfield in sight. After breakfast, we were driven by jeep to the landing strip, which was bordered by "needle peaks." We saw our aircraft, Ding How Dottie, sitting on the end of the runway--looking like a goose in a hummingbird's nest.

Our pilot spoke by radio with the commanding officer at Luliang and convinced him that he could get the airplane off the ground in another day if we could strip it of as much weight as possible. We spent a day removing everything that was not necessary for the flight. Dan arranged for the tail to be locked to a cable that would be released on his signal when he reached a certain RPM. He had a flag placed beside the runway at the point where the wheels had to be off the ground if we were going to make it. After takeoff, he would immediately have to make a right turn at the end of the runway because of the nearby needle peaks.

I kneeled between the pilot and co-pilot to let them know when we reached the flag. Needless to say, it was a successful takeoff. The landing at Luliang was even better. There we celebrated the end of our first "peanut" mission.

THE FLYING CHEETAHS IN KOREA

By J. E. Lello, Brig. Gen. SAAF (rtd.)

At 0400 on Sunday, June 25, 1950, North Korean forces, supported by Russian T-34 tanks, poured across the 38th Parallel into South Korea. North Korean marines waded ashore on the East Coast near Kangnung while the army advanced on its two primary targets, Kaesong, which fell at 0700, and Chuson. This was not a border skirmish. A full-scale attack on South Korea had begun.

On August 4, the South African Government announced its intention of placing a squadron of the SAAF at the disposal of the United Nations for service in the Korean War. The squadron selected was No. 2 Squadron, "The Flying Cheetahs," so named because of its emblem of the South African Cheetah. This squadron already had an outstanding WW II record from East Africa, the Desert Campaign in North Africa, and Italy. The first contingent, all volunteers, comprising 49 officers and 157 other ranks under command of Cmdt. S. van Breda Theron, left Pretoria on September 25. The next day, No. 2 Squadron boarded the S.S. Tjisadane at Durban and sailed for Korea, docking at Yokohama en route on November 4.

The squadron was immediately taken to Johnson Air Base where the pilots and crew were trained on F-51 Mustangs purchased from the U.S. After a week of flying, Theron requested that the squadron be assigned to operations. The USAF, however, felt that more training was required. Theron then took a Mustang up and gave an aerobatic display over the airfield. As one American said, "He just made the goddamn Mustang sit up and take notice." This was not a case of showmanship, but one of ability because most of the pilots had previously flown Mustangs or had had vast experience on other fighter aircraft. The first flight of Mustangs was flown into Korea on November 16. The first operational flight was flown from K9 Air Base on November 19.

The squadron formed an integral part of the 18th Fighter Bomber Wing, operating as an independent squadron under control of the Far Eastern Air Force (FEAF), but under command of the SAAF. The squadron's main task was one of interdiction, ground attack and close support. It flew sorties from various bases: K10, K13, K47 and others. In addition, the squadron took part in mass raids, flying with its sister squadrons, 12th and 67th USAF.

... SOUTH AFRICAN AIR FORCE, No. 2 SQUADRON

On July 23, 1951, Captain Freddie Bekker as leader, with Lieutenant Rooi Du Plooy as element leader, 2nd Lieutenant Tony Green and Boff Halley as wingmen were briefed to carry out a weather recce. Airborne at 1500, they proceeded low level to the Han River with the weather deteriorating all the time with a lowering cloud base. As the flight could not penetrate the clouds to the north, the leader decided to look for a target of opportunity. Flying line astern at 200-450m above ground level, they eventually found an intact road bridge that they destroyed. The flight continued to look for other targets.

As the leader passed over a small hill at about 90m, Captain Bekker's aircraft received a direct hit from ground fire, burst into flames and crashed. The flight took evasive action by breaking away and going into the low cloud. Second Lieutenant Green made a pass over the downed aircraft and saw no sign of life, but observed a parachute descending directly over the position. Lt. Du Plooy and Green saw Hally land safely.

Du Plooy instructed Green to climb up and call for the pick-up chopper while he would cap the downed pilot and attempt to keep the enemy from overrunning Halley's position by continuous strafing and harassment runs.

The rescue helicopter attempted to pick up Halley, but it was too late and he was taken prisoner. Meanwhile, Green sighted the smoldering remains of another Mustang and a parachute nearby. It was Du Plooy's. He never returned. He was awarded the American Silver Star posthumously.

On December 27, 1952, SAAF Mustangs flew their last operational sorties. While in Korea, they flew 10,373 sorties. Of the squadron's original 95 aircraft, 74 were destroyed. Subse-

quently, because of the increasing appearance of MIGs, the squadron was re-equipped with F-86 Sabre jets. On January 27, 1953, it moved to an all jet base, K55, at Onsan. Adapting quickly, the squadron flew its first jet sortie on March 11.

The Cheetahs then flew, in addition to ground attack, high level interdiction and standing patrols along the Yalu River, which was the boundary between Manchuria (China) and North Korea. Manchuria was a safe haven from which the MIGs operated. Using F-86s, No. 2 Squadron flew 2032 sorties and lost only four aircraft. Following the cease-fire on June 27, the squadron began to prepare for the trip home. Altogether, 243 officers and 545 other ranks saw service in Korea, together with 8 Army officers and 15 other ranks. Among these men, 34 pilots and 2 other ranks gave their lives for freedom and 8 POWs were eventually returned. (It is worthy of note that if a SAAF pilot was taken prisoner, the SAAF did not continue to pay his salary. He was considered "absent without leave." Ed.)

No. 2 Squadron received the United States Presidential Citation as well as that of the Korean President. Furthermore, 3 Legions of Merit, 2 Silver Stars, 50 Distinguished Flying Crosses, 1 cluster to a DFC, 40 Bronze Stars, 176 Air Medals and 152 clusters to the Air Medals were presented to members of the squadron.

Travis AFB

Website Address:

www.travis.af.mil/database/museum/



TRAVIS AFB HISTORICAL SOCIETY MEMBERSHIP

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Travis AFB, CA 94535.

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