



# CROSSCHECK



AN OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE  
DISTINGUISHED FLYING CROSS SOCIETY

The Distinguished Flying Cross Society (DFCS) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to honoring, preserving, and teaching the legacy of heroism and extraordinary achievement in aerial flight.

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*McDonnell-Douglas F-15EX Eagle II*

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

This is my first message as President after serving as Chairman in 2025. The change was necessary to match the position with the duties and responsibilities I have held per the by-laws. The Chairman position remains vacant while we continue reorganizing the DFCS to increase membership and diversify our revenue streams.



John Whiddon

The Board began training this month with National University's Fundraising Academy. The training includes strategic planning, revising our vision and mission statements and developing a tactical plan to address the changes needed to propel the DFCS into the future. We will provide a full report once the training is complete next month. This training was funded entirely through the very successful Giving Tuesday campaign that was held in December. Thank you for your support!

We continue to update the website and will be adding more Old Guys and Their Airplanes (OGTA) content. We have also been in contact with Evergreen Winery to establish a new DFCS Wine Club. There will be more details soon.

The response to the survey about holding a joint reunion with the River Rats in Dallas was very positive. Ron Bartlett is in contact with the River Rats to further the conversation and determine how we can collaborate. Interestingly, we received an inquiry from the Marine Fighter Foray about attending their reunion, also in Dallas, in October. We have also been in touch with the Naval Helicopter Association about attending their reunion in May. In short, we are looking at attending various reunions to promote the DFCS.

One of the proposed by-law changes includes the creation of "Ex-Officio" board members who will be non-voting members. The positions will be filled by active-duty members from the Army, Navy, Marines, Air Force and Coast Guard. These new board positions will provide us direct access to the various services, will allow us to market the DFCS at the unit level and will provide a new perspective to the board.

We are developing a relationship with Auburn University's School of Aviation and are finalizing details to help support their weeklong Summer Aviation Camp in 2027. We have also been in contact with veteran-owned businesses such as Nine Lines, Born Primitive, and Origin to explore common areas of interest and possible marketing and cobranding opportunities. More details to come.

There is a great deal of work going on behind the scenes, so I appreciate this opportunity to communicate with the DFCS members through our Newsletter. Thanks to Jay Miller for taking over the responsibilities of producing our quarterly newsletter.

When asked why I joined the DFCS, the answer is simple. Over the past 15 months, I have been fortunate to meet battle tested aviators and aircrewmembers who persevered and overcame incredible odds in service of their nation and then went on to achieve remarkable results in their businesses and communities. It is a privilege to serve as President of the DFCS.

Best regards

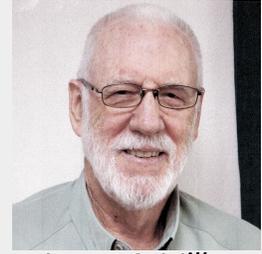
*John*

John Whiddon

President, Distinguished Flying Cross Society

## EDITOR'S CORNER

In this second issue of the *DFCS Newsletter*, we bring [News](#), first, of the award of the **Medal of Honor** to our distinguished member of the DFCS, Captain Royce Williams (USN, ret.). Also, of the award of the **Congressional Gold Medal** to the Dustoff crews of the Vietnam War. (The underlined words throughout the newsletter are hot links to more complete stories or to sections in the *Newsletter*.) Send your news stories to me at the email address, below.



James C. Miller

This issue's [Featured Article](#) is part 2 of the **McDonnell-Douglas F-15E Strike Eagle** article that was prepared under editor Lew Jennings' guidance for publication in our former *DFCS News Magazine*. It was lengthy, so I split it into three parts for the *Newsletter*. Part 2 is followed by five more 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 be featured** 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 me at the email address, below.

Again, our [Taps](#) section continues to grow. A large proportion of us are Vietnam veterans, and we are getting pretty old. I have included links to full obituaries, where possible, and the name of the person who sent us the notice. When you send in these notices, please try to include a link or source name for a full, on-line obituary, and try to find a good head and shoulders photo of the deceased. I can't always track those down. Also, I've backtracked, providing links in the Taps section of this issue to full obituaries for those members listed in the previous (December 2025) issue of this newsletter.

As always, be sure to check the [Book Nook](#). We feature books written by DFCS members there. Our members continue to produce good reads! Featured in this issue is the story of how Captain Richard Evans became the B-17 Flying Fortress pilot for WWII's Field Marshal Bernard L. Montgomery.

The last piece in the **News** section, below, is an introduction to your new newsletter editor.

James C. (Jay) Miller  
[DFCS.Editor@DFCSociety.org](mailto:DFCS.Editor@DFCSociety.org)



## DFCS NEWS

### DFCS Member Awarded Medal of Honor

**Captain Royce Williams** (USN, ret.) has been awarded the **Medal of Honor**. Royce is known for his 1952 solo dogfight with seven Soviet MiGs during the Korean War, one of the greatest feats in aviation history. He was awarded the Silver Star in 1953. In January 2023 it was upgraded to the Navy Cross. On 4 February 2026, it was announced that his Navy Cross would be upgraded to the Medal of Honor.

