

Trained for Combat

By David C. Diefendorf

Col. Allen J. Diefendorf (Dief) spent 33 years flying aircraft first for the Army Air Corps, and then for the United States Air Force. He flew combat missions in WWII, Korea and Vietnam. Included among his accomplishments are leading an attack on von Rundstedt's castle headquarters in the waning days of WWII, and causing an international incident in 1950 when he and another F-80 pilot attacked a Soviet airfield during the Korean War.

Dief's interest in flying began while growing up in the small village of Silver Creek, New York. On Sundays, his

father would take young Allen and his brother Charles to the Buffalo airport, among other destinations, so that they could see the rows of P-40 Warhawk aircraft that the huge Curtiss-Wright plant manufactured. Bell Aircraft would soon move in and begin to turn out the P-39 Airacobra.

On Sunday, December 7, 1941, Dief was at home working on a homework assignment (he was a senior in high school), when he heard a newsflash saying that Pearl Harbor had been attacked by Japanese forces. Enduring the remainder of the 1941-1942 school year was tough, knowing that the nation was at war. Upon graduation, he enlisted in the U.S. Army and was sworn in in November 1942.

When it was time to report, Dief was bused to Ft. Niagara, a large replacement depot. He decided to try for the Aviation Cadet Program, passed the tests, and was accepted. Soon after, he boarded a train to the San Antonio Aviation Cadet Center in Texas. There was no flying at San Antonio, but there was a lot of physical training (PT), class time, close order drill and more PT.

Upon graduation, Dief boarded a troop train and headed to Cimarron Field, Oklahoma. Cimarron Field, like many others of its kind, was a civilian flying school with contracts with the U.S. government. The instructors were civilians with military supervisors. The aircraft were Fairchild PT-19 tandem trainers with about 175 horsepower.

Primary instruction was eight weeks, the time frame now being April-May, 1943. Dief learned the controls, airspeed control, and wind adjustments. At any time, the instructor would shout over the intercom tube, "Forced landing!" Dief would have to pick out a suitable field and set up a pattern to set down. This occurred on about every fifth flight.



Curtiss P-40 Warhawks under construction at the Curtiss plant, similar to the scene a young Diefendorf would have seen. (Curtiss photo from the Gerald Balzer collection, AAHS archives)



Bell P-39s undergoing final assembly and checkout prior to delivery. (Bell photo from the Gerald Balzer collection, AAHS archives)



An example of a Fairchild PT-19 similar to the ones used to introduce Diefendorf to military flying. (Photo from Paul Schiding collection, AAHS-S026169)

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A Vultee BT-13A similar to the aircraft Diefendorf flew at Enid, Okla., during his second phase of flight training. A careful examination of the photo shows section lines that were common in the Enid area. (USAF photo from the Gerald Balzer collection, AAHS archives)

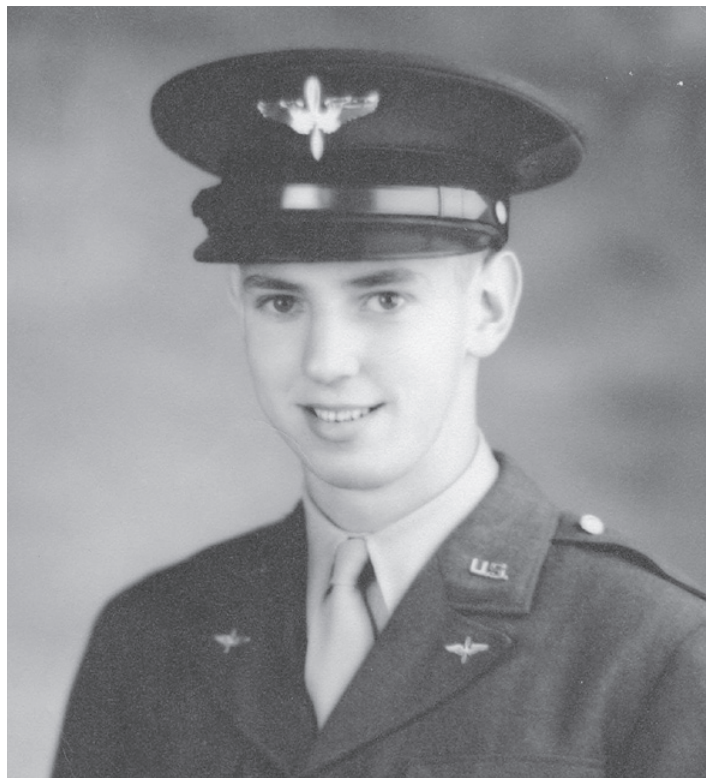
Completing the eight weeks of primary instruction, he graduated and boarded a train to Enid Army Air Field, which was about 70 miles north-west of Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Enid Army Air Field was a much larger base. It occupied two sections of land (a section of land is one square mile or 640 acres). The section lines were geographically oriented, which made the traffic patterns much easier. The aircraft were the Vultee BT-13 and BT-15. These were two-place tandem fixed gear airplanes with about 450 horsepower.

The instructors at Enid were mostly military flyers, a mix of lieutenants and captains. The captains acted as stage managers as well. Dief and the other trainees were assigned to squadrons, flights and barracks by alphabetical order. Academics consisted of navigation, weather, identification of aircraft and of course PT and drill. The flying was on a schedule. Dief would have Saturday afternoons and Sundays off. There was no off post for the first four weeks.

The BT-13 was a lot larger and more powerful than the PT-19, and Dief worked on the same basic maneuvers taught in primary flight training. There were power on and off stalls, spins, lazy eights, chandelles, snap and slow rolls and formation flying. All flights were dual until the trainee was ready to solo. A lot of time was spent at auxiliary fields practicing takeoffs, patterns and landings.

The time finally arrived for Dief to solo. He took off, flew the pattern, and landed. After all of the training and practice, it turned out to be anticlimactic. His preparation was such that flying the aircraft was second nature to him. After his solo flight, the flying hours added up. There were landing stages, short field landings, forced landing practice, day and night navigation, and night landing stages. He did almost everything right and passed all of his check rides. He had just passed his 19th birthday when he graduated from primary flight training.

