

THE FIGHTER ACE ASSOCIATION

Submitted by GEORGE J. LETZTER

THE AMERICAN FIGHTER ACES ASSOCIATION
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During the first World War, the airplane became a primary weapon system. True, the earliest flights were strictly observation missions, but it was inevitable that English and French air crews would sight German aircraft. Eventually they flew close enough to exchange a friendly wave. The knights of medieval days had progressed to become knights of the air. However, just as in rugby, cricket, or football, the gentle thoughts of the adversaries took a violent turn and means were rapidly devised to crush the enemy. Finally, at one historic meeting, a pistol was drawn and shots actually fired. The race was on, and some 47 years later the limits still have not been reached.

The French were the first to recognize the most successful pilots of aerial combat in World War I. They bestowed the "Ace" designation upon their pilots when a tenth aerial kill was accomplished. It was in the form of a "knighthood" and was considered perhaps the most glamorous distinction man could achieve.

The British, too, informally recognized ten aerial victories as qualifying for "acedom" although nothing official ever developed. It was not until the Americans joined the combat that the greatest impetus was exhibited and the A.E.F. arbitrarily established five aerial victories as qualifying one as an ace. The Germans were seriously engaged in war at this time and gave little thought toward establishing such a term as "ace", but they did bestow a form of knighthood upon their more successful pilots.

Between World War I and the outbreak of World War II in 1939, the world came to tacitly accept the figure of 5 aerial kills as qualifying one for "acedom". This figure, which remained the standard during World War II and Korea, still stands and is generally recognized although no country has a hard and fast method of decorating or otherwise recognizing the fifth kill for each pilot. The USAF sometimes awarded a Distinguished Flying Cross or Air Medal, sometimes nothing.

The German Air Force gave the Iron Cross at times, nothing other times. On the Russian front in 1943-44, the German pilot had to make 100 kills to win the Knight's Cross.

Today there are about 2500 pilots living of the approximately 9500 who qualified as Aces between 1915 and 1953. Due to the changed state of the art of aerial combat, it is quite likely that the door to the elite fraternity of Aces is now closed.

To perpetuate this fraternity, on 23 September 1960 at San Francisco, California, a group of men gathered together in a common cause - the reunion of America's Fighter Aces. It was the first known attempt to organize such a meeting and the degree of success was encouraging. Nearly 100 of the elite fraternity elected their officers, selected Captain Edward V. Rickenbacker (top American Ace of World War I) as their Honorary Chairman, debated for hours before finally determining their purpose and objectives, and defined several projects to be undertaken.

First, however, it was determined that to be eligible to be a member of this singular association, as a fighter pilot at the controls of a fighter plane, one must have destroyed five or more enemy aircraft in air-to-air combat. This ruled out all credits claimed for aircraft destroyed on the ground (during straffing runs, etc.) and made membership available only to the true Knights of the Air with five aerial kills accredited.

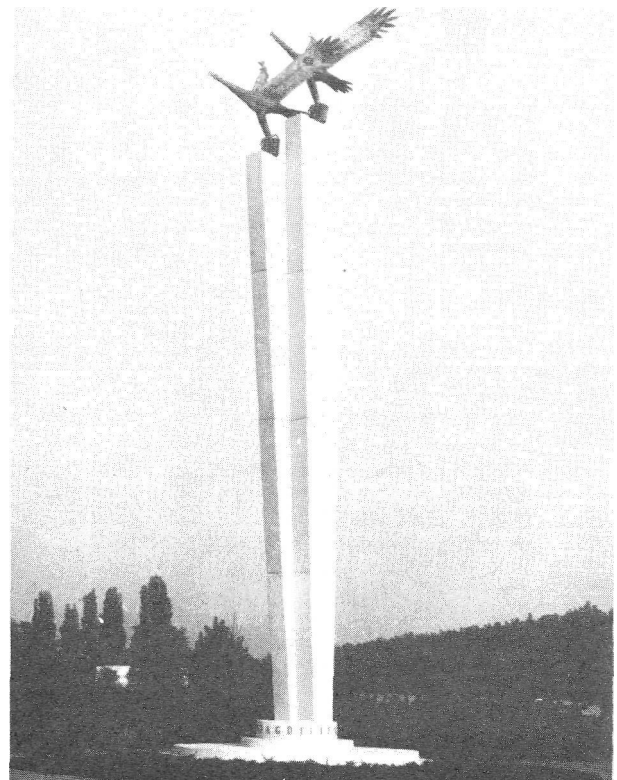
The first year of the life of this young organization was typically difficult. Membership increased

slowly but the word was getting around. In January, 1961 the officers of the Association made known to the German Fighter Pilots Association that they would like to participate in the erection of the beautiful monument to the Fallen Fighter Pilots of World War II then being erected at Geisenheim on the Rhine River. In May, 1961, five of the American Aces flew to Germany and on the 10th day of the month, in a driving rainstorm, paid homage to the fallen eagles. Hosting for the German Fighter Pilots Association were Werner Andres, President, General Adolph Galland, a past president and well known General of the Fighters of World War II.