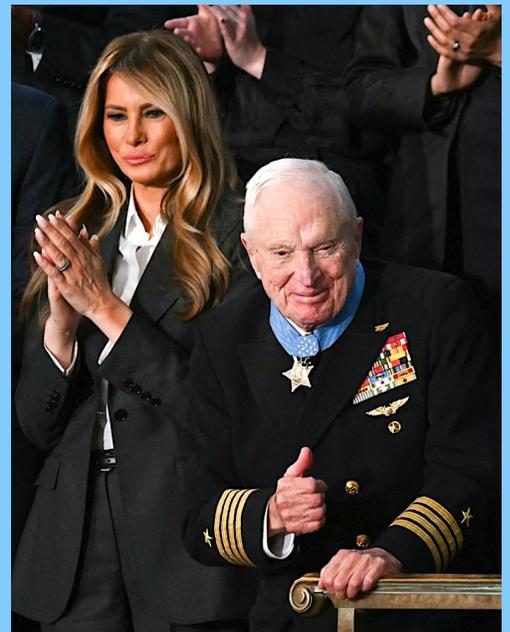


“President Donald Trump says he will bestow the Medal of Honor on Escondido war hero Royce Williams for the courage he displayed during the Korean War in taking on seven Soviet MiG fighter jets, shooting down four of them. Trump made the announcement Tuesday afternoon in a phone call to Williams, who will turn 101 this spring. ‘We’re going to put that very beautiful medal over his very strong neck,’ Trump told Williams’ caregiver while he listened over a speaker phone. ‘It is the ultimate honor, so you’ve got to shake his hand for me.’ Williams told Trump, ‘This is wonderful. As you know, I’m quite an old man—100 plus.’ Williams told the Union-Tribune Wednesday, ‘This is the fulfillment of a lifetime. I am so pleased.’” ([San Diego Union-Tribune](#), 4 Feb 2026). Other

stories: [Stars & Stripes](#), [Navy Times](#), [Wikipedia](#).

Between 1965 and 1967, Williams flew 110 missions in A-4 Skyhawks and F-4 Phantoms from the aircraft carrier *USS Kitty Hawk* during the Vietnam War. Williams was the commanding officer of the command ship *USS Eldorado* between September 1969 and January 1971. He retired from the Navy as a Captain in 1980.

The actual award was made by President Donald Trump on 24 Feb 2026, just before he gave his State of The Union address to Congress that evening. Captain Williams was one of the President’s guests at the State of the Union address.



The following was abstracted from *Wikipedia*. Royce Williams qu August 1945. He learned to fly the F9F-5 Panther and was assigned which he flew 70 missions.



MiG-15



Grumman F9F-5 Panther

In 1952, LT Williams was serving with VF-781 aboard the *USS Oriskany*. On 18 November, on his second mission of the day, near Hoeryong, North Korea, his group of four pilots spotted seven MiG-15s overhead. Two of the other three pilots had to return to the

carrier and the MiGs began to fire on Williams, putting him into a dogfight with seven MiG-15s that lasted 35 minutes. It is believed to be the longest dogfight in U.S. Navy history. He shot down four of the MiGs and likely hit two others. By the end of the 35-minute period, only one of the MiGs was still in the air with him, and he managed to escape back to his carrier, out of ammunition and having lost his hydraulics. He was uninjured, but there were 263 holes in his aircraft.

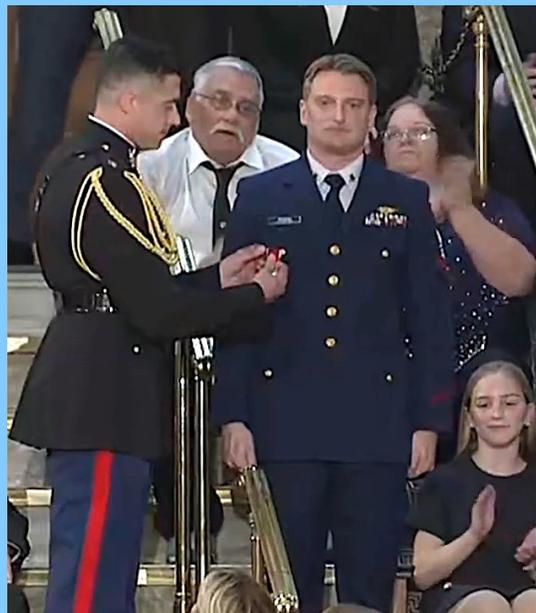
Williams was debriefed by admirals, the Secretary of Defense, and by President Eisenhower. A decision was made to cover up the specifics of the battle because, at that time, the Soviet Union was not officially a combatant in the Korean War. Williams was sworn to secrecy about the incident. He never told anyone about it, not his wife or his pilot brother, until the Korean War records were declassified in 2002. The dogfight was recorded in Soviet archives which were released after the fall of the Soviet Union in the 1990s.



The **Villages FL Chapter** of the DFCS was well represented at the [2025 DFC Society reunion](#) in Charleston. Shown in the photo (L-R) are Monika and Joe Finch, Jack and Tanat Moran, and Dwight and Nona Moore. (Other reunion photos [here](#).) **Joe Finch:** DFC 7 Sep 1969, Pilot, Company A (Little Bears), 25th Aviation Battalion, USA. **Jack Moran:** DFC 25 Aug 1972, B-52 Lead Radar Navigator, USAF. **Dwight Moore:** DFC 3 Jun 1972, DFC 18-28 Dec 1972, DFC 29 Dec 1972. B-52D Aircraft Commander, 43rd & 307th Strategic Wings, USAF.

## Legion of Merit

On 24 Feb 2026, President Donald Trump awarded the **Legion of Merit** to **AST2 Scott Ruskan** during the 2026 State of the Union Address to Congress. USCG rescue swimmer Ruskan became a household name across America after he rescued 165 people from deadly Central Texas floods on 4 July 2025. For those efforts, Homeland Secretary Kristi Noem had already awarded Ruskan the DFC and promoted him to Aviation Survival Technician (AST) second class. Ruskan was one half of the DFC Society's Aircrew of the Year. [Story](#).