By now it was spring 1943, and Advanced Flying School assignments were posted. Dief was sent to Victoria, Texas, some 100 miles southeast of San Antonio. From Victoria, he was processed and assigned to Foster Field, Texas. Foster was



Air Cadet Allen J. Diefendorf taken at San Antonio, Tex., in the spring of 1943. (From the A.J. Diefendorf archive)

a typical airfield, but it was out in the middle of Texas grazing land and there were no section lines to follow. The aircraft that Dief was going to fly was the North American AT-6 Texan. It was 600 horsepower, dual tandem with retractable gear and powered flaps.

The instructors at Foster were veterans of combat tours in England. Dief's instructor was a Royal Air Force Flight Lieutenant who, between class and flying time, related his combat experiences and lessons learned to the cadets.

The schedule alternated between flying and academics, each taking half a day. A lot of class time was directed towards identification – both friendly and enemy aircraft and capital ships. Testing occurred daily using 1/25 second slides. The flying essentially followed the same curriculum as basic, except



Diefendorf graduated to advanced training where he flew North American AT-6 Texans similar to this restored one seen at Oshkosh in 2017. (Photo by Hayden Hamilton)

with a much faster aircraft. Flying was dual until it was time to solo. There was a lot of day navigation and night flying. Dief's class had five fatalities as a result of night accidents. When time permitted, he and the other cadets rat-raced through the clouds.

A few days before graduation, the cadets found out their future assignments. Most of the men went directly to replacement training units (RTU's) for fighter training. Dief was assigned to attend the Central Instructor School at Randolph Field, Tex., to fly BTs again.

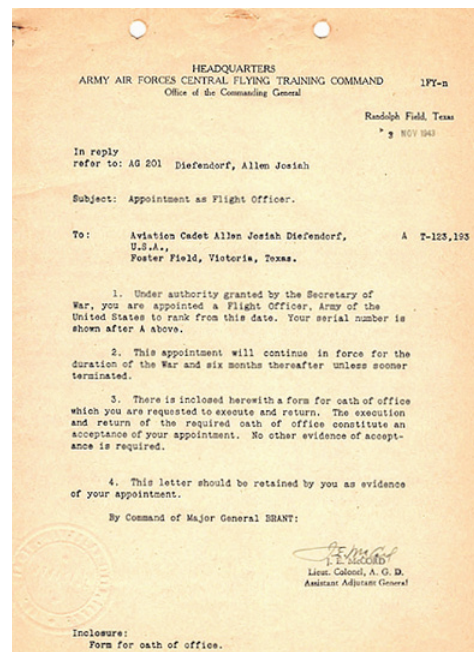
Graduation day arrived on November 3, 1943. Dief was part of class 43-J. While many of the cadets received commissions as 2nd lieutenants, Dief, being enlisted, was promoted to the rank of flight officer.

The instructor course at Randolph was four weeks long, and there were no academics or PT. Dief flew BT-13s and BT-15s in the afternoons. His instructor was a 1st lieutenant. Dief learned to be standardized, that is, do the chandelles, stalls, lazy eights, acrobatics, formation and instruments exactly right – the way that the Air Corps wanted them taught. Once he passed his final check ride, Dief was assigned back to Enid Army Air Field in Oklahoma.

He reported to Enid on December 18. Many of the instructors that he had trained under had been transferred to combat units. Now Dief, the instructor, had three young, eager cadets fresh out of primary – the same status as Dief had some six months earlier. For the next three months, he put his cadets through the same regime that he himself had gone through. He was gaining valuable flying experience and hours as well.



Graduation photo of newly minted Flight Officer Allen J. Diefendorf, Class 43-J. (From the A.J. Diefendorf archive)



Copy of the letter promoting Diefendorf to the rank of Flight Officer. (From the A.J. Diefendorf archives)

In March 1944, Dief received orders to join the 4th Air Corps Reserve Training Unit (RTU) program. He boarded the Southern Pacific to Phoenix, Arizona, where he attended gunnery school. While at Williams Army Air Field, he flew the AT-6 that had a .30 caliber machine gun in each wing.

Finished with gunnery school, Dief was assigned to Concord Army Air Field, Calif., located about 14 miles northeast of Oakland/San Francisco. The instructors were mostly 1st lieutenants, but there were a few captains as well. The aircraft at Concord was the P-39 Airacobra. For the next four weeks, he flew throughout the San Francisco area, while trying not to wander into the bay area, which was off limits. The only area around San Francisco he was allowed to fly in



4th Fighter Squadron, 1st Training Group, Class 43-J formal portrait taken November 3, 1943 at Foster Field, Texas. (From the A.J. Diefendorf archive)



P-39 aircraft at Concord. FO Allen J. Diefendorf second from right. (Photo from A.J. Diefendorf archive)



Diefendorf's next assignment took him to Ontario, Calif., where he transitioned to flying Lockheed P-38 Lightnings similar to this restored one seen at Chino, Calif., in 2015. (Photo by Charles E. Stewart, AAHS archives)

Transition Flight No. 1 (1 1/2 Hours) P-38
1944 Ontario, Cal

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Take off, climb to an altitude between 5,000 and 10,000. Level off and trim ship.
2. Execute a series of gentle turns, noting gain or loss of altitude.
3. Still the ship straight ahead, normally, about 15° Hg., both with wheels and flaps retracted and extended.
4. Practice glides and gliding turns (15° Hg.), wheels and flaps down, not below 5,000 feet.
5. Practice overshooting procedures.
6. Try climbing steeper (not under 140 MPH).
7. Execute a series of medium turns (not in excess of 60 degree bank).
8. Dives to 300 MPH.
9. Return to field.

