



CROSSCHECK

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DISTINGUISHED FLYING CROSS SOCIETY



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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Fundraiser Gift Program Extended to June 15

Picture yourself flying tree top level air support over the Vietnamese jungle. Both door gunners are laying down suppressive fire, allowing friendly forces to break contact, recover their wounded, and withdraw safely. Despite intense automatic weapons fire, you continue making repeated passes when a commotion erupts behind you. Your crew report that a rocket had flown through the starboard door, passed through the cabin, and exited the port side. Miraculously, no one is injured and the helicopter remains flyable. You continue with your mission. Had that rocket been a millimeter in either direction, the outcome would have been tragic — and a different story would be told.

Now imagine launching into a blinding snowstorm at night to rescue a fisherman. It is your first operational mission as a rescue swimmer. Waves are thirty-five feet, winds approaching seventy knots, and the conditions are far beyond anything encountered in training — yet you answer the call. With the survivors aboard the helicopter, you grab the rescue basket and climb in. With no warning, you are dragged violently backwards through the tops of mountainous waves. Each impact explodes into white water. Your mask and snorkel are ripped away, and you cling on, hoping the crew above can pull you free. Finally, you break clear of the sea, swinging wildly beneath the aircraft. After what feels like an eternity, you are hauled into the cabin and look into the faces of a fisherman and his six-year-old son. They are alive — and you have survived your first rescue swimmer mission. History has been made.

Now you are leading a two-ship formation of F-15Es tasked with defeating an Iranian attack involving more than three hundred ballistic missiles, cruise missiles, and drones. The safety and future of Israel depend on you and a group of coalition pilots to stop the swarm. After expending your missiles, you turn to guns, carefully engaging drones while avoiding collateral damage below. Finally, you turn toward Israel and remove your night vision goggles. Ahead of you are thousands of sparkling lights — the burning remnants of intercepted missiles and drones falling from the sky. With fuel running critically low, there is no option but to stay on course and fly through active air defenses and falling debris. Your flight lands safely and the flight taxis to shelter. Mission accomplished.

These accounts are recorded in the Honor Roll. However, many of the details are missing, and after talking with the individuals involved, I realized the memories are vivid and they still have a tremendous degree of pride and

satisfaction in accomplishing these incredible feats of bravery and airmanship. These stories speak of courage in the face of extreme danger, perseverance when others might have faltered, and an unwavering commitment to mission success. Though they span generations, the actions of these Distinguished Flying Cross recipients embody the very spirit of the Distinguished Flying Cross Society.

Your story and countless others are preserved in the DFCS Honor Roll. Every citation is unique, yet each stand as a testament to courage, sacrifice, leadership, and service. They deserve to be preserved, shared, and passed on to future generations. These stories matter.

Today, I am asking for your support for the Distinguished Flying Cross Society's mission to preserve the legacy of our air warriors. If you have already donated – thank you for your commitment to the DFCS mission. If you have yet to donate, consider that your contribution is vital to preserving these stories and the legacy of the DFC. Your gift today directly powers our mission to Honor, Preserve, and Teach the Legacy: Without your support, this vital work cannot continue. But with it, we ensure that the extraordinary sacrifices and achievements of Distinguished Flying Cross recipients are never forgotten.

In recognition of your generous donation, the DFCS has arranged with key vendors, Prior Service Veterans Superstore and Evergreen Winery (formerly Millbrandt Winery) to offer carefully selected gifts in appreciation for your continued support.

Each gift of \$100.00 will receive a DFCS key chain and challenge coin. \$250 donors will receive a DFCS ball cap and challenge coin. For \$500 donors, there are a limited number of John Mollison prints of Medal of Honor recipient Royce Williams. These prints have been signed personally by Royce. \$1000 donors will receive a six-bottle selection from Evergreen Winery, our DFCS Wine Club vendor. You may donate [here](https://dfcsociety.app.neoncrm.com/campaigns/military-appreciation-month-fundraiser).*

Thank you for your service, your membership, and your steadfast belief in the mission of the Distinguished Flying Cross Society. Together, we honor the past and inspire the future.