## Khe Sanh Hero

Approximately 60 veterans live in a veteran's home in Boulder City NV. **Michael Hays**, DFCS Secretary, visited that home recently. Michael was introduced there to resident veteran and DFCS member **Richard Camburn** by Richard's niece, Kim Marsh. Most of the residents wear military paraphernalia. Richard did not have a DFCS shirt or hat. Kim and Michael resolved to provide him with a DFCS hat. Christmas seemed like an appropriate time to present it to him. Kim provided the following information.

Richard M. Camburn celebrated his 92nd birthday in December. Born and raised in New Jersey, he enlisted in the United States Air Force in 1952 and served with distinction for two decades. TSgt Camburn was awarded the DFC for his actions on 18 April 1968 while serving as a C-130E Flight Engineer at Khe Sanh, Republic of Vietnam, during a mission to evacuate a planeload of Marines under intense small-arms, anti-aircraft, and mortar fire. His professionalism and unwavering devotion to duty helped ensure the rapid loading of the aircraft and a nearly vertical takeoff that brought both the troops and the air crew to safety. Following his Vietnam service, he was stationed in Europe, supporting special missions along the Soviet border, and was awarded the Air Medal on 29 May 1969. TSgt Camburn retired from the Air Force in 1972 and returned to New Jersey, where he established and operated his own construction business. His lifetime of service, courage, and dedication continues to inspire all who know him.



On Jan 12, Michael Hays went back to the Southern Nevada State Veterans Home with Warren Eastman, DFCS Executive VP, and Jack Donahue, former President of the DFCS Las Vegas Chapter, to visit Richard. Warren presented Richard with a DFCS Vietnam 50 Welcome Home Challenge Coin. Local station KLAS/Channel 8 covered the event and [reported it on their evening news](#).

## Rescue at Cau Song Be

John M. White writes an excellent blog about aviation history. His 13 Feb 2026 post was about [The Rescue at Cau Song Be](#). Lt Larry Liss was piloting an unarmed Huey on 24 May 1967 on a routine mission to a Green Beret outpost. However, he wound up rescuing 87 South Vietnamese and Green Beret soldiers under fire. Initially, Liss' heroism was overlooked. Eventually, he received the **DFC**. In 2024, his DFC was upgraded to the **Silver Star**. There is a movie, "Rescue at Cau Song Be."

John White has had a long career in aviation, including as a corporate pilot flying a DC-3. In retirement he runs the aviation website, [www.aviator-sunglasses.net](http://www.aviator-sunglasses.net).

## Dustoff Medic, John Seebeth

The Dustoff news, below, was brought to our attention by former Dustoff medic, John Seebeth, who was wounded gravely in action in Vietnam. In late August, 1969 he was shot in the neck during a rescue mission to evacuate a soldier who was shot in the back. Read about John here: [Issaquahwa.gov](http://Issaquahwa.gov).

## Dustoff Medal

On 26 Sep 2024, President Joe Biden signed the “Dustoff Crews of the Vietnam War **Congressional Gold Medal Act**” into law. This gold medal recognizes the pilots, crew chiefs and medics who “served honorably during the Vietnam War aboard helicopter air ambulances.” At the end of October, U.S. Senator John Cornyn (Texas) and retired Maj. Gen. Patrick Brady, a Medal of Honor recipient and former Vietnam Dustoff pilot, attended a ceremony hosted by the U.S. Army Medical Center of Excellence at the Army Medical Department Museum at Joint Base San Antonio-Fort Sam Houston that paid tribute to the intrepid flight crews of the Vietnam War medevac helicopters. [Dustoff.org](http://Dustoff.org). [Army.mil](http://Army.mil). [Kerrville Daily Times](http://Kerrville Daily Times).



## Last WWII Ace Dies

[World War II's last American ace dies at 103](#). Amid the 80th anniversary of WWII's end came the death of the man who was believed to be America's last surviving ace, **Don McPherson**.

**The B-52 Stratofortress Association** will have it's next reunion in the Seattle WA area on 10 to 13 Sep 2026. It will be held at the Double Tree Suites by Hilton Seattle Airport/Southcenter. There will be tours of Boeing, The Museum of Flight, and Pike Place Market. Full information is posted the [Association's website](#). Submitted by Russ Stephenson, DFCS Life Member.



## Introduction to James C. Miller, Newsletter Editor

During summers in high school and college, and through 1965, I worked as a research assistant in the brain research laboratories of [Dr. W. Ross Adey](#) at UCLA. I acquired my bachelor's degree at the University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB), class of 1964. In 1966, I attended USAF Officer Training School at Medina Annex, Lackland AFB, San Antonio TX. My Squadron 1 colleague, roommate, and friend at OTS was [Rich VanDyke](#). Next, a year of Undergraduate Pilot Training at Webb AFB, Big Spring TX (Class 67H), and then three months of C-130 upgrade training at Sewart AFB, Nashville TN. I became a fully tactically-qualified copilot in the Lockheed C-130E Hercules at Dyess AFB, Abilene TX, about six weeks before the Tet Offensive of 1968. Subsequently, I spent 20 months in the Far East with the [346<sup>th</sup> Tactical Airlift Squadron](#) as copilot, aircraft commander, and then instructor pilot (1968-1970). I flew 689 combat sorties in SEA, logging about 680 hours of combat time. I was awarded the DFC and five Air Medals. I told my war stories in [A 346<sup>th</sup> TAS Diary](#).