QUESTIONS:

1. Before you release brakes for take-off, what was your manifold pressure? L.W. 44 R.W. 44
2. At what speed were you airborne? 170 L.W. 170 R.W. 170
3. Airspeed during climb? 170 L.W. 170 R.W. 170
4. Manifold Pressure? L.W. 32 R.W. 32
5. Coolant Temperature? L.W. 130 R.W. 130

4. Stalling Speed: Wheels and flaps up? 100-110 Wheel and flaps down? 85-100

5. Define stalling characteristics of ship. KEYS: SHOWN IN STALLING POSITION WITH SHIP AT ANGLE OF 15° TO HORIZON

6. During steeper climb what was airspeed? 110 Rate of climb? 1000 ft/min

7. Did coolant temperatures vary during climb? No If so, how much?

8. Did the oil temperatures vary during the climb? YES If so, how much?

9. What was maximum diving speed? 170 MPH How did controls feel during dive? SAME OLD STUFF

10. Did you find it difficult to maintain altitude constant in your turns? YES

Allen J. Diefendorf
(Pilot Name)
P-38
(Aircraft)
Diefendorf, Allen J.
(Organization)
Staff P-38

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This document is the syllabus for Diefendorf's first transition flight in the P-38. (From the A.J. Diefendorf archives)

was out to a small ground gunnery range located in north San Francisco bay.

Following his four weeks flying the P-39, Dief was assigned to Ontario, Calif., about 40 miles east of Los Angeles. Ontario Army Air Field, being surrounded by grape vineyards, had one long runway with billeting/administration areas on one side, and the flight line on the other. Dief began training in the P-38 Lightning.

Dief thought that the P-38 was huge compared to the P-39. His excitement was palpable as he checked out the aircraft, with its two nacelles and heavy armament in the nose. Training began with lots of ground school, along with endless questionnaires and, finally, cockpit time. Once in the cockpit, he practiced starting up several times, with the instructor on the wing outside the cockpit. This was followed by blindfold cockpit checks and emergency procedure checks. After a practice taxi, Dief was briefed on the first mission card. The instructor watched the inspection and engine start, then it was off.

Dief thought that the first flight in the big twin-engine airplane was scary and thrilling. With all of that power, and being light, he was off the ground in no time. He had to be aware of his surroundings so as not to get lost in the Los Angeles basin area. He flew formation and rat-raced through the clouds towards Catalina Island. Occasionally, he would race Navy Corsairs around the Channel Islands. Night flying would be in the high desert area that is now the Edwards Air Force Base complex. While flying at night, Dief would watch the search lights light up the sky in the Los Angeles valley.



Patches associated with the 392nd Fighter Squadron, 367th Fighter Group, 9th Air Force. (From the A.J. Diefendorf archives)

Graduation time arrived and Dief was assigned to the European Theater. He processed in on June 27, 1944, in San Francisco. Taking a train to Chicago, he next boarded a New York Central headed to Camp Kilmer in New York. By July 16, he was aboard the RMS Aquitania headed to Scotland – unescorted. A week later he was flying P-38s with Royal Air Force (RAF) instructors, flying formations and buzzing the countryside, commonly known as low level attack practice, of course.

On August 17, 1944, Dief boarded a C-47 and crossed the English Channel. The C-47 landed at A-1, St. Pierre-du-Mont, a PSP (pierced steel planking) strip on the shore at Omaha Beach. Dief was assigned to the 367th Fighter Group, Ninth Air Force, currently at Advanced Landing Ground (ALG) A-2. This was near a Normandy coastal town named Cirqueville. The runway had been bulldozed on pasture land, and French civilians and cattle roamed freely around the place. He was assigned to the 392nd Fighter Squadron, C Flight. Indoctrination consisted of hearing war stories from the old timers and checking out the maps at Group Intelligence.

By February 1945, the Group had moved to ALG A-64 St. Dizier. The P-38s were being sent to the Pacific Theater and were being replaced by the P-47 Thunderbolt. The Group pilots were briefed on the new aircraft and took a few orientation rides. Dief removed the armor plate from his P-38 seat and had it installed in his P-47.

The Raid on von Rundstedt's Castle, March 19, 1945

On the morning of March 19, Dief noticed some unusual activity around the briefing room. Upon entering, he was surprised to see that he was leading the 12 P-47s of the 392nd Squadron. The target was a castle that was the reported headquarters of the German Commander in Chief West, General Field Marshall Gerd von Rundstedt. The castle was located at Ziegenburg, a small town near Bad Nauheim.

The Group was flying this mission only three days after arriving at A-94 Conflans-Jarny, located between Metz and Verdun, France. Field Marshall von Rundstedt had been relieved and replaced by General Field Marshall Albert Kesselring earlier in March, but Allied Intelligence didn't know it at the time. Also unknown was that German Armaments Minister Albert Speer was visiting the castle that day for a noon conference with Kesselring.



SSgt. Stan Petela was Diefendorf's crew chief. (From the A.J. Diefendorf archives)



Sgt. Ralph Castetter was Diefendorf's armorer. (From the A.J. Diefendorf archives)



Diefendorf with Lady on a P-38 at ALG A-68, Juvin-court, France.



Group photo of the 392nd Fighter Squadron taken at ALG A-71, St. Quentin, France, in 1944. (From the A.J. Diefendorf archives)



The 392nd FS transitioned in February 1945 to Republic P-47 Thunderbolts similar to this one. (Photo from the AAHS archives, AAHS-20245)

The briefing team was from Ninth Air Force headquarters. The plan was for two squadrons of 12 aircraft, each loaded with two 1,000-lb bombs, to go in first and destroy the castle. These were the 392nd and 394th with the 394th leading. The 393rd was to follow with napalm. Flight and element leaders had 16mm color film in their gun cameras for this mission.

How was this intelligence attained? After the war, it was learned that an American intelligence officer, fluent in German and posing as a POW, was placed in a compound with captured German officers. After a few weeks, he was able to determine who, what, and where of this headquarters at Ziegenburg. Lunch, always punctual for German officers, was served at 1330 hours, the time on target.