With respect and gratitude,
John Whiddon
President/CEO, DFCS

[*https://dfcsociety.app.neoncrm.com/campaigns/military-appreciation-month-fundraiser](https://dfcsociety.app.neoncrm.com/campaigns/military-appreciation-month-fundraiser)

Ace of Aces: WWII Pilot Don Gentile Commemorated Along the Dayton-Kettering Connector

17 April 2026. The new [Gentile Nature Park](#) pays homage to the military service of [Major Don Gentile](#), recipient of **eight DFCs**. The 13-acre park offers a nature-themed playground, a climbing tower, a 100-foot-long zipline and interpretive signage honoring the war hero. Then-Captain Don Gentile was credited with downing or destroying 27.8 enemy aircraft. When he presented Gentile with one of his DFCs, Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower, the supreme commander of the Allied forces and future U.S. president, called Gentile a “one-man air force.” This became the title of Gentile's [book](#).



An Exclusive Wine Club for DFCS Members



[Evergreen Family Wines](#) is proud to partner with the DFCS to offer a private wine club available exclusively to DFCS members. This unique collaboration was first established with renowned Washington wine pioneer **Butch Milbrandt**, bringing together a legacy of service and a passion for exceptional winemaking.

Founded in the heart of Washington State wine country, Evergreen Family Wines is dedicated to crafting estate-grown,

sustainably farmed wines that reflect both quality and value. Each release is thoughtfully curated to showcase the character of the region and the craftsmanship behind every bottle.

With every shipment, a portion of proceeds is **donated to the DFCS** directly supporting its mission to honor and preserve the legacy of those awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross.

USCG Victor Roulund Award

U.S. Coast Guard Senior Chief Rescue Swimmer (Ret.) **Jeffrey Tunks** was honored recently with the prestigious [Victor Roulund Award](#) at the Coast Guard Aviation Association “Roost” in Houston. The Roulund Award recognizes USCG aviation professionals who demonstrate exceptional judgment, initiative, and courage **under pressure to save lives**.



A member of the DFCS, Senior Chief Tunks was the first Coast Guard Rescue Swimmer to be awarded the DFC. [His DFC](#) recognized Chief Tunks' 1987 rescue off Sitka, Alaska, saving a fisherman and his six-year-old son. Conducted at night in extreme conditions—heavy snow, 70-knot winds, and 30-foot seas—the mission marked the Coast Guard's first high-seas deployment of a rescue swimmer. During Hurricane Katrina in 2005, Tunks was credited with rescuing 98 survivors from rooftops and flooded buildings. If you are wondering about the pterodactyl hovering overhead in the photo, see [here](#).



Man of the Year

Marty Lenzini was honored recently by the alumni classes of St. George High School as their “man of the year.” Marty is a former DFC Society Director, serving on the Board for nine years, finishing as the Vice President of Chapter Development. St. George was a Catholic high school in Evanston, Illinois, that closed in 1969. Alumni of all the classes still meet annually for a reunion luncheon. This was Marty's 70th HS reunion, as he graduated in 1956. The award Marty received is called the **Georgian Giant Award**.

Born and raised in Illinois, Marty distinguished himself early through academic excellence, earning a B.S. in Mechanical Engineering and an advanced Aeronautical Engineering degree from the Naval Postgraduate School. Commissioned as a Marine officer in 1961, he became a Naval Aviator and went on to serve with distinction in multiple operational and leadership roles throughout his 26-year career.

During the Vietnam War, he flew more than 350 combat missions in A-4 Skyhawks, awarded four DFCs and 24 Air Medals for his extraordinary courage and precision under fire. On numerous occasions, he executed challenging close air support missions against heavily defended enemy positions in adverse weather and terrain, saving countless

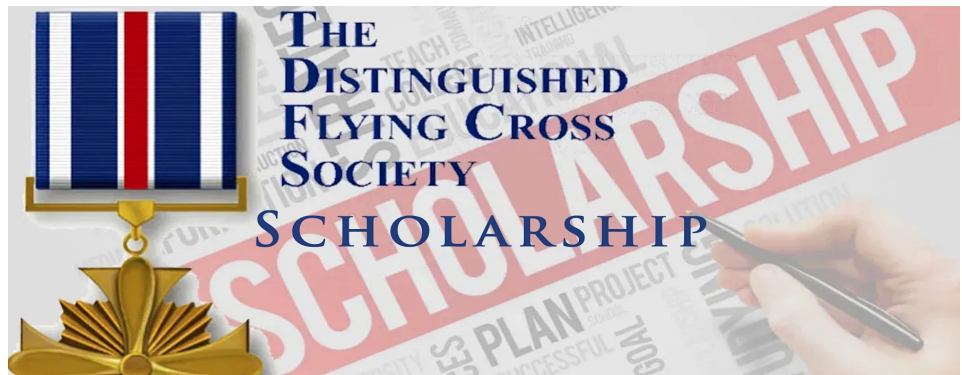


lives and enabling ground forces to succeed.