I left active duty in 1971. Later, I spent 10 years in the USAF Reserve, first as an Admissions Liaison Officer for the USAF Academy, including commanding the South Texas area in the 1980s, then with the AF Office of Scientific Research. In 1989 I was placed into the now-defunct USAF Honorary Retired Reserve in the grade of Major.

After active duty, I completed my doctorate in human physiology and psychophysiology under the guidance of [Dr. Steve M. Horvath](#) at UCSB's [Institute of Environmental Stress](#). I then spent about 45 years working as an applied research scientist, 14 of those years as a civilian scientist with the USAF at Brooks AFB/City-Base, San Antonio TX, plus spending 1987—1989 as the Chief, Human Factors Engineering Branch, AF Flight Test Center, Edwards AFB CA. My applied research focused mainly on the effects of sleep disruption and circadian rhythm disruption on the cognition of operators in transportation systems. Most of my research articles are available at [Researchgate.com](#). I've written seven technical books, including [Anatomy of a Fatigue-Related Accident](#).

I'm now fully retired. Joy and I live in Wilson County TX, about 30 miles east of San Antonio. I play trombone in several groups, including the [Veterans Funky Rock Jazz Tejano Band of Corpus Christi](#).

Working with editor Lew Jennings, I wrote or edited a number of articles for the DFCS *News Magazine*:

- Summer 2022: Editor's Corner, p. 5. "YC-130A—The First Herky Bird," pp. 32-33. "C-130 Operations: The First Decade," pp 34-35. "The Four Horsemen," p. 36. "C-130—The Last Half-Century," pp. 37-39. Editor's note on Captain Paul Katsuki's DFC, p. 53.
- Winter 2022: "USAF Lockheed U-2 Dragon Lady Development," pp. 32-34. "High Altitude Flight and Decompression Sickness," pp. 34-35.
- Winter 2023: Editor, "Escort Services Over the Ho Chi Minh Trail" by Fred Doubet, pp. 54-55
- Summer 2024: "Airborne Forward Air Control," pp. 20-26. Editor, "Flying the Cessna O-1 Bird Dog as a Slow FAC" by John Postgate, pp. 28-31.
- Winter 2024: "Reindeer Really Do Fly: The CV-2/C-7/DHC-4 de Havilland Caribou," pp. 26-33

Photo below: Squadron mate landing at Bu Dop, 1 July 1970. Photo by Capt James Miller.



## FEATURE ARTICLE

### From Eaglet to Predator

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

#### Part 2. Development and Employment of the Strike Eagle

When the F-15E was in a Development Test and Engineering (DT&E) phase in the late 1980s at the Air Force Flight Test Center (AFFTC) at Edwards AFB, California, one of the authors (Dr. Miller) was the chief of AFFTC's Human Factors Engineering Branch. In May 1989 he made the presentation, "Human Factors in USAF Cockpit Design, Development and Acquisition," to two groups within the Department of Defense Technical Human Factors Engineering Advisory Group (DoD HFE TAG). The presentation characterized the inadequate flow of human factors research and development information from the USAF basic and applied research laboratories, where he had worked previously, through the USAF acquisition process and into DT&E at AFFTC. He stated that, "for applied behavioral science, there is a disconnect between our research and our acquisition of systems. The disconnect cripples effective aircrew-aircraft interactions in the cockpit, thus the disconnect may degrade the ability of the USAF to perform its mission." Two of the examples that he presented dealt with DT&E for the F-15E.

(1) Even though the entire nature of interactions between the aircrew and aircraft systems was changed by the modification of the F-15 to the F-15E, the test and evaluation master plan (TEMP) did not specify these interactions as a critical test item. The F-15E will provide a low-level, high-speed, night, under the weather penetration capability for the delivery of air-to-ground weapons. This is a mission change from the air superiority role of the F-15A/C. The modifications to the aircraft include a complete replacement of primary displays with those similar to the F-18. They also include a doubling of the operational crew complement. My review of the TEMP labelled it a test plan for an unmanned aircraft. No cross-fertilization between acquisition people and applied behavioral scientists was apparent in this TEMP. Those working in applied behavioral science would have identified quickly the flaw in the test plan. Recommendations made by human factors specialists may have been ignored in the drafting of this TEMP.

(2) The pilot of the F-15E, during night, low-level operations, relies solely upon the head-up display (HUD) for orientation. The HUD displays air speed and altitude in alphanumeric form. Decades ago, applied behavioral scientists showed that the brain needs analog, not alphanumeric, information to perceive trends quickly. The F-15E crew will ingress to a ground target at nearly supersonic speed, at and below 200 feet above the terrain. Their view of the world is restricted to a small aperture directed forward, provided by infrared sensors.

The crew does not have the time to perform mental arithmetic to determine altitude trends. They need a moving scale or a moving pointer to determine quickly whether they are going up or down. The relevant information has long been available in MIL-STD-1472. The submission of this HUD display for flight test was an error. Test pilots saw the flaw immediately and formally reported it with the assistance of a human factors engineer. Changes to the system software will now complicate and perhaps delay DT&E.

Similarly, the bank angle indications on the HUD were designed in a manner poorly interpreted by the human brain. Again, the appropriate guidance was available in MIL-STD-1472. This problem was also reported formally by the test community.