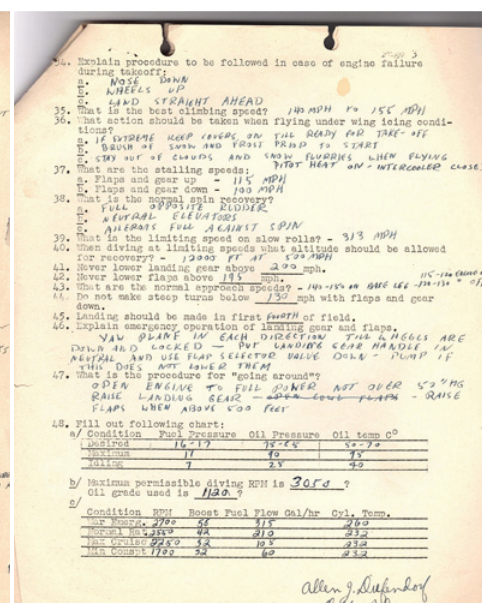
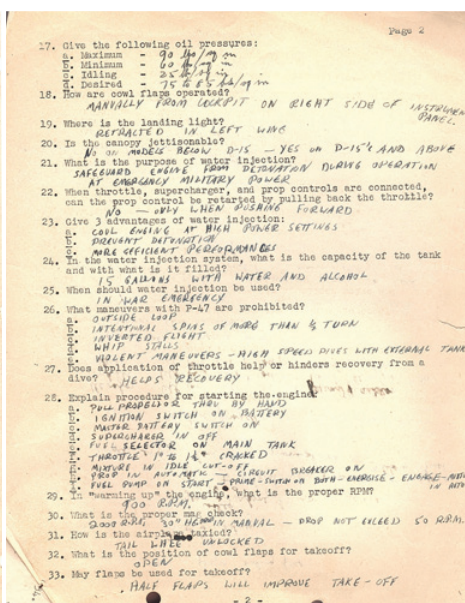
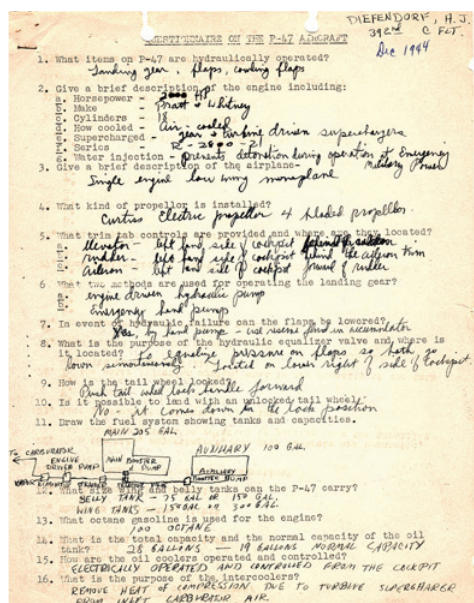
Take off required quarter flaps due to the heavy load and a large high-tension line off the end of the runway. Dief's route took him north right between Frankfurt and Hanau, probably in the top five of the most defended cities left in Germany. The flak was heavy, and the 88s really let the squadrons have it, so they scattered like turkeys. They got back together quickly. The 394th was leading when Dief noticed that they turned up



This is a bomb assessment photo taken shortly after the raid showing the destruction of the complex. Difficult to make out is a penciled track from the upper right to lower left across the center of the complex labeled "Dief / Adams." (USAF photo from the A.J. Diefendorf archive)

the wrong valley as they approached the target. He broke radio silence and called the Group Commander, Colonel Chickering, who was flying with the 393rd behind the 392nd. Dief said, "I have the target in sight!" Chickering didn't want to abort the mission, so he said, "Hit it!"

With his wingman in loose formation, Dief dove from 6,000 feet, fired his guns for film, and they dropped their four bombs right in the front door. The other aircraft came in and had



Part of the transition was a test of the pilot's knowledge of the characteristic and operation of the P-47. These images are of Diefendorf's test. (From the A.J. Diefendorf archive)



The remains of Ziegenburg Castle, Field Marshall von Rundstedt's command headquarters bombed by Diefendorf. The color photo was taken about a month after the raid. (USAAC photo from NARA). The B&W photo was taken by Diefendorf in 1962, 18 years after the raid.



direct hits. The castle was destroyed, but the German officials and other high-ranking officers escaped into the underground bunkers. Dief found out later that the bunkers were at least six feet of reinforced concrete and about 25 feet underground. The Group wasn't briefed on the tunnels or the bunkers at the morning briefing.

After the war, Field Marshall Kesselring was quoted as saying, "I didn't think it was honorable for one general to put a bunch of Jabos (fighter bombers) on another's headquarters." The 367th Fighter Group was awarded its second Distinguished Unit Citation for this operation.

General Patton flew over Ziegenburg in April and commented, "We flew over von Rundstedt's (sic) headquarters at the town of Ziegenburg, 16 kilometers west of Bad Nauheim, which had been bombed by our fighter-bombers just before we crossed the Rhine. The effect produced by these bombings was remarkably good. I am continuously amazed at the efficiency of the fighter-bombers, particularly their ability to pick out isolated transport and hit it."¹

Field Marshall von Rundstedt, even though not being present during the attack, said after the war, "Allied bombers not only shattered our supply lines and upset all our efforts to move our defensive forces, but they carried the war right home by hitting the headquarters at Bad Nauheim." He also complained that attacks such as these complicated his heart troubles, adding, "This is a hard life for an old soldier."

In his memoirs, Albert Speer wrote, "...during a simple meal with his staff, Kesselring had just offered a brief toast to my fortieth birthday when a formation of enemy fighter planes suddenly descended on the castle with a high-pitched whining sound. At the same moment, the first burst of machine-gun fire struck the windows. Everyone threw himself to the floor. Only

now did the alarm sound. The first heavy bombs crashed in the immediate vicinity. While the explosions boomed on either side of us, we rushed through the smoke and plaster dust into the bunkers. This attack was obviously aimed at the western defense headquarters. The bombs continued to fall without pause. The bunker swayed but was not hit directly. When the attack was over, we continued our conferences..."²

After the surrender of German forces in May, the 367th flew a simulated replay of the castle mission for a visiting Russian officer, Maj. Gen. A.R. Shaparov. Colonel Chickering escorted the Russian around the castle ruins, and P-47s of the 394th came in low and made quite a bit of noise during their mock attack. Dief flew in this gaggle. General Shaparov complimented Chickering and the pilots.

