

# DFC Society Newsletter

Volume 25, Issue 2, December 2025

2025 Scholarship  
Awards

F-15E: From Eaglet to  
Predator, Part 1

Newsletter  
format change



THE  
DISTINGUISHED  
FLYING CROSS  
SOCIETY

**Distinguished Flying Cross Society Newsletter**  
**Volume 25, Issue 2, December 2025**  
website: [dfcsociety.org](http://dfcsociety.org)

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Also, there are links embedded in the Newsletter, below.  
Point and click.*

**Cover photo:** The McDonnell Douglas F-15E Strike Eagle

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## CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE



John Whiddon

Welcome to the first edition of the DFCS *Newsletter*. We hope that this newsletter will provide you with many of the same features that you have come to expect from our printed DFCS *Magazine*. As you may know, Lew Jennings, our longtime editor of the DFCS *Magazine* has been dealing with serious medical challenges and is unable to edit the magazine. Dr. Jay Miller, with help from Jim Davis and Ron Bartlett, has stepped in to create this newsletter. The goal is to deliver the newsletter quarterly, which will allow us to provide timely information and updates about the DFCS and its members directly to your inbox.

Several changes have been introduced this year that have improved and streamlined our organization. The [Neon One](#) internet platform was launched in October. It allows each member to access their own member portal and update or change personal information. The new-look [website](#) was also launched in October and is being updated continually. Websites are often described as the “front door” to an organization. Our website is intended to provide insights into the DFCS and to share information about our mission, our members and the services we provide.

Changing to a 501(c)(3) allowed the DFCS to expand membership opportunities. The recent adoption of bylaw changes will enable us to expand our membership by expanding opportunities for Associate Members and corporate sponsors.

I have been in touch with several veterans organizations to determine if we share common interests and to explore opportunities to collaborate where it makes sense to do so. There will be more to come in this area soon as we look to expand our reach. One example of collaboration is the possibility of working with Auburn University's Aviation program to help provide opportunities for middle school and high school students to attend their week long aviation summer camp.

It has been a privilege to serve as your Board Chairman for the past year. The more conversations I have with members, the more I realize how remarkable our members really are—not just for your aviation accomplishments, but for what you have achieved after your military careers.

Finally, as we approach the holiday season, Lauri and I extend our best wishes and blessings for the season.

Sincerely,

*John*

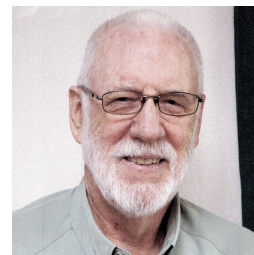
John Whiddon

Chairman, Distinguished Flying Cross Society

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## EDITOR'S CORNER

As you may have read in recent DFCS communications, the highly-skilled editor of the *DFCS News Magazine*, Lew Jennings, is no longer able to continue in that role as he is dealing with serious health issues. He's doing pretty well at present, but keep him in your thoughts and prayers. Our final issue of the printed *Magazine* was Summer 2025. Lacking Lew's expertise, the Board has opted to switch to this quarterly newsletter in PDF file format to keep you informed of DFCS happenings. Lew continues to provide assistance and insight for the new format of the *Newsletter*.



James C. Miller

In this issue, **DFCS Chairman** John Whiddon discusses change to the Society's organization and internet presence, and opportunities to grow our membership.

In the **News**, the 2025 DFCS **Reunion** was a success. We have **scholarship** winners! The **Ira C. Eaker Chapter** dedicated a DFC Monument for the Arkansas State Veterans Cemetery. Fifteen **Army Aviation** heroes were awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross, 34 years after action. Send us your news stories: [editor@dfcsociety.org](mailto:editor@dfcsociety.org).

The DFC Society has promoted and funded [scholarship programs](#) since 1998, making awards annually to outstanding students. The students have all been direct descendants or legally adopted children of DFC Society members. There are two types of one-year scholarships: funds can be applied to either an academic institution or a vocational/technical institution.

This issue's **Featured Article** on the McDonnell-Douglas F-15E Strike Eagle was prepared under editor Lew Jennings' guidance for publication in the December *News Magazine*. It is lengthy, so I've split it into three parts for the *Newsletter*. Part 1, included here, is followed by DFC citations for missions flown in the F-15E. These awards were made to some of our younger members who faced peril in combat.

Members are invited to write articles to appear in the *Newsletter*. We seek anecdotes from your aviation career and your descriptions of aircraft. Anecdotes should include some background information: where you are from, how you came to join the military, your aviation training, etc. Follow up with some information about your subsequent career and life. Aircraft descriptions should start with how the aircraft came to be, such as need, planning, and first flight, and end with later models and variants. Don't worry if your writing is a bit rough. We'll wordsmith it with you and make helpful suggestions. Send drafts to [editor@dfcsociety.org](mailto:editor@dfcsociety.org).

Sadly, our **Taps** section continues to grow. A large proportion of us are Vietnam veterans, and we are getting pretty old.

Be sure to check the **Book Nook**. Three new books are listed there. Our members continue to produce good reads!

I will introduce myself in the next (March) issue of this newsletter. But first...

## A Tribute to Lew Jennings

I found a 2004 posting for graduates of Cupertino High School in California. The after-graduation-plans caption below Lew's 1964 senior picture reads, "Own a surf shop." However, he reported that "I went into the Army [in 1967] as an infantry private, qualified for flight school, and graduated top of my class as a warrant officer." I asked Lew to send me his bio, which follows.

**Combat.** Lew was awarded over 50 combat decorations including three Distinguished Flying Crosses and 36 Air Medals. He flew 726 combat missions as an Army AH-1G Cobra gunship helicopter pilot in Vietnam 1969-70. Lew described his experiences in Vietnam in an [interview](#) with *American Warrior Radio*.

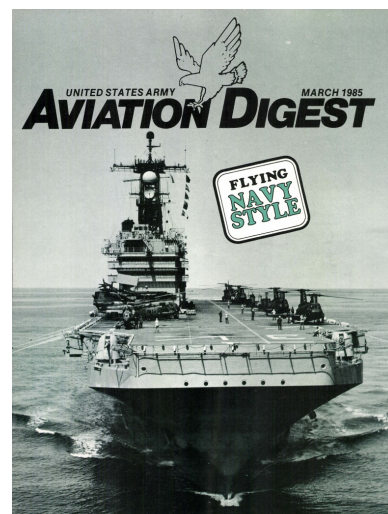


Left: CWO Jennings, Vietnam, 1969. Right: Lew Jennings (R), Mike Talton (L) and crew rearming their AH-1G Cobra, A Shau Valley, Vietnam, 1969

**Creating Doctrine.** In his Army career, Lew published Army aviation doctrine and training programs that won him much acclaim. He was named U.S. Army Europe's Aviator of the Year in 1975. He was then instrumental in redesigning Army aviation combat organizations for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, implemented world-wide.

Towards the end of his 20-years of active duty, Lew was assigned to the Navy and Marine Corps to coordinate helicopter and search and rescue operations for the Third and Seventh Fleets. Lew spent two years on sea duty assignments and published an article, "Flying Navy Style," describing how helicopters operated aboard U.S. Navy ships. The article was selected as the cover story for the Army's *Aviation Digest* (March 1985), an Army-wide aviation information and safety publication. Many aviation commands, especially those involved in Special Operations, made copies of the article to include in their training programs. (**Ed. Note:** a PDF copy of that article is available from the editor.)

Lew followed up that cover story by writing an in-depth study in 1985, examining the differences between the military services that were



undermining combat readiness. He recommended extensive changes in leadership, communications, education, training, equipment, and employment to enhance joint operations. His study was circulated up through the chain of command to the President, Secretary of Defense, Joint Chiefs of Staff, and Senate and House Armed Services Committees. The Joint Chiefs organized a task force to study his recommendations. Senator Barry Goldwater, Chief of the Senate Armed Services Committee, wrote Lew a personal letter of congratulations on his study and proposed legislation to implement and expand upon many of his recommendations.