Fortunately, USAF pilots can deal well with inadequacies. They are both rigorous in the execution of flight-related procedures and readily adaptable when presented with anomalous aviation problems.

**Employment of the Strike Eagle.** The F-15E became the newest fighter in Tactical Air Command when the 405<sup>th</sup> Tactical Training Wing, Luke AFB, Arizona, accepted delivery of the first production model in April

1988. The 4<sup>th</sup> Fighter Wing at Seymour Johnson AFB, North Carolina, was the first operational F-15E wing in the Air Force (*globalsecurity.org*). Initial operating capability was achieved in September 1989. The aircraft became the USAF's primary strike fighter/interdictor, gradually replacing the F-111 Aardvark.

According to an anonymous author on *Giantbomb.com*, the F-15E “has a much darker grey paint than the air superiority F-15s, which is the source of a few of its nicknames. It is affectionately known as the Mudhen, with ‘mud’ in reference to its air to ground role and darker color scheme and ‘hen’ referencing its fat CFTs. F-15C crews call the F-15E, ‘the dark side’ and pilots that transition to the F-15E are ‘joining the dark side.’” The F-15E is also nicknamed the “Beagle,” a blend of the words, “Bomber” and “Eagle.”

Since 1990, the F-15E has been deployed almost continuously to trouble spots across the world. Shortly after completing initial operational capability, the aircraft was deployed in response to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. After that the F-15E saw considerable action in Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm and destroyed many high value targets during those two operations. It was in these two operations that the air-to-ground capabilities of the F-15E were proven. Post-Desert Storm operations such as Northern Watch, Southern Watch, and Desert Fox were supported by the F-15E, and the aircraft continued to demonstrate its value and to make significant contributions to allied air-to-ground efforts.

In 1993, the F-15E was deployed in support of operations in the Balkans. Numerous sorties were flown in which SAM sites and other high value targets were engaged successfully. Of note in these operations, weapons such as the AGM-130 rocket-boosted bomb were used with devastating effects against numerous high-threat targets. In 2001, the F-15E was deployed in support of Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan. Air defenses were light in the Afghan operation and the F-15E performed in a low threat environment. Subsequent operations involved Operations Iraqi Freedom and Odyssey Dawn in Libya. Finally, F-15E operations have remained continuous against the Islamic State in places like Libya and Syria.

One of the authors (Dr. Miller) was honored, while working at the Air Force Research Laboratory, to assist Mary *Melfi* Burns with her master's thesis, "Causes and Effects of Fatigue in Experienced Military Aircrew and the Countermeasures Needed to Improve Flight Safety" (2006). Mary is the epitome of women USAF aviators. She served as a USAF F-15E Strike Eagle Weapon Systems Officer in Operation Iraqi Freedom. She logged 250 hours of combat time and was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross twice and the Air Medal with three Oak Leaf Clusters. The descriptions of her two DFC missions, below, exemplify the effectiveness of the F-15E Strike Eagle in combat.



Captain Mary L. Melfi distinguished herself by heroism while participating in aerial flight as F-15E Weapon Systems Officer, 336<sup>th</sup> Expeditionary Fighter Squadron, 379<sup>th</sup> Operations Group, 379<sup>th</sup> Air Expeditionary Wing at Al Udeid Air Base, Qatar on 20 March 2003. On that date, in support of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM, Captain Melfi led a flight of two Strike Eagles on the second night of hostilities. Initially tasked to provide defensive counter air, Captain Melfi was re-tasked by the Combined Air Operations Center to locate, identify, and destroy a time-critical, high-value target capable of delivering weapons of mass destruction, near the heavily defended city of Basra. Due to smoke, haze, and cloud cover in conjunction with the target significance, Captain Melfi was forced to descend into the heart of the threat envelope. Entering the target area, the flight encountered heavy anti-aircraft artillery fire. Knowing the magnitude of destroying this target and the possibility that the missiles could be quickly relocated, Captain Melfi decided to enter multiple surface-to-air missile and anti-aircraft artillery threat envelopes without dedicated suppression support. In response to heavy anti-aircraft artillery, she directed evasive maneuvers defeating the rounds as they detonated slightly behind the aircraft. On her first reconnaissance pass, Captain Melfi expertly employed aircraft sensors to pinpoint a deceptively concealed Ababil-100 surface-to-surface missile launcher, despite a discrepancy in the original coordinates versus the target's actual location. Captain Melfi successfully guided two GBU-12s, achieving direct hits and completely destroying the Ababil-100 launcher. The outstanding heroism and selfless devotion to duty displayed by Captain Melfi reflect great credit upon herself and the United States Air Force.



Captain Mary L. Melfi distinguished herself by extraordinary achievement while participating in aerial flight as F-15E Weapon Systems Officer, 336th Expeditionary Fighter Squadron, 379th Expeditionary Operations Group, 379th Air Expeditionary Wing, Al Udeid Air Base, Qatar, on 10 April 2003. On that date, Captain Melfi was the lead weapon systems officer on a mission providing time critical close air support for Special Operations Forces in support of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM. Upon receiving the airborne tasking, Captain Melfi directed her flight through a sophisticated integrated air defense system, including SA-2s, 3s, 6s, 8s, Rolands, and anti-aircraft artillery to support ground forces in the vicinity of Tikrit Airbase South. Coordinating with a Special Operations ground forward air controller, Captain Melfi provided a crippling strike against Iraqi ground forces defending the airbase. Due to a failure of her wingman's low altitude navigation and targeting infrared for night targeting pod, Captain Melfi was required to perform buddy guide attacks with the laser guided bombs on both aircraft, using her own targeting pod. Captain Melfi successfully attacked eighteen revetted tanks, fuel storage bladders and artillery pieces, destroying a different target every three minutes. The targets were confirmed destroyed by the ground forward air controller. Captain Melfi provided the firepower for the Special Operations task force to take control of the airfield within hours. The professional competence, aerial skill, and devotion to duty displayed by Captain Melfi reflect great credit upon herself and the United States Air Force.