The Korean Incident

By Fall 1950, Dief was an instructor in ground school at Williams AFB, Arizona. There had been a Reduction in Force (RIF) beginning in 1949, and Dief chose to remain in the Air Force, albeit not on flying status. The day after North Korea invaded South Korea on June 25, 1950, Dief was offered the opportunity to get back to flying status if he volunteered for Korea. He volunteered, got current in the AT-6 and the F-80, and was sent to Nellis AFB, Nev., for a month of gunnery school. Afterwards, he was sent to Camp Stoneman, Calif., to wait for deployment. A week or so later, he boarded a C-54 for the long flight to Japan.

Dief was assigned to the 49th Fighter Bomber Group stationed at Taegu, Korea, designated K-2. He was assigned to the 9th Fighter Bomber Squadron, A Flight. By October 7, Dief had flown four missions, mostly attacking marshalling yards and targets of opportunity in North Korea. It was his fifth



By the time of the Korean conflict, Diefendorf was a first lieutenant and flying Lockheed P-80 Shooting Stars. He was assigned to the 49th Fighter Bomber Group based at Taegu, Korea (K-2). (USAF photo from the Gerald Balzer collection, AAHS archive)

mission that Dief refers to as, “the Cruncher.”

On October 8, the 9th Squadron was scheduled for an afternoon mission. In the briefing tent, the pilots found that the mission was a long range one to recon a possible airfield at Chongjin, north-northeast of Taegu and about 60 miles south of the narrow USSR-North Korea border. There had been several other missions there recently, but nothing was sighted.

At the briefing, a message from the commander Fifth Air Force was supposedly read that said to the effect – stay away from the Manchurian border, as some American flyers had (hearsay) made some violations. They were to avoid all incidents that might provoke the Red Chinese. It should be noted that when asked later, none of the pilots remembered hearing those instructions.

The flight leader examined a very flimsy target folder and the post mission reports indicated no activity at Chongjin. The weather was lousy, and flying over an undercast, the flyers wouldn’t be able to see the ground, added to this there would be no radio aid assistance and no radar help.

The winds aloft were briefed to be about 100 mph at 30,000 feet from the northwest. (They were never even close to being accurate.)

The #4 ship aborted on the ramp, so that left three aircraft to launch. They climbed through the overcast to get to the top, which was at 37,000 feet, somewhat higher than predicted. The flight leader reported a rough engine and told #3 (Lt. Al Quanbeck) to take over, and that he was returning home. Dief flew his wing and they were now a flight of two.

After flying time and distance, and judging wind speed, the flight leader started a descent a little earlier since the aircraft were 7,000 feet higher. The pilots throttled back and weaved their way through the multilayered clouds. Due to the clouds, Dief was flying a close wing position, and he knew that Quanbeck was doing all of the looking around. They

found a hole and circled down, ending up almost on the deck. Quanbeck spotted a truck going down a road and was thinking of getting it when Dief saw something that flashed off of his left wing. He then looked right and saw a sod airfield with aircraft lined up on both sides. He called it out and they went for it. The parked aircraft were wing tip to wing tip and had red stars with white borders, painted a dull brown. Dief was sure that they were P-39s, having flown them, and of course knew of the Lend Lease program to the Russians during WWII. The Pilots in their F-80s lined up quickly and each of them went down a line of the aircraft with their six 50s wide open and watching their hits. On their third and final run across the airfield, each pilot picked out a particular airplane as a target. Dief saw his target get hit causing the nose wheel to collapse and followed by smoke.

The F-80s were by that time minimum fuel, so they took off on their briefed heading for home. Dief could see water over his left shoulder but didn’t think too much about it at the time. He did hear Misawa tower loud and clear on the VHF radio. The pilots climbed and flew with no one answering their calls. They were on top at 37,000 feet and iced up so badly that they had to scrape holes in the canopy with their gloves in order to get a peek hole so they could see each other. Finally, they picked up a weak signal from the Taegu radio beacon, and it showed a sharp correction to the right. Radio contact was finally established and they requested for homing directions that established the new heading. The new heading confirmed the fact that the winds aloft were a jet stream with a velocity that was of outrageous proportions.

The pilots let down and throttled back while still scraping frost from the inside of the canopy. They saw the field and made a 360-degree pattern. The pilots landed safely, though long overdue. Dief actually flamed out while taxiing into the parking area.

The Wing Commander and the Group Operations Officer were there to meet them. The word got around from the crew chiefs and armorers that the guns on the F-80s had been fired. Dief and Quanbeck were debriefed in Intelligence, holding nothing back, and tiredly went to supper. While eating, they were informed that General Partridge, Fifth Air Force Commander, wanted to see them.

They got a jeep and drove the few miles to the city of Taegu where his headquarters was located. He and his staff were very nice and polite, and the pilots told them exactly what had transpired during the mission. The staff showed the pilots maps and pictures that they never knew existed, and that should have been available to aircrews. Dief and Quanbeck drew pictures of the airfield that they had attacked.

The gist of the meeting, Dief thought, was that the General and his staff thought that the pilots had attacked an airfield that might have been inside Russia, just south of Vladivostok, at a place called Rashin. The terrain features were the same, and with a 200-mph tail wind the pilots figured that it could have happened that way.

The pilots drove home silently, not knowing what was going on but were both so tired that they didn't care at the time. Quanbeck flew a mission the next day with nothing to report, and Dief didn't fly. The following day, October 10, Quanbeck was scheduled by Fifth Air Force to fly in a B-26 to reconnaissance mission to the Chongjin area. It was a clear day but no enemy activity was sighted. When Quanbeck returned, Dief met him on the tarmac and told him that they were in trouble.