That legislation, the [Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act](#) of 4 October 1986 implemented the most sweeping changes to the military since 1947 to improve and foster joint service operations. The Act established combat commands with a mix of forces from all the services, tailored to and trained for the mission and commanded by a 4-star general or admiral who reported directly to the Secretary of Defense. The Act also required any senior officer seeking flag rank (general or admiral) to complete a joint services tour of duty and specific education courses in joint operations.

"Publishing that study was my most important contribution to the national defense during my 20-year Army career," Lew recollected. "I was hoping the chain of command would seriously consider my recommendations, but I had no idea the study would foster so many radical changes in the military and directly contribute to the success of future combat operations in Panama, the Gulf War and beyond."

Because he published the study, Lew was threatened with court martial by his Navy superiors and confined to quarters for 59 days. That ended when the Commander, Naval Forces Pacific Fleet (COMNAVSURFPAC) had all charges dropped. Lew returned to work at the same Navy base, but this time with the Marine Corps Landing Force Training Command where he served with distinction as an Amphibious Aviation Operations Instructor and Assistant Curriculum Director until his retirement from active duty in the rank of Major in 1987.

**Civilian Life.** In his 2004 Cupertino HS post, Lew reported that "The following year [1988], I fulfilled a life-long dream becoming a commercial airline pilot flying Metroliner commuters for American Eagle out of San Francisco, and later DC-10 jumbo jets for World Airways and Malaysia Airlines out of Kuala Lumpur. I met my lovely wife Anneke on my return from Malaysia. We set up a training and education business in Seattle and later moved aboard our sailing Ketch, the *Unicorn*, our home for over 9 years. We sailed on many wondrous adventures from Canada to southern Mexico, and also did boat deliveries from the Virgin Islands to the Chesapeake on the east coast in between our company education and training projects.

"We finally settled near Puerto Vallarta, Mexico, where we built and operated a lovely bed and breakfast oceanfront resort (*Casa Mantaraya*) for several years. At this writing (September 2004) we've retired once again, sold our bed and breakfast, finished remodeling an older golf course home just north of Puerto Vallarta, and now I spend my time golfing, sailing, publishing a local boating and visitors guide for charity, working for community organizations and traveling north to visit family and friends when it gets too hot and wet down here in late summer." Later, back in the States...

Lew came out of retirement again at age 62 to join a group of "gray hairs," mostly retired military aviators and crews, to fly secret Intelligence, Surveillance, and (ISR) missions in Iraq (their Chief Pilot was 72). Lew did several tours in Kosovo and Iraq flying nearly 800 ISR and logistics missions. "We mostly flew at night with sophisticated camera and surveillance equipment catching bad guys doing bad things and notifying our active-duty and coalition military forces in real-time. We saved thousands of lives in the process."

Lew and Anneke now live near their kids, grandkids and new great grand daughter in the seaside town of Capitola CA on Monterey Bay.

**The Editor.** Lew “volunteered” to take over the DFC Society newsletter in 2017 at the insistence of then DFCS President Michael O’Neil and Chairman Bruce Huffman. They had read his book, [19 Minutes to Live— Helicopter Warfare in Vietnam](#), and thought he might be the right candidate to help develop the newsletter. He was a graduate of the prestigious Defense Information School specializing in print, photo and television journalism. He had also been an award-winning author for many years.

Lew thought the DFCS Newsletter would be a fun project with little effort required and accepted the assignment. “Little did I know that the ‘Type A’ warrior spirit in me would quickly take over, and the small newsletter would become a 116-page, full-color magazine requiring hundreds of hours of research, editing, layout and design to produce each issue. I was thrilled with the first edition back in the summer of 2018 and dedicated myself to trying to make each one even bigger and better and more appealing to the membership and public at large.” Lew published 15 editions of the magazine during his 8-year tenure as editor. Every edition featured a wide range of topics, each carefully edited and designed to be both informative and appealing to readers.

“Each edition was a labor of love, and I learned so much about military aviation history and the development of aviation in all the military services. And, of course, the courage and accomplishments of so many heroes who have been awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross. I am forever grateful to the Distinguished Flying Cross Society for allowing me to be the editor of the news magazine. My hope is that it contributed to the Society’s mission of preserve the rich heritage and historical narratives of those who are recipients of the DFC and educating the public, especially the youth of America, on the values of courage, patriotism and character.”

Thank you Lew!



Major Lew Jennings, USA (Ret.)

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## SUPPORT THE DFCS THIS GIVING TUESDAY

### Strengthening Our Mission Through Strategic Growth

John Whiddon, DFCS Chairman

Traditionally, the DFCS has held a Winter Donation Campaign using the donation envelope in our Winter Magazine. This year we are changing to online giving in collaboration with the **Giving Tuesday Campaign** on December 2nd.



Combining with **Giving Tuesday** reminds us of the power of collective generosity. It is a day when individuals and communities come together to support organizations that preserve our nation's history, honor our heroes, and serve those who have sacrificed in extraordinary ways. The **DFCS** stands among these organizations, committed to recognizing and supporting recipients of the Distinguished Flying Cross and their families.

As we look to the future, the DFCS has initiated steps to build a stronger, more sustainable organization—one that can expand its reach, deepen its impact, and continue to honor valorous aviation achievement for generations to come. This Giving Tuesday, we are asking for your support to help us take that next step.

**Why We Need Your Support Now.** The Distinguished Flying Cross Society is experiencing real challenges in terms of membership growth and revenue diversity. To build upon the opportunities that come with a 501(c)(3) organization, it is vital that we strengthen our internal infrastructure and prepare the organization for the future. This year's Giving Tuesday campaign goal is \$10,000 and will focus on funding two areas critical to our long-term sustainability and growth:

**1. Strategic Planning for Long-Term Sustainability.** The DFCS is initiating a comprehensive strategic-planning effort to ensure we can grow effectively and responsibly. This includes:

- Evaluating and improving organizational processes
- Identifying new opportunities to engage members across generations
- Expanding outreach to DFC recipients and families who may not yet know we exist.
- Preparing leadership transitions for continuity and institutional strength
- The development of marketing materials

**2. Training to Strengthen Operational Excellence.** Our volunteers and leaders are the backbone of the DFCS. To support them, we must invest in:

- Leadership and operational training
- Enhanced digital tools and communications processes.
- Continued implementation of modern membership management systems.
- Skill development for chapter leaders and volunteers

Thoughtful strategic planning will help us preserve the legacy of the Distinguished Flying Cross while positioning the Society for steady growth in the years ahead. These areas of investment will streamline operations, improve coordination, and empower the DFCS to serve members with even greater efficiency and professionalism.

**Your Gift Makes an Impact.** Every contribution—no matter the size—helps us build a stronger foundation for the future of the Distinguished Flying Cross Society. Your support:

- Preserves the stories and legacies of extraordinary heroism.
- Helps us reach more recipients and families.
- Strengthens the programs, events, and resources we provide.
- Ensures our organization continues to grow with purpose and integrity.

**Join Us This Giving Tuesday.** By contributing on Giving Tuesday, you join a community of supporters committed to honoring heroism in aviation and ensuring that the legacy and achievements of DFC recipients are preserved.

We invite you to stand with the Distinguished Flying Cross Society as we embark on this vital stage of growth. Our goal is to raise \$10,000 this December. Your donation will directly support the strategic planning and training initiatives needed to advance our mission and build a stronger, more resilient organization.