Jumping forward 20 years, numerous Iraqi drones have been shot down in the last two years. The F-15E was involved in the first of such successful encounters. On 14 April 2024, U.S. officials singled out the role of F-15E Strike Eagles from the 494th Fighter Squadron and the 335th Fighter Squadron in downing more than 70 Iranian drones. F-16s were involved, also. President Biden spoke with members of the F-15 squadrons, commending them for their “exceptional airmanship and skill in defending Israel from an unprecedented aerial attack by Iran.” This was the largest air-to-air enemy engagement in over 50 years: 170 one-way drones, 120 Medium-Range Ballistic Missiles, and 30 Land-Attack Cruise Missiles were launched from Iran, a Houthi terrorist group in Yemen, and Iranian-backed proxies in Iraq. F-15E crew, pilot Maj. Benjamin “Irish” Coffey and weapons systems officer Capt. Lacie “Sonic” Hester, “described flying as close as they could to an Iranian drone, well below the minimum safe altitude for the F-15 Strike Eagle, and using a gun—an extremely dangerous maneuver in total darkness, against a barely visible target.” Hester and Coffey were awarded the Silver Star. [Air & Space Forces](#), [Aviationist](#), [CNN](#).

### **Part 3. Continuation and Variants of the Strike Eagle. (to follow in the June issue)**



## DFCS F-15E MEMBER CITATIONS

Lew Jennings and I identified 14 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 second five individuals are shown here. The final five citations will be included with the third installment of the F-15E feature article. Let me know if we've missed any (email address, above).



**Culver, Curtis B.** The President of the United States takes great pleasure in presenting the Distinguished Flying Cross (WITH VALOR) to Lieutenant Colonel Curtis B. Culver for heroism in aerial flight while engaged in military operations involving conflict against an opposing foreign force as Squadron Commander and F-15E Evaluator Pilot, 494th Expeditionary Fighter Squadron, 332d Air Expeditionary Wing, from 13 April 2024 through 14 April 2024. During this period, Colonel Culver flew in a two-ship formation of F-15E Strike Eagles and served as the senior airborne commander in 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 Culver 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 Culver 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 Culver'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 Culver reflected great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.



**Damsker, Jamie A.** The President of the United States takes great pleasure in presenting the Distinguished Flying Cross to Captain Jamie A. Damsker for extraordinary achievement while participating in aerial flight as an F-15E Weapons Systems Officer, 494th Expeditionary Fighter Squadron, 31st Expeditionary Operations Group, 31st Air Expeditionary Wing, Aviano Air Base, Italy, during Operation ALLIED FORCE, on 28 April 1999. On that date, Captain Damsker, employed the Guided Bomb Unit-28 for the first time ever by F-15Es in combat. He was tasked to destroy tunnel entrances leading to bunkers storing enemy aircraft near the city of Pristina. The five thousand-pound, precision-guided bunker buster was the only weapon capable of accomplishing this critical mission. Severe weather in the target area made it necessary for him to perform multiple passes through numerous missile threats over the heavily defended airfield. The flight, low on fuel, coordinated for an emergency tanker and, after returning to the target area, had their tenacity pay off. With less than favorable weather conditions, Captain Damsker's formation was forced into using precise release parameters never before attempted with this weapon. He scored a direct hit of his aimpoint and subsequently guided the weapon dropped by his wingman. Despite the unfavorable weather, Captain Damsker's unwavering spirit to carry

out the mission prevented Serbian fighter aircraft from seeing the light of day. The professional competence, aerial skill, and devotion to duty displayed by Captain Damsker reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.



**Dyer, Todd R.** The President of the United States takes great pleasure in presenting the Distinguished Flying Cross to Captain Todd R. Dyer 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, in support of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM, Captain Dyer flew in a flight of two Strike Eagles, tasked with strike coordination and reconnaissance. En route to the working area, the flight was fired upon by two surface to air missiles. He aggressively defeated the missiles with maneuvers and countermeasures. Once established in the area, Captain Dyer found, identified and destroyed six T-72 tanks arrayed in positions to protect Baghdad. After refueling, the flight was retasked to investigate and destroy a high priority-building complex southeast of Baghdad. Captain Dyer orchestrated the release of his three remaining bombs, destroying three buildings hiding enemy personnel. The flight was then tasked to find and destroy certain vehicles in a military complex west of Baghdad, targets of the highest priority possible. The flight encountered multiple anti-aircraft artillery fires over Baghdad but again defeated the threats with defensive maneuvers. Having expended all nine weapons on previous targets, Captain Dyer flew defensive cover for his flight lead. Subsequently, he identified three targets and aided in passing their locations to two F/A-18 Hornets, affecting the destruction of 20 military vehicles. Maintaining extreme vigilance for threats within the saturated defenses of Baghdad, he visually picked up the launch of two surface to air missiles only seconds after the last F/A-18 weapon hit its target. Captain Dyer directed the flight to execute a threat reaction, causing the missiles to miss the F-15E. In total, Captain Dyer personally destroyed six tanks, three high-priority buildings, and defeated four surface-to-air missiles along with numerous anti-aircraft artillery fires. His actions ensured the quick downfall of the Iraqi regime and helped protect coalition forces. The outstanding heroism and selfless devotion to duty displayed by Captain Dyer reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.