The Russians had complained about the air attack, and newspapers all over the United States were jumping on the story. "Moscow says U.S. jets strafed Russian airfield!" It got to the United Nations in New York. The Russian protest insisted on strict punishment of those involved and wanted assurances that nothing like this would happen again. General Partridge had no choice but to launch an investigation. He sent his Inspector General down to interview Dief and Quanbeck, and others and to collect the facts. A few days later, on October 15, a very disturbed President Truman had met General MacArthur at Wake Island. (ABC TV dramatized this meeting in a network presentation entitled *Collision Course: Truman vs. MacArthur*, a Drama based on Historical Fact. Ernest Kirov, November 5th, 1975. Wolfen Productions.) In the ABC show, President Truman was quite unhappy with the two Air Force pilots involved in the incident.

Also, at this time, Dief and Quanbeck had been identified at the United Nations. Their names were spread in the papers and radio media around the world. They had been grounded and were in limbo until another investigating officer had been appointed, and it started all over again. After several days of testimony and listening to others, this particular investigation was ended. The investigating officer found no direct evidence and noted that trial by Court Martial could not be recommended.

Unfortunately, people in Washington, D.C., were playing by a different script, and the pilots found out that they were going to trial. The date for a General Court Martial was set for November 18, 1950, at Nagoya, Japan, at Fifth Air Force headquarters. This was 40 days after the mission.

A fellow pilot in the squadron recommended a JAG (Judge Advocate General) attorney in Taegu, so Dief and Quanbeck visited the attorney, Lt. Col. Bernard Katz, and asked him to take their case. Since the attorney was on the Commander's staff, he had to clear it with the higher ups. They gave him permission, and Dief and Quanbeck spent a lot of time with Katz after that.

The big day finally arrived and the courtroom at the Nagoya HQ "had everything but a firing squad hidden in the corner" as Dief later said. The government accused the two pilots of three violations under Article 96, the military catch-all; two specifications for violations of written orders, and one for "wrongfully, negligently, carelessly, and recklessly attacking a neutral airfield."

The prosecution presented a series of witnesses (no Russians) and rested their case in mid-afternoon.

Lt. Colonel Katz then stood up and, as Dief says, "fired his big guns." He told the court that Dief and Quanbeck had nothing to defend, that there was no proof to support any of the alleged violations, and so forth. After several closures of the court, the verdict was not guilty of the specifications and charges. The Group Commander was promoted up to the Fifth Air Force Advanced Echelon. Dief and Quanbeck thought that their being grounded was punishment enough, along with suffering the tension and sweat for such a long period of time.

The trial proceedings were classified, and the results were never released – not even the fact that there was a trial.

According to Lt. Col. Fletcher Prouty, who served as a USAF aide to the Joint Chiefs of Staff at the time, "Because they never expected an attack by us in that area, the Russians had no antiaircraft, no missiles and no jet aircraft to defend that small field. I'm sure their radar had tracked our two F-80's in and then probably lost them in ground clutter."

By map references, the small Soviet airfield is only 62 air miles from the Korean border, and only 40 miles from Vladivostok, a major USSR port city. Despite the briefing and what appeared to be an obvious error, the intelligence men got on the hotline to higher HQ that included MacArthur's staff in Tokyo.

MacArthur's chief of intelligence personally briefed President Truman in a top-secret session. His report to Truman noted: "The USSR would find it both convenient and economical to stay out of the conflict, but to let the idle millions of Communist China perform the task as part of the master plan to drain United States resources into geographical rat holes of the Orient...No, the Soviet Union will not enter the conflict in any direct fashion." Indeed, Josef Stalin decided to disengage a good bit, and on October 22, 1950, ordered the USSR military to slow aid and supplies to North Korea in a sign to Washington that the Soviets did not wish to escalate tensions over the issue. (Truby 2007, 60-62)

Some U.S. officials theorized that the attack was intentional, that it was planned and carried out in order to send a message to Russia, essentially to say, "We can reach you." There is no evidence of this, but the "planned secret mission" theory gained momentum when Stalin began his disengagement of supplying the North Korean military on October 22. The only official

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The accused Diefendorf was then arraigned upon the following charge and specifications:

CHARGE: Violation of the 96th Article of War.

SPECIFICATION 1: In that First Lieutenant Allen J. Diefendorf, 9th Fighter Bomber Squadron, 49th Fighter Bomber Group, APO 970, having been ordered by written Operations Order No. 8-50, Headquarters 6149th Tactical Support Wing, APO 970, dated on or about 8 October 1950, to "remain well clear of the Manchurian border unless specifically authorized by this Headquarters", did, on or about 8 October 1950 in the Korean Theater of Operations, wrongfully violate said order by piloting a military aircraft across the Manchurian border without authority.

SPECIFICATION 2: In that First Lieutenant Allen J. Diefendorf, 9th Fighter Bomber Squadron, 49th Fighter Bomber Group, APO 970, having received a directive KP-QPR. 215, dated on or about 29 September 1950, from Commanding General, Fifth Air Force in Korea to "make no attack unless target is positively identified", did, on or about 8 October 1950, in the Korean Theater of Operations, wrongfully violate said directive.

SPECIFICATION 3: In that First Lieutenant Allen J. Diefendorf, 9th Fighter Bomber Squadron, 49th Fighter Bomber Group, APO 970, did, at or near Sukhaya Rechka in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republic, on or about 8 October 1950, while piloting a military aircraft of the United States, wrongfully, negligently, carelessly and recklessly attack by strafing a neutral airfield and aircraft thereon, property located within the boundaries of, belonging to and under the jurisdiction of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republic, a country at peace with the United States.