**Together, we can ensure that the Distinguished Flying Cross Society continues to thrive—honoring achievement in flight, preserving history, and supporting the next generation of aviation professionals.**

Thank you in advance for your generosity and commitment to our shared DFCS mission. Donate today at <https://dfcsociety.app.neoncrm.com/forms/donate>. Checks can be mailed to: Distinguished Flying Cross Society, PO Box 502408, San Diego, CA 92150

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## DFCS NEWS

### 2025 DFCS Reunion

The [2025 DFC Society reunion](#) in Charleston is a wrap! The theme, “Celebrating our 30-year legacy—charting our future,” was supported by the various chock talk speakers from the Army, Marines, Air Force, and Coast Guard who represented aviators from the Vietnam era to those that participated in the recent conflicts over Israel in April 2024. Photos [here](#).

### U.S. Coast Guard DFCS

#### [Coast Guard rescue crew awarded Distinguish Flying Crosses, Air Medals for actions in Texas](#)

The four crewmembers were [awarded](#) the DFC and the Air Medal for their actions helping to rescue almost 200 flood victims in Texas. The crew of Rescue 6553, based out of USCG Air Station Corpus Christi, flew into Kerr County, shortly after a massive downpour caused much of the area to flood. For their actions, pilot Lt. Ian Hopper and rescue swimmer Petty Officer 3rd Class Scott Ruskan received the Distinguished Flying Cross. Helicopter co-pilot Lt. Blair Ogujiofor and flight mechanic Petty Officer 3rd Class Seth Reeves each received the Air Medal for their actions.

The crewmembers were invited to the 2025 DFCS reunion in Charleston and honored there. Each was presented with a plaque from the DFC Society.



In Coast Guard uniforms: Petty Officer Ruska (third from left), and LT Hopper (center), at the DFCS Reunion.

## 2025 DFCS Scholarship Recipients

The DFCS committee chose 11 students to be scholarship recipients. The Ward Macauley Scholarship was started by Lydia Macauley to honor her late husband who was awarded his DFC during WWII. This scholarship is for students pursuing academic (BA or BS degree) courses of study at 4-year institutions of higher education. Funding comes from your generous donations to the DFC Society. The Colonel William D. Garner and Commander Evelyn L. Moy Scholarship Grant provides \$5,000 annually in scholarship funds for either academic or vocational/trade courses of study. The RGT Charitable Remainder Trust Scholarship supports students pursuing vocational or trade/technical courses of study. We are seeking more applicants who wish to pursue a vocational or trade program of study, especially those seeking a career in an Aviation or Aerospace related field. More info [here](#). Here are this year's awardees. The connection to the DFCS [Honor Roll](#) is included for each recipient.



**Morgan Grace Beck.** "I am so grateful and honored to have been selected for a DFCS Scholarship in honor and memory of my grandfather, Charles McClarren, who was awarded the DFC a, USAF F-105 Thunderchief pilot in Vietnam. I am currently a senior double majoring in physics and applied mathematics with a minor in French at the University of Rhode Island. After I complete my bachelor's degree, I intend to go to graduate school for applied math or scientific computing. I would like to leverage computational science toward improving the lives of others, potentially at a national lab or in defense." Macauley Academic Scholarship.



**John David Garrett.** "I will be attending Liberty University, majoring in Commercial/Corporate Aviation, with my intended career being a commercial pilot. Thank you so much for accepting me for this scholarship! It is going to go a long way in helping pay for this expensive major. I am grateful for this opportunity, and this support motivates me to work even harder toward achieving my goal of becoming a professional pilot and representing Liberty University with excellence in the aviation industry. Thank you so much for accepting me for this scholarship. It is going to go a long way in helping pay for this expensive major." John is the grandson of John E. Elsey, who received the DFC as a USAF O-1 Bird Dog FAC in Vietnam. Macauley Academic Scholarship.

**Rylee Habel** Is attending Concorde Career College to become a Licensed Vocational Nurse (LVN). Rylee is the granddaughter of Robert W. Thydean, awarded the DFC as an Army UH-1H Huey pilot in Vietnam. Gardner/Moy Vocational Training Scholarship.



**Matthew Stuart Jones** is the grandson of the late Donald E. Jones, who flew the Army AH-1 Cobra in Vietnam and was awarded the DFC. "Thank you so much for my being accepted for the DFC Society Scholarship! I am a computer science student at the University of Kentucky aspiring to earn a Ph.D. in AI and public policy to shape and advise on advanced technology legislation." Macauley Academic Scholarship.

**Ryan Michael Kailian.** son of Michael V. Kailian, who was awarded the DFC as an Army MH-60 Black Hawk pilot in GWOT/Iraq. Ryan is a sophomore at Fairmont State University studying Aviation Management. He desires to be a military pilot after graduation. Macauley Academic Scholarship.

**Robert Alexander Kuropkat.** Robert is a high school graduate with an associate's degree as well; will be attending Hicks Honor College at the University of North Florida with a double major in English & Philosophy. He plans to become a Public Defender. Robert is the grandson of Robert Arthur Kuropkat, who was awarded the DFC twice as a USAF EWO in the RB-47, flying special missions. Garner/Moy Academic Scholarship.

**Owen Thomas Markham.** Owen finished Community College and will be attending the University of North Carolina (Chapel Hill) to study Psychology and Sociology. Owen is the grandson of Lawrence W. Markham, who was awarded the DFC as a USAF Navigator on the KC-135A in Southeast Asia. Garner/Moy Academic Scholarship.



**Sagan Charles Marozzi** is studying Chemical Engineering at the Colorado School of Mines. "I hope to enter the energy conservation or environmental protection field upon completion of my degree." Awarded in honor of Sagan's grandfather, the late Col. Louis G Rever. Col. Rever served in the Air Force from 1960 to 1985, flying F-100, F-5, and F-4 fighter jets. His actions during the Vietnam War. earned him The Distinguished Flying Cross, the Bronze Star, multiple Air Medals, and the Vietnamese Gallantry Cross with Palm. Lou concluded his military career as a Base Engineer at Lowry AFB CO. Macauley Academic Scholarship.

**Colin Edward Nelson**, son of Keith L. Nelson, who was awarded the DFC as a USAF Fire Control Officer in the AC-130H Spectre gunship in GWOT/Afghanistan. Colin is a high school graduate who will be attending LSU in the AFROTC program to study Petroleum Engineering. He desires to be a military pilot after graduation. Macauley Academic Scholarship.

**Ella R. C. Ridgway**. Ella is a high school graduate who will be attending Boston College to study Political Science & Mathematics as a double major. She desires to work in government service on public policy. Ella is the daughter of James D. Ridgway (Associate Member) and the granddaughter of James J. Ridgway, who was awarded the DFC three times as a USAF F-4D Phantom pilot in Vietnam. Macauley Academic Scholarship.



**Bella Lynn Supica** is the granddaughter of Lt. Col. (Ret.) Kevin Sweeney. “I am honored and thankful to have received a scholarship from the RGT Charitable Remainder Trust scholarship fund sponsored by the DFC society. I will be attending Metropolitan Community College—Penn Valley to pursue a career as a radiology technologist.” Col. Sweeney is the only person to successfully land a KC-135 after two of the four engines were ripped completely off the airplane while on a night combat mission in Desert Storm ([link](#)). Gardner/Moy Vocational Training Scholarship.

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## Villages Chapter: Something Quirky Happened On the Way to the Podium

by Joe Finch

The [Villages Chapter](#) has been awarding college scholarships to deserving high school students. The scholarships focus on the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math fields (STEM). All of our recipients have done well. We have a very robust applicant rating system. This year’s scholarship awards went to two kids with the same last name. What was quirky was that all five of our judges rated both kids identically!