**Flood, Kevin J.** The Distinguished Flying Cross for heroism 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 29 May 1999. On that date, his formation, Metro 53, was tasked to destroy an army barracks complex near Obrva Airfield. This required leading his element directly into the heart of a known surface-to-air missile site. After Major Flood designated the target and released his weapons, he began to guide the bombs to the target. Immediately, he was targeted by an enemy radar site in the target area. His timely threat call provided situation awareness to his formation and allowed the accompanying suppression of enemy air defense assets to attack the site. Unfortunately, this was not before missiles were launched at his formation. Major Flood directed defensive maneuvers for his aircraft while he simultaneously spotted two missiles heading towards his jet. He ensured the external fuel tanks were jettisoned and confirmed his wingman did the same. When it was apparent that he had defeated the threat, he calmly returned his attention to guiding his 500-pound bombs into the target area. With just seconds until weapons impact, he ensured the precision-guided munitions hit the target area causing severe damage to the enemy. On egress he was once more engaged by missile fire which he expertly defeated. The outstanding heroism and selfless devotion to duty displayed by Major Flood reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.



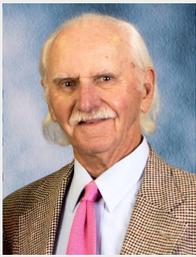
**Haskin, Randall J.** The President of the United States takes great pleasure in presenting the Distinguished Flying Cross to Captain Randall J. Haskin for heroism while participating in aerial flight as F-15E Pilot, 336th Expeditionary Fighter Squadron, 379th Expeditionary Operations Group, 379th Air Expeditionary Wing at Al Udeid Air Base, Qatar on 2 April 2003. On that date, in support of Operations Iraqi Freedom, Captain Haskin received a last minute tasking from the Combined Air Operations Center against time-sensitive, high-priority targets. The new targets were five overpass culverts under a busy highway suspected of harboring SCUD surface-to-surface missiles in the vicinity of heavily defended Baghdad. Additionally, Captain Haskin was informed that there were friendlies within 1,500 meters of one of the culverts. This unconventional tasking called for an unconventional game plan. With minimal planning time, Captain Haskin's flight masterminded a buddy guide employment tactic to ensure adequate weapons effects. The plan required precise run-in-headings and precise formation positioning. The execution of this non-standard plan was made even more difficult by the maneuvering required to avoid the heavy anti-aircraft artillery fire near the target area. During the attack on the second culvert, a surface-to-air missile was launched, causing Captain Haskin to begin evasive maneuvers while dispensing countermeasures. Without regard for his own safety, Captain Haskin continued attacks on all five of the culverts with one culvert yielding secondary explosions that were later verified by a ground observer to be the destruction of a SCUD missile. After refueling, Captain Haskin's flight was tasked to verify the presence of Iraqi helicopters believed to be carrying weapons of mass destruction. After three reconnaissance passes, well within Baghdad's surface-to-air missile engagements zone, it was determined that the suspected helicopters were not present. However, while searching, Captain Haskin's flight identified and destroyed a surface-to-surface missile transporter. The outstanding heroism and selfless devotion to duty displayed by Captain Haskin reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

## 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.*



**Jacob L. Cooper**, Col., USAF (Ret.), USAF, 1924—2026, passed away in Clarence Center NY at the age of 101. A native of Ilion NY, whose parents had immigrated from the Netherlands, he was the 5th of 8 children. He was a P-47 fighter pilot in WWII, 493rd Fighter Squadron, 48th Fighter Group, 9th AF, ETO. His DFC citation reads, "On 25 January 1945, while leading a squadron in a close support of the ground forces, Lieutenant Cooper attacked an enemy truck and tank column with telling effects. Heedless of intense anti-aircraft fire and demonstrating superior airmanship and aggressiveness, Lieutenant Cooper returned alone to make numerous strafing passes until his ammunition was exhausted, inflicting additional damage on vital enemy equipment." After WWII, Col Cooper joined the Reserves and worked at Remington Arms in Ilion before being recalled to active duty. He retired from the Air Force in 1970 with 28 Years of service, then sold insurance for NY Life and was on the Urban Renewal board in Ilion. He was the last living 493rd FS fighter pilot who had flown missions during the war. He compiled and edited the book, *The 493rd Fighter Squadron in World War II*. Submitted by Col Cooper's son, Scott Cooper. [Obituary](#) 1. [Spotlight](#). [Obituary](#) 2.



**Pat "Hawk" Farley**, Lt. Col. USAF (Ret.), 1942—2025, flew west on 15 Oct 2025. Raised in Brooklyn NY, he departed for KC-135 crew training at Castle AFB CA in 1966. After five years at Plattsburgh AFB NY, Hawk transitioned to the F-4 at MacDill AFB FL and Nellis AFB NV. He then reported to Udorn RTAB, Thailand in October 1972. There, he flew 155 Combat Missions with the 421st TFS, Black Widows, and as a Laredo Fast FAC. He was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross and 11 Air Medals. His next assignment was with the 496TFS, Hahn AB, Germany, finishing that tour as the Chief, Contingency Plans, 50TFW. Next was a rated supplement assignment to the 381st Strategic Missile Wing, McConnell AFB KS, selected eventually as Commander, 532nd Strategic Missile Squadron. He concluded his USAF career as the Assistant Deputy Commander of Maintenance and the Project Officer for Operation Rivet Cap, the deactivation of the 17 Titan II Missile sites surrounding Wichita KS. In retirement, the Hawk took a position in the Government Marketing Group at Beech/Raytheon Aircraft in Wichita, Kansas. Sent in by James "Doc" Graninger. [Obituary](#).