The charges and specification brought against 1st Lt. Allen J. Diefendorf. (From the A.J. Diefendorf archive)

explanation ever presented by the U.S. at the time was offered by General MacArthur's HQ, which termed the incident "... an accident due to weather, navigational error, and poor judgment on the part of the pilots." President Truman offered to pay for the damaged aircraft. In view of their Lend-Lease origins, the President probably did this with great tongue in cheek; so much for the top-level diplomacy. (Truby 2007, 62)

The Air Force investigating officer concluded that there wasn't any real evidence of deliberate wrongdoing, and recommended that no charges be filed. However, because of the political pressure from people in Washington, the Air Force recommended a full court martial. At the time, Diefendorf and Quanbeck remembered, "It may have been an international show for the big guys, but it was very real and personal for us. That court-martial had us worried because the USAF was our career and our life, for both of us." Diefendorf recalled, "One of our flight leaders suggested we retain Lt. Col. Bernard Katz from Fifth Air Force JAG as defense counsel. We did, and he really was a first-class lawyer for us, despite the political pressures not to be. When we got Katz on our side, things began to be very much different and positive for Quanbeck and me. His work in and out of the court was just great. He was a helluva defense attorney and reduced the case against us to mush." (Truby 2007, 62)

The transcript of the defense attorney's closing arguments of the Court Martial hearing make for interesting reading. The following is the transcript.:

The prosecution rests.

DEFENSE: If the court please, I now renew my motion to strike from the record Prosecution Exhibits 3, 6, and 7, upon the grounds that the prosecution has failed to

establish a corpus delicti.

LAW MEMBER: The motion is overruled.

DEFENSE: I now move you for a finding of not guilty on all specifications and the charge with respect to both of these accused. In spite of my usual loquacity, I have no intention of taking any extended time to argue this motion. If this case present one single element, one single element, of proof upon which this court can make a finding of guilty, then I am prepared to surrender my admission certificate to practice law.

The accused are charged first – not in this order, but first and foremost – with having strafed a Russian airfield. Is there any evidence in this case that any airfield was strafed, except the evidence that appears from Prosecution Exhibits 3 and 6? And further, to rely entirely upon that evidence, then the airfield that was struck was in Korea. These accused are charged with violating an order, and order to positively identify a target. If you are willing to accept Government Exhibits 3 and 6, they did positively identify a target, and they did strafe a target that they positively identified. They identified it as a North Korean airfield, on which was contained certain aircraft, bearing the mark of a star. They had been briefed that any aircraft marked with a star found in North Korea was good game, whether it was on the designated target is unimportant. Testimony reveals – and we all know – that targets of opportunity are resorted to more particularly in the Korean effort than the designated targets. And so, if you are to take the Governments Exhibits 3 and 6 as evidence, they did identify the target and maybe they are proud that they strafed that airfield where they found twenty aircraft, and I wouldn't expect to find them there the following day. If they sent that B-26 pilot up there, he came back with what everyone would expect – no target. They certainly wouldn't permit those aircraft to remain at Rashin when they had been discovered. Now, is there any evidence that these men violated the order to positively identify the target? Is there any evidence that they did not strike a legitimate target? None whatever!

They are also charged with violating the Manchurian border. I suggest to you gentlemen that the Government couldn't make up its mind whether they wanted to charge these men with striking a Russian airfield or violating the Manchurian border, so they charged them with everything in the book, so to speak. Now, if they went up to Russia, as the Government alleged, they didn't and couldn't have violated the Manchurian border. If you will examine the map you will find that at a certain point here (indicating), the Manchurian border is inland and west, if they were to go up to the airfield alleged, in Russia, they would not have violated the Manchurian border. And so, the Government has attempted to put these men in Manchuria on one count and in Russia on another count.

I want to say this to the court; we have nothing to defend. We have been charged with three violations.

There is no proof to support any one of these violations. What would you expect us to do if we were called upon to present proof? Nobody has said that we were in Russia. Nobody has said that we violated the Manchurian border. Should we come in, should we put witnesses on the stand to say that we didn't strafe an airfield in Russia, when nobody has said that we did? And so, I submit to you, gentlemen, that this is the time to decide the issues – right here and now. The Government has failed to prove the charge and the specifications as alleged, and, I might even add, if these things did happen, the Government hasn't proved it, and therefore, we are entitled at this moment to a finding of not guilty.

PROSECUTION: I wish to point out to the court some matters on this map. We have a photographic mission flown from the Siberian border to Kilchu on the morning of the 9th of October. No airfield was found anywhere in that area, with the exception of an airfield at Ch'ongjin. The photo interpreter has testified that a picture taken of that airfield on the next morning, the 9th of October, on that picture he could detect no sign of recent activity. If aircraft had been destroyed there the day before, certainly there would have been wreckage there. There was nothing seen on that field at all. There were no other fields in this area at all. He has so testified.

One other point I want to bring out is this. I think that is important. The accused have testified – they have not testified, but the evidence indicates that they stated that immediately upon leaving the target they saw a large island off their left wing, which led them to believe that they were at Rashin; Rashin is at the point marked No 2. There is no airfield in that area. That was established by the testimony of Lt. Rutledge. There is only one other point on this entire coast that you could strafe an airfield and upon leaving the airfield see a large island off your left wing, and this is the area at position No 1, Sukhaya Rechka. No other place on this course down to Kilchu is that possible. There is an island at Rashin, a number of islands off the coast from Sukhaya Rechka; there is no other place along this coast where there is an island. They could not have been at Rashin because of the fact that there is no airfield there. By a simple deduction that leaves us only the airfield at Sukhaya Rechka. That is all I have.

DEFENSE: Just one further moment. Who has said that there is an airfield at the place which only Major Cheney can pronounce? Who did they bring into this court to testify that there is an airfield there? They say there is no airfield at Rashin. We say there is. That is a matter of dispute. There is no dispute about the airfield in Russia; nobody says that there is an airfield there and we agree with that. Maybe there is not a airfield there, but we agree that there was nobody available who could say so. Now, it is all very well to say that they couldn't have hit anything here (indicating), because they were there (indicating). But the Government at this juncture is charged to present a prima facie case. It isn't proved

in the negative that because this couldn't have happened, something else must have happened. They must offer some affirmative proof to establish a prima facie case.

In closing, for the benefit of all of the members of the court, as the law member has instructed you in relation to the receipt of the statements in evidence, at page 159, top of the page, in the Manual for Courts-Martial:

“An accused cannot be legally convicted upon his uncorroborated confession. A court may not consider the confession of an accused as evidence against him unless there is in the record other evidence, either direct or circumstantial, that the offense charged has probably been committed . . . “

Probably, gentlemen, does not allow of any speculation. To continue,

“In other words, there must be substantial evidence of the corpus delicti other than the confession. Other confessions or admissions of the accused are not such corroborative evidence.”