We had never seen either of the kids and did not know them. One was a boy with great grades, extracurricular activities, and athletic endeavors and the other was a girl with similar credentials. Jack Moran, Norm Kasch, and I [Joe] went to the awards ceremony and took our places on the stage. We noticed that one of our awardees, Emory Strickland, received several other scholarships. The other of our awardees, Emma Strickland, received several, also. Both kids were athletic, well poised, and attractive. Norm and I started thinking, could they be brother and sister? I asked one of the student guides if she knew Emory Strickland or Emma Strickland. She said “The twins?”

Norm and I agreed that we would award them the two scholarships at the same time. When I stepped up to the podium I said “All of our five judges selected the same two students for first place. And now we find out they have been competing since before they were born! Could we have both of the

Strickland twins come up together so that we can recognize their scholastic excellence! They both earned our Distinguished Flying Cross Society scholarships.” That doesn’t happen every day.

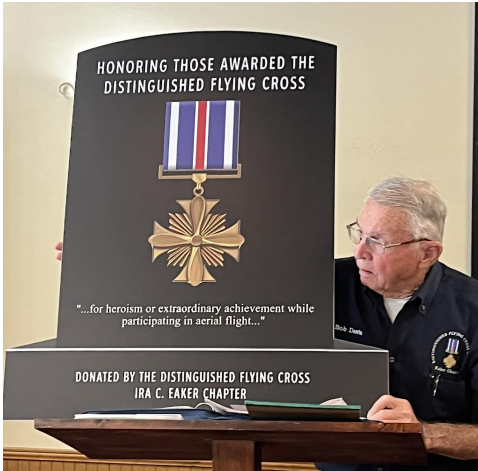


L-R: Joe Finch, Emory Strickland, Emma Strickland, and Norm Kasch.

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### Ira C. Eaker Chapter’s DFC Monument

The [Ira C. Eaker Chapter](#) dedicated their DFC Monument for Arkansas’ North Little Rock State Veterans Cemetery on 4 Oct 2025. In attendance were U.S. Congressman French Hill; Colonel (Ret) Robert A. Ator II, Director of the Arkansas Department of Veterans Affairs; and Cemetery Commissioner Steven Seavey. About 50 Chapter Members and guests were present. Below, left: Ira C. Eaker Chapter President Bob Davis displays the monument. Right: Attendees at the ceremony at the North Little Rock State Veterans Cemetery.



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## Task Force Normandy DFCs

### [Task Force Normandy Heroes Awarded Long-Awaited Distinguished Flying Crosses](#)

Nashville, Tennessee—Fifteen legendary Army Aviation heroes were awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross at the 2025 AAAA Summit in Nashville on May 15, recognizing their valor during Operation Desert Storm. Their actions on 17 Jan 1991 as part of Task Force Normandy marked the beginning of the air campaign.



## FEATURE ARTICLE

### From Eaglet to Predator, Part 1

#### The Development of the McDonnell-Douglas F-15E Strike Eagle

James C. Miller, Ph.D., and James A. Davis (Col, USMC, ret.)

#### Part 1. The Birth of the Strike Eagle

Because the F-15E Strike Eagle retained the maneuverability of its predecessor airframe, the F-15 Eagle, we start with a description of the formidable F-15, an iconic fighter aircraft.

One of the important lessons that emerged from the Vietnam War was the pressing need for a superior air-to-air fighter that could dominate anything the Soviet Union could field. McDonnell went to work and designed the F-15 to answer this challenge, and in 1969, the USAF selected the McDonnell design to provide the USAF with a dedicated air superiority fighter aircraft.

The F-15 entered service in 1976. It was an immediate success. Its strengths included low wing loading, two very powerful engines, excellent cockpit visibility, a powerful advanced radar, and an internal gun. McDonnell put this package together in conjunction with the USAF, and the requirement for a superb air superiority fighter was accomplished.

To describe this aircraft adequately, one must discuss its capabilities from the perspective of an aerial opponent, albeit an opponent on the same side. In the late 1970's

and early 1980's, One of the authors (Col Davis) had the fortunate experience of witnessing the F-15's immense capabilities in the air, on various training exercises both on the East Coast and in the Far East.

The Marine Fighter/Attack Aircraft Group to which I was assigned, flying the F4S Phantom, would conduct regular Air Defense exercises off the coast of the Carolinas, and both Air Force and Navy assets participated. It was during these exercises that we encountered the F-15. Once we were airborne, the F-15's capabilities became obvious, and we attempted to develop tactics that would give us a chance to survive against this aircraft.

Our best chances arose during engagements with multiple aircraft. If an F-15 lost sight or lost radar contact with an F4, that was our chance to get a shot. If you encountered an F-15, one on one, my tactic was to be supersonic, at least Mach 1.2 at the head-on pass, turn across the flight path of the F-15 (only 10 degrees at most), and unload and extend. This was followed by a nose-low slice turn and, hopefully, enough separation so that our radar could pick up the F-15, and we could launch a simulated Aim-7 Sparrow missile. The next move was to depart the area as quickly as possible. As can be noted, our F4 was at a marked disadvantage against the F-15.

At one of these exercises, as I briefed an up-coming hop with an F-15 pilot, I asked him if we could set up a one-on-one engagement, turning at the merge, so that I could see, in person, the



McDonnell Douglas F-15 Eagle

performance of the F-15. He agreed. Once airborne in the Warning Area, we made a head-on pass and turned at the merge. I went into a hard turn, and the F-15 came around the corner faster than anything I had ever seen. As I looked over my shoulder, I saw this magnificent machine turning behind me with shock waves appearing off the wings and tail, rolling onto my six. It was a view that I will keep in my mind forever; it was a privileged look at the F-15 in action.

I was very fortunate because I witnessed first-hand the epic air-to-air capability of this superb aircraft. It was obvious that the USAF had a winner, and the subsequent record of this now multi-role aircraft has been proven many times over.

Since its early days, the F-15 has seen many modifications, including the significant air-to-ground capabilities that are discussed, below. The single-seat F-15C and two-seat F-15D models entered the Air Force inventory in 1979. They were equipped with improvements, including 2,000 pounds of additional internal fuel, provisions for carrying exterior conformal fuel tanks, and increased maximum takeoff weight. Conversely, the Streak Eagle was a special modification of an F-15A (72-119) created specifically to break records. It was stripped of its weapons, external paint, and non-essential equipment. The aircraft's thrust-to-weight ratio was 1.6:1, making it one of the fastest and most agile aircraft of its time. The Streak Eagle resides now at the National Museum of the USAF at Wright-Patterson AFB, Dayton, Ohio, where it is noted that the aircraft "broke eight time-to-climb world records between Jan. 16 and Feb. 1, 1975. In setting the last of the eight records, it reached an altitude of 98,425 feet just 3 minutes, 27.8 seconds from brake release at takeoff and 'coasted' to nearly 103,000 feet before descending."

**The Birth of the Strike Eagle.** This birth occurred as a result of planning; specifically, the Air Force Tactical Fighter Roadmap. Robert D. Russ, writing in the June 1984 issue of *Air and Space Forces Magazine* (67:6), explained the fighter status existing at that time. "The F-15 is currently used in the all-weather air-to-air role with a limited secondary air-to-ground role. The F-16 is the swing fighter, being used in both the air-to-air and air-to-surface roles. The F-4 has moved to a predominantly air-to-ground role but retains residual air-to-air capability. The A-7 and A-10 are used for close air support with limited interdiction capabilities, and the F-111 is our only long-range, around-the-clock, interdiction aircraft. Of the six types of aircraft in our inventory, only two, the F-15 and F-16, are still in production."