**Col Edwin Dale Gunter, Jr.**, USAF (Ret.) (1948—2025), passed away on 4 Aug 2025 in Claremore OK. Ed was born at Randolph AFB, San Antonio TX. His family lived in New Braunfels, Karnes City, San Marcos, and Austin TX. In 1963, Ed received an appointment to the USAF Academy. Upon completion of pilot training at Laughlin AFB, Del Rio TX, Ed was assigned to an O-1 Bird Dog squadron in South Vietnam, where he was recruited by the CIA to fly in Laos as a Raven forward air controller. He flew 526 combat missions, earning the Legion of Merit, three Distinguished Flying Crosses, the Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry, six Meritorious Service Medals, eighteen Air Medals, and the Air Force Commendation Medal. After the war, Ed returned to USAFA as a flight instructor. Later, he became the Technical Training Wing Vice Commander at Keesler AFB MS, and concluded his career as Vice Commander of the USAF Civil Air Patrol at Maxwell AFB AL After retiring in 1994, Ed taught aviation science and pilot courses at Palo Alto Community College, San San Antonio TX. Ed was also a test pilot of experimental aircraft and a banner towing pilot, logging over 8000 flight hours, including more than 1000 in combat. Sent in by J. Bruce Huffman. [Obituary](#).



**Gerald Lee "Mitch" Mitchell** (1943—2026), passed away on 11 Feb 2026 in Little Rock AR. He was a member of Little Rock's Ira Eaker Chapter of DFCS. After graduating from North Dakota State University with a degree in electrical engineering, he entered the USAF as a 1Lt in 1966 and trained as a pilot at Vance AFB, Enid OK. He then flew the Lockheed C141 Starlifter. Subsequently, he had a one-year tour in Vietnam as a forward air controller (FAC) in the Cessna O-2 Skymaster. He was awarded the DFC for action "near Phan Thiet, Republic of Vietnam on 28 October 1969. On that date, Captain Mitchell flew in support of a Long Range Reconnaissance Patrol which was under heavy attack by a numerically superior hostile force." Later, he became a missile launch control officer in North Dakota. He also flew the North American T-39 Sabreliner and the C-21 Learjet, retiring as a major at Scott Air Force Base IL with 21 years of service. After his retirement, Mitch worked for 28 years as a simulator instructor for Flight Safety International in St Louis MO He was awarded the FAA's Wilbur Wright Master Pilot Award, which recognizes pilots who have practiced safe flight operations continuously for 50 or more years. [Obituary](#).

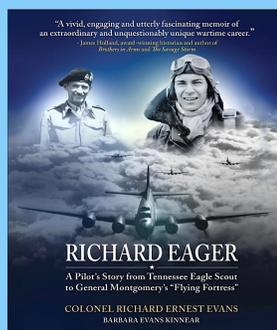
**Ed. note.** For the December 2025 newsletter I had planned to include links to full obituaries in our Taps section, Time and circumstances precluded my doing that. As Robbie Burns said famously, "The best laid schemes o' Mice an' Men Gang aft agley." So, here are the December issue's full obituary links that I have found.

[Lewis L. "Lew" Barger, Jr.](#), [Lt. Col Robert I. Biss](#), [Maj \(Hobart\) Ray Bower](#), [MG Edward Robert Bracken](#), [Robert](#)

[William "Bob" Brown](#), [Mortimer B. Cameron, Jr.](#), [CMSgt Wilburt "Cas" Castaneda](#), [Maj Richard L. "Dickie" Dunn](#), [Col Ronald V. "Ron" Grabler](#), [Col Gerald "Jerry" T. Hipp](#), [William Henderson Hyde](#), [Maj Paul Katsuki](#), [Harvey Levine Pickerington](#), [Col Billie J. Massey](#), [Edward Francis Mullen, Jr.](#), [Brian John Russ](#), [CWO5 John Anthony "Tony" Shoemaker](#), [William Guyton "Bill" Simmons](#), [Maj Dennis Edward Sullivan](#), [CDR Charles J. "Chuck" Sweeney, Jr.](#), and [Kuldar "Kool" Visnapuu](#).

## 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 the editor to discuss advertising your books here (email address, above).*



### **Richard Eager**

By Col Richard Ernest Evans and Barbara Evans Kinnear (2021)

The story of how young Captain Richard Evans became the B-17 Flying Fortress pilot for Field Marshal Bernard L. Montgomery throughout North Africa and Italy. Evans' recollections of cadet training, combat missions and experiences with the "top brass" bring the realities of being a World War II pilot into a deeply human focus. All book proceeds go to an endowed education scholarship that is managed by the Air Force and Space Aid Society, Submitted by DFCS associate member and co-author, Barbara Evans Kinnear, daughter of DFCS posthumous member, Col Evans (1919—2006). [Book site](#). [Amazon](#).



## ADMIN

**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).

**BECOMING A MEMBER.** Members may be former active duty DFC recipients; recipients on active duty; the spouse, relative, or descendant of a DFC recipient (associate member); or a posthumous member. The membership page is located at [dfcsociety.org/join](http://dfcsociety.org/join).

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