In other words, if they had four confessions from one man, one confession does not corroborate the other.

“Usually the corroborative evidence is introduced before evidence of the confession. . . “

I will omit the rest of that; that deals with other matters.

“This evidence of the corpus delicti need not be sufficient of itself to convince beyond reasonable doubt that the offense charged has been committed, or to cover every element of the charge . . . ”

It is only necessary to establish that the offense was probably committed.

PROSECUTION: Nothing further.

The court was closed.

LAW Member: Subject to objection by any member of the court, the motion of the defense as to a finding of not guilty of all specifications and the charge as to both accused is sustained.

Lt. Col. Olmstead: I object to that ruling

The court was closed.

The court was opened.

PRESIDENT: The court, in closed session and upon secret written ballot, voted to sustain the motion of the defense for a finding of not guilty as to all specifications and the charge as to accused Lt. Quanbeck and Lt. Diefendorf.

The two men, having been found not guilty of the charges, were reassigned from the 49th FBG. Lt. Quanbeck went to Nagoya as an aide to General Spivey, commanding general of the 314th Air Division, while Lt. Diefendorf was assigned

to an F-80 squadron at Misawa, Japan, and from there to the Philippines.

Earlier, on October 15, President Truman and General MacArthur held their famous meeting on Wake Island. This conference, according to Truman, was called by him “to get the benefit of MacArthur’s first-hand information and judgment on Korea, as well as to let him see the world-wide picture as we saw it in Washington.”

John W. Spanier, in the 1959 book *The Truman-MacArthur Controversy and the Korean War*, surmises that the main reason for the October 15 Wake Island meeting might have been the attack of October 8 on the Russian airbase by Diefendorf and Quanbeck. Spanier advanced the following rationale to support his theory: “Though the Truman memoirs nor the official MacArthur biography give any clues for scheduling the conference on October 15, 1950, the timing does not seem to be totally unconnected to an attack on October 8 by two United States F-80 Shooting Stars on a Soviet Airbase in Siberia. This base was not located on the Korean frontier, but 60 miles north inside Russian territory and 18 miles southwest of Vladivostok.” He continued, “... was this attack ... responsible for the President’s sudden decision to meet General MacArthur on the weekend of the fifteenth? The attack took place on October 8. The Soviet Government protested the attack on October 10. The Presidential flight was announced the same day. The conference, which lasted for only a few hours on October 15, resulted in the note from MacArthur’s office blaming the ‘accidental attack’ on ‘navigation error and poor judgement.’”

Speaking to Allen J. Diefendorf and re-reading the newspaper accounts of the incident, one gets the feeling that the Air Force was not too serious in its prosecution of the two pilots. The trial was a mere formality, probably done more to appease the Russians than court-martial Diefendorf and Quanbeck. (Bauer 1990, 41)

Conclusion

At the conclusion of his assignment with the 314th Air Division, Al Quanbeck taught at the U.S. Military Academy and the U.S. Air Force Academy. He earned a PhD and worked at the Pentagon as a strategic weapons planner. His last assignment was as a systems analyst for the Secretary of Defense during the Vietnam War. He retired in 1970 as a full Colonel, and went to work for the CIA until retiring to a farm in Virginia.

Allen J. Diefendorf continued flying F-80s while stationed in Japan. While at Clark AFB, Philippines, he helped organize and lead the *Silver Stars*, an acrobatic team similar to the Acrojets. Flying F-80s, the *Silver Stars* performed throughout the Philippines.

Dief was reassigned to Alexandria AFB, La., in 1953, where he flew the F-86F and the F-84F. In 1957 he was reassigned from Alexandria (renamed England AFB in 1955) to Shaw AFB, S.C., where he flew the F-100. These years were filled with air-to-air and ground gunnery training, squadron and group competitions, fire power demonstrations and numerous air shows. In 1960, Dief was assigned to the 4th Allied Tactical Air Forces (ATAF) at Ramstein AFB, Germany. He kept up his flying hours in the F-4 Phantom.

In 1964, Dief was reassigned to MacDill AFB, Fla., as commander of the 557th Tactical Fighter Squadron, 12th TFW. From MacDill, the Wing was sent to Cam Ranh Bay, Vietnam, where he flew 142 combat missions in the F-4C. After his tour, he went back to Ramstein to 17th Air Force Headquarters, followed by an assignment back at Shaw AFB, to 9th Air Force Headquarters. Finally, in 1971, he landed at the Office of Safety and Inspection at Norton AFB, Calif., where he worked for Robin Olds and Chuck Yeager.

In 1975 Dief retired from the Air Force as a full Colonel, a veteran of more than 220 combat missions in three wars. Of those missions, the raid on von Rundstedt’s castle and on the Soviet air base stand out. Allen J. Diefendorf passed away on December 11, 1996. He is interred at Riverside National Cemetery in Riverside, California. ➔

Endnotes

- 1 Patton, George S., *War as I Knew It* Houghton Mifflin Co. 1975.
- 2 Speer, Albert *Inside the Third Reich* Simon & Schuster, Inc. 1970, pp. 440-441.

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- Bauer, Daniel “The Pilots That Nearly Started WWII” *Air Classics* Vol. 26, No. 4, April, 1990.
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About the Author



David C. Diefendorf is the middle son of Allen J. Diefendorf, who, as a fighter pilot, flew combat missions in WWII, Korea, and Vietnam. Years after retirement from the Air Force, Dief wrote his memoirs for his family. He added to the memoirs as he recalled events until his death in 1996. Upon his own retirement from teaching 2017, David decided to edit his father’s memoirs while expanding on the content by including examples of communications, photos, documents (general orders, flight records, combat records, commendations) personal letters, newspaper clippings, and so much more, of a career that spanned 34 years. David takes keen interest in military history and is a prolific reader of such. He is currently editing a fictional account which Allen J. Diefendorf wrote years ago concerning the Spanish-American War.