In March 1981, the USAF had announced an Enhanced Tactical Fighter (ETF) program aimed at procuring a replacement for the General Dynamics F-111 Aardvark. The USAF sought an aircraft that could conduct deep air interdiction missions without requiring additional support by fighter escorts or electronic jamming aircraft. The program was later renamed the Dual-Role Fighter (DRF) competition. A DRF evaluation team, directed by BG Ronald W. Yates, operated from 1981 through 30 April 1983.

General Dynamics submitted the F-16XL for the competition, while McDonnell Douglas submitted a prototype Strike Eagle. The single-engine F-16XL had major structural and aerodynamic differences from the original F-16 Fighting Falcon, requiring substantial effort to produce. The prototype Strike Eagle had two-engine redundancy, with greater thrust and carrying capacity than the F-16XL.

According to [The Aviationist](http://theaviationist.com), McDonnell Douglas had quietly included some basic secondary ground attack capabilities in the Strike Eagle's design from the start, and had worked privately on enhancing them to create an F-15-derived interdiction fighter that would be able to replace the F-111 ([theaviationist.com](http://theaviationist.com)). They had built a prototype fighter-bomber variant that was a conversion of the second two-seat F-15B Eagle trainer, F-15B-4-MC 71-0291, an airframe that had first flown back on 18 October 1973. The converted prototype made its first flight on 8 July 1980, nearly a year before the beginning of the USAF's ETF program. McDonnell Douglas used this prototype as a demonstrator in the DRF competition.

The USAF chose the Strike Eagle on 24 February 1984. The deciding factors were the Strike Eagle's lower development costs compared to the F-16XL, a belief that the Strike Eagle had future growth potential, and the latter's twin-engine redundancy. Edgar Ulsamer, writing in the April 1984 edition of *Air Force Magazine* ([67:4](#)), reported that "Although initially contested in the Pentagon by advocates of 'high-tech' unmanned standoff weapons, the Air Force won OSD approval in February for its Dual-Role Fighter program and announced that 392 two-seat F-15s would be procured and modified for this purpose."

In his announcement of the procurement, Air Force Chief of Staff Gen Charles A. Gabriel explained that the Strike Eagle would be a key element in the modernization program for tactical airpower (the Tactical Fighter Roadmap), stating that the Strike Eagle was "vitally needed to redress our tactical forces' limited ability to operate over long ranges in adverse weather conditions, day or night."

The Strike Eagle prototype, 71-0291, remained at McDonnell Douglas as a dedicated test aircraft. It was retired from the active inventory in the early 1990s, was used for battle damage repair training at Warner Robins AFB, Georgia, and is reported to be on display at the Royal Saudi Air Force Museum at Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, in RSAF colors and markings ([thisdayinaviation.com](#)).

The Strike Eagle, which had begun as a private venture by McDonnell Douglas, went into production as the F-15E. The first production model, 86-0183, made its first flight on 11 December 1986. The F-15E is designed to be operated by a pilot and a weapons system officer (WSO). The aircraft can carry bombs, missiles and guns for a ground attack role, while maintaining its capability as an air superiority fighter. Its airframe was strengthened and its service life doubled to 16,000 flight hours.

In his 1984 article about the Air Force Tactical Fighter Roadmap, Robert Russ went on to say that the F-15E would be the "centerpiece of our air-to-surface qualitative improvements." He noted that the F-4 and F-16 did not have the range to attack long-range interdiction targets. The fuel capacity of the F-15E was greater by about fifty percent. Also, the F-15E would allow the U.S. to attack targets at night and in marginal weather conditions.

The F-15E retained the maneuverability of the F-15 while adding advanced avionics and weapons for ground attack. "Key modifications included reinforced airframe structures, conformal fuel tanks (CFTs) for extended range, and advanced targeting systems, ensuring its capability in high-threat environments. ... The AN/APG-70 radar, later upgraded to the AN/APG-82 AESA radar, provides superior target acquisition and ground mapping capabilities. The integration of LANTIRN (Low Altitude Navigation and Targeting Infrared for Night) pods enables precision strikes under all weather conditions" (Wiley Stickney, [boltflight.com](#), 2025).

The F-15E was powered by two Pratt & Whitney turbofan engines equipped with afterburners. Earlier E models used the F100-PW-220 engines (50,000 lbs of thrust); later E models used the -229 engines (58,000 lbs of thrust). The engines were controlled by digital technology for improved performance. For example, the digital electronic engine control system allowed F-15E pilots to increase thrust from idle power to maximum afterburner in less than four seconds. Each of the low-drag conformal fuel tanks on the F-15E's fuselage could carry 750 gallons of fuel. Weapons were mounted on short pylons on the conformal tanks instead of on conventional weapon racks.

Nominally, the F-15E was a Mach 2.5+ aircraft with a range of 2,400 miles and a ceiling of 60,000 ft. It had a wingspan 42.8 ft, with length 64 ft and height 18.5 ft. Its empty weight was 37,500 pounds. It could carry 35,550 pounds of fuel in three external tanks and the conformal fuel tanks. The maximum takeoff weight was 81,000 pounds.

According to the [U.S. Air Force Fact Sheet](#) of 2019, the F-15E Strike Eagle was designed as a dual-role fighter to perform both air-to-air and air-to-ground missions, fighting at low altitude, day or night, and in all weather. Using four screens, the WSO could monitor aircraft or weapons status and possible threats, select

targets, and use an electronic "moving map" to navigate. A laser gyro and a Global Positioning System (GPS) monitored the aircraft's position continuously, providing a digital moving map in both cockpits.

The ... radar system allows aircrews to detect ground targets from long ranges. One feature of this system is that after a sweep of a target area, the crew freezes the air-to-ground map then goes back into air-to-air mode to clear for air threats. During the air-to-surface weapon delivery, the pilot is capable of detecting, targeting and engaging air-to-air targets while the WSO designates the ground target.

The low-altitude navigation and targeting infrared for night (LANTIRN) system allows the aircraft to fly at low altitudes, at night and in any weather conditions, to attack ground targets with a variety of precision-guided and unguided weapons. ...

The navigation pod contains terrain-following radar which allows the pilot to fly safely at a very low altitudes following cues displayed on a heads-up display [HUD]. This system also can be coupled to the aircraft's autopilot to provide "hands off" terrain-following capability.

The targeting pod contains a laser designator and a tracking system that mark an enemy for destruction at long ranges. Once tracking has been started, targeting information is automatically handed off to GPS or laser-guided bombs. (USAF, 2019)

The evolution from an aircraft built to serve strictly as an air superiority fighter to one that has the additional capability of being an exceptionally capable air to ground machine is indeed a significant achievement.

## **Part 2. Development and Employment of the Strike Eagle (to follow in the next edition)**

# # #

## F-15E MEMBER CITATIONS

Lew and I identified 15 individuals in the DFCS [Honor Roll](#) whose actions occurred in the F-15E: Anthony, Christopher T.; Benitez, Michael W.; Caudle, Mike S.; Causey, Timothy A.; Cooper, James C.; Culver, Curtis B.; Damsker, Jamie A.; Dyer, Todd R.; Flood, Kevin J.; Haskin, Randall J.; Hruby, John T.; Kaiser, Sebastian B.; Patton, Jeffery S. (2); Thibault, Jared T.; and Welton, George O. The citations of the first five individuals are included here. The others' citations will be included with the next two installments of the F-15E feature article. Let me know if we've missed any: [editor@dfcsociety.org](mailto:editor@dfcsociety.org).