The first annual meeting of the American Fighter Aces Association was held at Philadelphia in conjunction with the Air Force Association Annual Convention in September, 1961. 1962 has been earmarked by the Association as a recruiting year - everyone will go all out to get as many of the eligibles into the Association as possible. Further, a meeting with the Japanese Fighter Pilots appears to be on the horizon for 1962. Still further, the Canadians have expressed an interest in forming an Aces Association and the American unit is giving full assistance, encouragement and cooperation.

The next meeting will take place in Las Vegas, Nevada, again in conjunction with the Air Force Association Annual Convention. The Aces Association at the present time boasts nearly 200 members, including Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, AVG and Eagle Squadron personnel, as well as Aces from World War I and Korea. All applicants are requested to direct their questions or requests to the American Fighter Aces Association, P.O. Box 565, Ben Franklin Station, Washington 4, D.C.

(1) Col. Toliver's activities in the USAF were described briefly in the JOURNAL, Vol. 6, No. 3 (Fall 1961)



Monument to the Fallen Fighter Pilots of WWII, Geisenheim, Rhine River, Germany



Members attending first meeting of American Fighter Ace Assn.

ROW 1

Col. Francis S. Gabreski, 37-1/2, WW-II, Korea
Col. Walker N. Mahurin, 25-1/2, WW-II, Korea
Col. Jack T. Bradley, 19, WW-II
Col. George F. Ceuleers, 14, WW-II
Jim Brooks, 13, WW-II, Korea
Cdr. Gene Valencia, 2k, WW-II, Korea

ROW 2

Col. Glenn T. Eagleston, 20-1/2, WW-II
Cdr. J. R. Strane, 13, WW-II
Col. Joel B. Paris, 9, WW-II
Lt. Col. Charles E. Yeager, 11-1/2, WW-II
Lt. Col. Harold E. Comstock, 5, WW-II
Col. Gerald W. Johnson, 18, WW-II
Col. Robert R. Rowland, 8, WW-II

ROW 3

Robert S. Johnson, 28, WW-II
Kenneth Dahlberg, 15, WW-II
Lt. Col. Wilbur R. Scheible, 9, WW-II
Col. John S. Stewart, 9, WW-II
John W. McGuyrt, 5, WW-II
Maj. Steve N. Pisanos, 10, WW-II
Maj. Sammy A. Pierce, 7, WW-II
Maj. John L. Sublett, 8, WW-II
Col. Robert L. Baseler, 6, WW-II

ROW 4

Col. George Laven, Jr., 5, WW-II
Lt. Col. Frank L. Gailer, Jr., 6-1/2, WW-II
Col. Barley C. Vaughn, 7, WW-II
Maj. William J. Sloan, 12, WW-II
Lt. Col. Joseph M. Forster, 9, WW-II
Lt. Col. Bruce W. Carr, 25-1/2, WW-II
Col. H. A. Paxton, Jr., 6-1/2, WW-II
Col. George L. Jones, 6-1/2, Korea
Lt. Col. Joseph T. McKeon, 8, WW-II

Lt. Col. Samuel V. Blair, 7, WW-II
Lt. Col. James B. Tapp, 8, WW-II

ROW 5

MSgt. Charles W. Anderson, 6, WW-II
Dr. Clayton K. Gross, 6, WW-II
Brig. Gen. Willard W. Millikan, 15, WW-II
Lt. Col. Eugene O'Neill, Jr., 5, WW-II
Frank E. McCauley, 5-1/2, WW-II
John W. Mitchell, 16, WW-II, Korea
Ralph J. Watson, 5, WW-II
Col. Joseph H. Griffin, 7, WW-II
Lt. Col. William H. Lewis, 8, WW-II
Lt. Col. Merle M. Coons, 5, WW-II
Lt. Col. Royce W. Priest, 5, WW-II

ROW 6

Major Carl J. Luksic, 18-1/2, WW-II
Lt. Col. William T. Whisner, 21, WW-II, Korea
Major Robert Ammon, 5, WW-II
Col. George D. Mobbs, 6, WW-II
Lt. Col. Harry C. Crim, Jr., 6, WW-II
Lt. Col. James Jabara, 18-1/2, WW-II, Korea
Lt. Col. Vernon T. Garrison, 21, WW-II, Korea
Sidney S. Woods, 12, WW-II
Col. J. K. Johnson, 11, WW-II

ROW 7

Lt. Col. Henry W. Brown, 32, WW-II
Lt. Col. Frank Klibbe, 7, WW-II
R. Morris, 14, WW-II
Major R. Goebel, 11, WW-II
Major Clayton E. Davis, 7-1/2, WW-II
Major John M. Simmons, 7, WW-II
Lt. Col. Robbie Risner, 8, Korea
Col. Clayton Isaacson, 5, WW-II, Korea
Lt. Col. J. W. Jorda, 5, WW-II
Major Philip B. Porter, 5, WW-II