**Anthony, Christopher T.** The Distinguished Flying Cross for extraordinary achievement while participating in aerial flight as an F-15E Weapon Systems Officer, 494th Expeditionary Fighter Squadron, 31st Expeditionary Operations Group, 31st Air Expeditionary Wing Aviano Air Base, Italy, on 11 May 1999. On that date, while his formation was sitting ground alert, he was scrambled against enemy fighters located at Batajnic Airfield on the outskirts of Belgrade, during Operation ALLIED FORCE. Captain Anthony's two-ship launched with no more information than the airfield location. Once airborne he received imagery and the exact aircraft location via data-link through the Rapid Targeting System. This capability, unique to the F-15E, allowed Captain Anthony's formation to successfully launch an Air-to-Ground Missile-130 with near-real time targeting data. Despite the timely information, the highly mobile aircraft had moved from the designated coordinates. Despite this, Captain Anthony managed to find the aircraft with just twenty seconds remaining before missile impact. He acquired and expertly guided the weapon for a direct hit that destroyed the MIG-21 fighter. In addition, he directed his wingman onto a second fighter when it became apparent that target acquisition was in doubt. Captain Anthony's quick thinking and unwavering commitment to the mission resulted in the destruction of two enemy fighters with no loss of friendly aircraft. The professional competence, aerial skill, and devotion to duty displayed by Captain Anthony reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

**Benitez, Michael W.** The President of the United States takes great pleasure in presenting the Distinguished Flying Cross to Captain Michael W. Benitez for extraordinary achievement while participating in aerial flight as F-15E Instructor Weapon Systems Officer, 492d Expeditionary Fighter Squadron, 380th Expeditionary Operations Group, 380th Air Expeditionary Wing, Al Dhafra Air Base, United Arab Emirates on 21 May 2014. On that day, Captain Benitez led two F-15Es responding to a troops in contact situation in support of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM in Afghanistan. An Army platoon had been ambushed by 15 insurgents hidden in a cave complex. The platoon had sustained injuries and was unable to retreat. Due to the ferocity of the firefight, the Joint Terminal Attack Controller and the ground commander were unable to articulate the positions of all friendly elements despite the presence of a B-1B, an air weapons team, and a scout weapons team. For more than 40 minutes, Captain Benitez patiently pulled the information from the Joint Terminal Attack Controller and used superior crew coordination with his pilot to locate all friendly positions. Ultimately, Captain Benitez used his targeting pod to accurately place two 500 pound bombs as close as possible to the platoon without endangering friendlies. He destroyed the enemy fighting position allowing the platoon to safely fallback and recovered the wounded soldiers by helicopter, ultimately saving American lives. The professional competence, aerial skill, and devotion to duty displayed by Captain Benitez reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

**Caudle, Mike S.** Major Mike S. Caudle is awarded a Distinguished Flying Cross for heroism while participating in aerial flight as F-15E Pilot, 336th Expeditionary Fighter Squadron, 379th Expeditionary Operations Group, 379th Air Expeditionary Wing at Al Udeid Air Base, Qatar on 2 April 2003. On that date, as the wingman of a two-ship flight of F-15Es, and in support of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM, Major Caudle's professional skill and superior airmanship suppressed Iraqi enemy forces attempting to ambush the 3rd Battalion, 3rd Brigade, 3rd Infantry Division of the United States Army. Under the cover of darkness, along a road in a heavily vegetated area northeast of Karbala, the 3rd Infantry Division was starting initial maneuvers to seize Baghdad. Major Caudle's flight was re-tasked to perform armed reconnaissance along the intended route. Without any notice from well-concealed positions on either side of the road, elements of the Medina Republican Guard Division ambushed the 3rd Battalion. Major Caudle expertly maneuvered his aircraft to a cover position for his flight lead as he watched the firefight ignite from both sides of the road. Major Caudle's flight immediately transitioned to emergency close air support with the ground forces call of "Troops in Contact-Danger Close, request suppression with 20 millimeter." Despite significant risk to his own life from the surrounding heavy anti-aircraft artillery and shoulder-mounted surface-to-air threats, Major Caudle provided cover and made threat avoidance calls as his flight lead executed four night high-angle strafe runs aided by night vision goggles. With the strafing runs complete, the 3rd Battalion requested Major Caudle to drop GBU-12s 500 meters to the east and west of friendly positions to cover their flanks and further suppress the enemy's movements. Once collateral damage concerns were satisfied, Major Caudle dropped three laser-guided bombs, ensuring the success of the 3rd Infantry Division's history-making advance towards Baghdad. The outstanding heroism and selfless devotion to duty displayed by Major Caudle reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

**Causey, Timothy A.** The President of the United States takes great pleasure in presenting the Distinguished Flying Cross (WITH VALOR) to Lieutenant Colonel Timothy A. Causey for heroism in aerial flight while engaged in military operations involving conflict against an opposing foreign force as Director of Operations and F-15E Evaluator Weapons Systems Officer, 494th Expeditionary Fighter Squadron, 332d Air Expeditionary Wing, from 13 April 2024 through 14 April 2024. During this period, Colonel Causey flew in a two-ship formation of F-15E Strike Eagles as part of a large-force Coalition Defensive Counter-Air mission to defeat an Iranian attack comprising over three hundred ballistic missiles, cruise missiles, and one-way unmanned aerial systems. During the opening phase of the attack, he intercepted a hostile drone swarm at low altitude and in complete darkness. Within a period of twenty minutes, Colonel Causey employed every one of his aircraft's air intercept missiles with one hundred percent effectiveness, achieving eight air-to-air kills against the swarms of attack drones. Out of missiles, he then attempted a ninth drone engagement, employing a laser-guided Joint Direct Attack Munition. Recognizing that the continuing onslaught of drones would overwhelm Coalition fighter aircraft, he returned to base to refuel and reload. During his engines-running reload, he remained in his aircraft during Alarm Red conditions, despite warning of an imminent missile impact. Colonel Causey launched for his second sortie as two PATRIOT missiles, launched from his base, ascended in close proximity to the runway and Iranian ballistic missiles and Israeli interceptors coursed through the sky overhead. Navigating through active air defense artillery and falling debris, he returned to the fight, ensuring mission success for the Coalition. Colonel Causey's actions played a vital role in blunting Iran's large-scale attack against Israel, protecting Coalition forces, saving countless civilian lives, and ultimately preventing a larger regional conflict. The outstanding heroism and selfless devotion to duty displayed by Colonel Causey reflected great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

**Cooper, James C.** The President of the United States takes great pleasure in presenting the Distinguished Flying Cross to Major James C. Cooper for extraordinary achievement while participating in aerial flight as F-15E Instructor Weapon Systems Officer, 492d Fighter Squadron, 48th Operations Group, 48th Fighter Wing, Royal Air Force Lakenheath, England on 19 March 2011. On this night, Major Cooper flew as number two of a four-ship F-15E formation during the first night of Operation Odyssey Dawn. With nominal intelligence data regarding the location and disposition of Libyan air defenses or hostile ground forces, his formation penetrated multiple known strategic surface-to-air missile threats to execute a tactical plan designed to draw the attention of the Libyan Integrated Air Defense System. Almost immediately, Major Cooper's aircraft was targeted by a mobile tactical surface-to-air missile system, and then by aimed anti-aircraft artillery fire which both required skillful and timely threat reactions to defeat the grave danger to his aircraft. Disregarding his own safety, Major Cooper turned back into the active threat envelopes and was able to track and positively identify a mobile missile system. He then established an orbit within lethal range of the threats in order to track and pass target information to the formation while simultaneously scanning the area for additional targets. Subsequently Major Cooper located, targeted and destroyed two additional mobile missile systems and two support vehicles while his aircraft was continuously harassed by additional aimed anti-aircraft artillery fire. The professional competence, aerial skill and devotion to duty displayed by Major Cooper reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

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## TAPS—FINAL FLIGHT

*"Taps" is a bugle call sounded to signal "lights out" at the end of a military day, and during patriotic memorial ceremonies and military funerals conducted by the United States Armed Forces.*



**Lewis L. "Lew" Barger, Jr.** (1938—2021), a forty-year resident of Lakeland, went to be with his Lord and Savior at the age of 83. Lew was born in Chattanooga, Tennessee and after graduating from the University of Tennessee he joined the Army, learned to fly helicopters, and spent a year in Vietnam with 3/4 Cavalry, 25th Infantry Division. He received the Distinguished Flying Cross and three Purple Heart medals.



**Lt. Col. Robert I. Biss, USAF (Ret.)** (1939—2025) of Schnecksville passed away on 21 June 2025. He graduated from Purchase Line High School in 1957. He then attended The Air Force Academy. On November 11, 1966, the F-4 Phantom Jet he was flying was shot down over Vietnam and he spent six and a half years as a MIA/POW until he was released on 4 March 1973. In his military career, he earned the Silver Star Medal with Bronze Oak Leaf Cluster, Legion of Merit, Distinguished Flying Cross, Bronze Star Medal with V Device and Bronze Oak Leaf Cluster, Purple Heart with Bronze Oak Leaf Cluster, Air Medal with 4 Bronze Oak Leaf Clusters, and the Air Force Commendation Medal.



**Major (Hobart) Ray Bower, USAF (Ret.) (1933—2025)** flew west on 8 June 2025, in Newark, Ohio. He was a USAF Command Pilot with over 5,000 hours and flew 484 combat missions as an Air Commando in Vietnam where he was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross, six Bronze Stars, and seven Air Medals.



**Maj. Gen. Edward Robert Bracken, USAF (Ret.) (1937—2024)** passed away on 14 October 2024. Ed served his country with distinction for 33 years. As a combat fighter pilot, he amassed over 4,100 total flying hours and flew 130 combat missions and held positions as an instructor pilot, test pilot and command pilot in the F-100, F-105, F-4, and F-111. Highlights amongst his numerous awards and decorations include the Distinguished Flying Cross, the Bronze Star, and the Distinguished Service Medal.



**Robert William "Bob" Brown (1941—2025)** passed away on 5 April 2025. In 1964, Bob joined the U.S. Army, attended Officer Candidate School in 1966, and served as a helicopter pilot in Vietnam throughout 1968, where he was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross. After retiring from the Army in 1984, Bob worked with Teledyne Brown and then Boeing, where he spent 12 successful years.



**Mortimer B. Cameron, Jr. (1927—2025)** passed away on 19 June 2025. Mort grew up in the Edgewood area of Pittsburgh but left high school early to attend The Citadel for a year. He received an appointment to the United States Military Academy and graduated in 1949. Commissioned in the newly formed US Air Force, he soon found himself in combat, flying reconnaissance missions in the Korean War. After completing 100 missions, and awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross and three Air Medals, he returned to the United States and served in multiple assignments, including a tour at Spangdahlem (Federal Republic of Germany). He completed his active-duty service in 1961 and returned to Pittsburgh. There he served in the Air Force Reserve finishing with a total of 20 years of military service.



**Chief Master Sgt. Wilburt "Cas" Castaneda, USAF (Ret.) (1939—2025)** served his country for 30 years, including three tours of duty in Vietnam. He was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross and five Air Medal for heroic actions while acting as a crew chief. He retired from the Air Force as a Chief Master Sergeant on 1 July 1988. Cas continued to serve his country, working as a civilian contractor managing the maintenance depot for many years at the Corpus Christi Naval Air Station in Corpus Christi, TX.



**Maj. Richard L. "Dickie" Dunn, USA (Ret.) (1945 —2024).** It's with a heavy heart that I report the death of a great helicopter pilot and friend, Maj. Richard L. Dunn, December 26, 2024. Dickie was *Yellow 1* while flying the UH-1H Huey for C/229th AHC during his first tour in RVN 69-70. He flew the AH-1G with D/229th which became F 1/9 (Prov) 70-71. He was awarded the Silver Star, Distinguished Flying Cross, three Bronze Stars, 62 Air Medals, and three Purple Hearts. Dickie was a true American Hero and my best friend. I'll miss the long

talks and laughs we had together...oh, the things we did in war are never forgotten and the friends forged by war can never be replicated, yes, we are truly a band of brothers! -

*Michael O'Neil*



**Col. Ronald V. "Ron" Grabler, USAF, (Ret.)** (1932—2025). Ron was born in Portland, Oregon, graduated from Oregon State University in 1955, and began his 28-year career in the U.S. Air Force flying B-47 and B-52 bombers in the Strategic Air Command, followed by the B-57 and OV-10 in Vietnam where he received the Distinguished Flying Cross. He then attended graduated school in Logistics Management, with subsequent assignments supporting many major programs including the F-16 fighter. He retired from active duty as a Colonel in 1984.



**Col. Gerald "Jerry" T. Hipp, USA (Ret.)** (1940—2025) flew west on 20 March 2025, in Savannah GA. Born in Washington D.C. and raised in Philadelphia PA he graduated from LaSalle High School in 1957 and LaSalle College in 1961 and was commissioned in the United States Army. He deployed to Vietnam in 1965-1966 with the 1st Air Cavalry Division as an Aerial Rocket Artillery Platoon Leader at An Khe (Ia Drang Valley campaign) and again in 1968 as a Company Commander with the 25th Avn Bn, 25th Inf Div, Cu Chi, Vietnam. He was awarded two Distinguished Flying Crosses, two Bronze Stars and 25 Air Medals for his combat service. After many more rewarding assignments, he retired in 1988 as the Chief of Staff, Aviation Systems Command, St. Louis, Mo.



**William Henderson Hyde** (1934—2025) earned a degree in Industrial Management from Brigham Young University and was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant in the United States Air Force. His 20-year military career as a pilot included distinguished service during the Vietnam War, for which he was awarded 11 Air Medals and the Distinguished Flying Cross.



**Maj. Paul Katsuki, USAF (Ret.)** (1942 —2025) made his last flight on 16 July 2025. Born in Media, Pennsylvania, he graduated from the University of Tennessee in 1965 and joined the U.S. Air Force. Paul served as an Air Force C-130 transport pilot for 21 years, retiring in 1986. He served in Vietnam and was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross, five Air Medals and other military decorations. After retirement, he flew for Southern Air Transport, Flight International, SENTEL Corporation, and retired again from the Smithfield Foods flight department after 10 years of service, completing 44 years as a pilot, logging 14,750 flying hours. He was a member of the Order of Daedalians, the Distinguished Flying Cross Society, the Air Force Association, and the Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association. **Ed. note.** Paul and I were pilots together in the 346<sup>th</sup> TAS, and in contact until he passed. His heroic action, saving the lives of passengers and crew, and a C-130E with an outboard prop failure on landing at Hue, led to a world-wide stand-down of B and E models while propellers were checked and repaired. RIP good friend and hero.



**Harvey Levine (1921—2025).** We mournfully announce the passing of Harvey Levine, who departed from this world on 25 June 2025 at age 103. Born in Cleveland OH, Harv was a proud veteran, having served with distinction during World War II as a Bombardier/Navigator flying B-24 Liberators in Europe with the Army Air Corps. His bravery and service to his country earned him a Distinguished Flying Cross. He resided in Pickerington, Ohio.



**Col. Billie J. Massey, USAF (Ret.) (1931—2025)** flew west on 14 June 2025, at the age of 94 in Hot Springs AR. Over the course of his 26-year military career, he served three combat tours in Vietnam, flew 26 different airplanes, and earned numerous medals and accolades. Billie flew more combat hours in the Vietnam conflict than any other USAF pilot. He was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for heroism. He retired from active duty in 1976 and had a successful second career as a comptroller, a small business owner, and a real estate professional.



**Edward Francis Mullen, Jr. (1940 —2025)** passed away peacefully on 24 June 2025 in Concord NH. A Distinguished Graduate of the UNH Army ROTC program, Ed was commissioned as a second lieutenant in the U.S. Army in 1962. He flew numerous combat missions in Vietnam in UH-1 Hueys and was awarded two Distinguished Flying Crosses and 22 Air Medals. He later became a flight instructor and flight commander at Fort Wolters TX. In 2014, he was inducted into the UNH Army ROTC Hall of Fame.



**Brian John Russ, AKA "Snake Driver" (1948—2025)** flew west on 12 June 2025 in Sarasota FL. Brian served as a chief warrant officer in the U.S. Army during the Vietnam War. He was part of the elite "Blue Max" Cobra gunship pilots of the First Cavalry Division. Highly decorated, he received the Distinguished Flying Cross, Bronze Star, and 40 Air Medals.



**Chief Warrant Officer 5 John Anthony "Tony" Shoemaker, USA (Ret.) (1944 —2025)** passed away on 12 June 2025. Born in Little Rock, Arkansas, Tony graduated from Fairmont High School, Kettering, OH, in 1962. In 1966, he joined the U.S. Army and began a 35-year military career. He flew helicopter gunships in combat in Vietnam and was awarded five Distinguished Flying Crosses and 21 Air Medals. He flew over 10,000 hours with service throughout the USA and overseas in Vietnam, Korea, Germany, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Kuwait, and Iraq during both Gulf War Operations, and humanitarian and peacekeeping missions in Somalia.



**William Guyton "Bill" Simmons (1945—2024)** passed away on 23 April 2024, at Overlake Medical Center, Bellevue WA. Bill was born in Gulfport MS. He grew up in Italy and Japan (his father was a TWA captain) before they settled in Bellevue WA. Bill graduated from Sammamish High School in 1963 and attended the University of Washington where he graduated in 1968 and received a commission in the U.S. Air Force. Bill flew C-130 Hercules cargo aircraft on combat support missions in Vietnam and was awarded the Distinguished

Flying Cross. He later flew C-141 Starlifters out of Travis Air Force Base CA until leaving active duty in 1977.



**Maj. Dennis Edward Sullivan, USA (Ret.)** (1947—2025) passed away on 14 July 2025 at his home in Greenwood SC. Born in Crestview FL, Dennis enlisted to join the U.S. Army at age 18 in 1966 and became an officer and Helicopter Pilot. He distinguished himself in combat as a gunship pilot in Vietnam and was awarded two Distinguished Flying Crosses, the Bronze Star with "V" for Heroism in Ground Combat, and 26 Air Medals. His service continued for several more assignments before retirement. After leaving the Army, he worked in the Computer Science field as a programmer, analyst and educator for over 25 years.



**Kuldar "Kool" Visnapuu** (1941—2025) was born in Tartu, Estonia. He fled with his parents and brothers when the Russians marched in and set Tallian on fire. He spent the next 7 years as a child in an Estonian refugee camp in Germany during and after WWII until immigrating to the U.S. He graduated from college, received a commission in the U.S. Air Force and was assigned with the Air National Guard's 174<sup>th</sup> Tactical Fighter Squadron flying F-100 Super Sabres while also flying as a civilian with American Airlines. When his squadron was called to active duty for service in Vietnam in 1968, he and his fellow pilots flew the F-100s from Iowa to Vietnam via Hawaii and Guam. He flew 256 combat missions including being shot down and subsequently rescued by an Army CH-47 Chinook helicopter crew. Kool was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for valor for his service in Vietnam. Kool would go on to complete a 35-year career flying with American Airlines where his greatest pride was having been the captain of a Boeing 777.

## Commander Charles J. Sweeney, Jr., USN (Ret.)



Our beloved former DFC Society President and CEO, Chuck Sweeney (1934—2025), flew west on 10 July 2025, at Coronado CA. A distinguished Naval Aviator and dedicated public servant, he leaves behind a legacy of courage and service. Born in Philadelphia PA, Chuck pursued a degree in engineering at St. Joseph's University before joining the defense industry. In 1958, he enlisted in the United States Navy as an aeronautical engineer. Initially assigned to Naval Air Test Center, Patuxent River MD conducting weapon systems tests, his passion for flying was ignited by Jim Lovell and other test pilots he met there, leading him to become a Navy carrier pilot. He completed flight training in 1962. He served four sea-duty combat tours flying 221 combat missions and, with Attack Squadron VA-212 flying A-4F Skyhawks off the USS Hancock (CVA-19) in 1970, was awarded three Distinguished Flying Crosses for one 7-day

period of intense combat operations over North Vietnam. Chuck would also receive four individual awards of the Air Medal, 19 Strike Air Medals and two Navy Commendations Medals for Valor. He retired from the Navy at NAS Miramar in June 1980 having flown over 200 combat missions, 4,300 flight hours and 757 carrier landings. In his post-military life, Chuck dedicated eleven years as President of the Distinguished Flying Cross Society, preserving the medal's history and heritage.



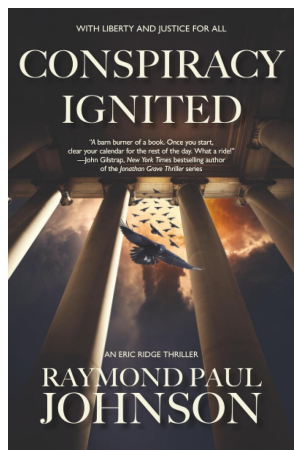
## Follow up on Dorsey Price



**Dorsey Price**, who passed away on 12 April 2024, was laid to rest in the USAF Academy Columbarium, following his Funeral Service in the Cemetery Pavilion. The service was led by his Classmate, Ray Milberg, a Deacon in the Catholic Church, on 22 August 2025. Dorsey's Stepson, Ken Auger, is standing to the left of the Deacon. Marty Lenzini, The Tucson Chapter President, is standing far right, The other eight men are Dorsey's 1966 Academy classmates. Dorsey's Service included an Air Force honor guard.

## BOOK NOOK

Many of our DFC Society members have written excellent novels and memoirs. Member authors may advertise their books for free in this section. The newsletter reaches thousands of DFCS members. Contact [editor@dfcsociety.org](mailto:editor@dfcsociety.org) to discuss advertising your books here.



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Soar into another adventure with Cubs, a vintage J-3 Piper Cub, and Volks, a cheerful Volkswagen! This unlikely duo is back on the road, exploring the great states of Wisconsin and Minnesota. Their journey is filled with fun surprises, from a festive cheese parade to a thrilling air and car show. But when a daring rescue mission calls them to action, their friendship and unique skills are put to the ultimate test.

Perfect for kids ages 8-12 who love airplane stories, car adventures, and heartwarming tales of friendship, this exciting children's book combines the thrill of aviation with a classic road trip. Available from [Amazon](https://www.amazon.com).



### Top Fin: Tales of Courage and Chaos from a Coast Guard Rescue Swimmer

By George Cavallo and Master Chief Darell Gelakoska, USCG (Ret.)

Top Fin chronicles the evolution of the Coast Guard Rescue Swimmer Program through the remarkable career of Master Chief Darell Gelakoska (#281), a leader whose example shaped generations of aviators and rescue professionals. Written with author and fellow rescue swimmer George Cavallo (#122), the book blends operational history with firsthand accounts of missions that tested courage, teamwork, and innovation. Told with clarity and respect for those who serve, *Top Fin* offers a rare inside view of the people behind the rescues—men and women who face chaos with calm resolve and uphold the enduring Coast Guard creed: So others may live. Available from [Amazon](https://www.amazon.com).



**THE DFCS STORE.** The DFC Society has contracted with the on-line ordering company, PriorService, to provide members with an outstanding array of DFC memorabilia and gift items. They may be ordered at [PriorService.com](http://PriorService.com).

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