Beyond his combat record, Colonel Lenzini made lasting contributions to Marine aviation as a test pilot, weapons project officer, squadron and aircraft group commander, and senior aviation planner at Headquarters Marine Corps. His leadership helped shape the development and integration of crucial aviation capabilities during a pivotal era of military modernization. Lenzini has been a devoted family man, sharing a lifetime partnership with his wife, Alice Ann, and raising six children who have excelled in a variety of careers and communities across the United States. His commitment to family, even amid the demands of military and civilian service, reflects his unwavering integrity and personal strength.

DFCS Scholarships

The Distinguished Flying Cross Society provides two types of one-year scholarships for applicants who are relatives of DFCS members. In addition to **academic** scholarships for four-year college programs, we provide scholarships for two-year **vocational/technical** programs that lead to a certificate or license.



As an aviation related Society and due to the pressing need for trained aviation personnel, we encourage aviation related fields of study — AVIATION MAINTENANCE TECHNOLOGY, PROFESSIONAL AIRCRAFT or ROTARY PILOT, or FLIGHT DISPATCHER TRAINING.

While we encourage aviation related fields of study, all technical fields, in accredited technical schools or community/junior colleges, also qualify. Besides aviation, typical qualifying programs include fire science (firefighting), paramedic, computer technology, two-year nursing program, craft training, etc.

If your student is interested in training for a technical/vocational career, then consider our technical/vocational scholarship to help fund the endeavor. Money is available. For more information go [here](#). For assistance, contact our Membership Services Administrator, Mary Ellen Park at mepark@dfcsociety.org.

Donations. Many of our heroes are aging, and the firsthand accounts, citations, aircraft details, and personal narratives that belong in the Honor Roll are fading and, once lost, will never be retold. Meanwhile, new stories of heroism are being created that must also be recorded on the Honor Roll. Looking to the future, the sons, daughters, and grandchildren of our DFCS members need scholarship support to carry that same spirit of courage, integrity, and leadership into the future.

Your gift today directly powers our mission to Honor, Preserve, and Teach the Legacy. Without your support, this vital work cannot continue. But with it, we ensure that the extraordinary sacrifices and achievements of Distinguished Flying Cross recipients are never forgotten — and that the next generation can learn from their example and continue the legacy that has been earned through dedication and sacrifice. Please consider making your gift today. Every contribution, large or small, goes directly to support our core missions of preserving the legacy and supporting the next generation.



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.

Coastal Bend Chapter, Texas

Chapter Secretary/Treasurer and *Newsletter* editor, James Miller, a long-distance member of the Veterans Band of Corpus Christi, played at the first annual [Scholarship Luncheon](#), held in Austin on 2 May, in remembrance of **Medal of Honor** recipient [MSgt Roy P. Benavidez](#) (1935—1998). Donations welcomed.



Honoring a Hero, Educating Tomorrow

Roy P. Benavidez Scholarship Luncheon

Inspired by the extraordinary courage of Roy P. Benavidez, this luncheon raises scholarship funds to help the next generation lead, serve, and succeed.

Saturday, May 2, 2026
11:00 AM to 1:00 PM
Austin Southpark Hotel



Pictured are Miller, left, and Joe Barrientes (First Sgt, USMC, ret.), right. **Ed. Note.** Joe and I are twins, having been born on the same day in 1943, though 10 hours and two time zones apart. Joe, being older, notes that in the 1988 movie about us, "[Twins](#)," his part was played by Arnold Schwarzenegger. Me? DeVito.

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.

BECOMING A MEMBER

Members of the DFCS 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.

SEND US A MESSAGE

We welcome questions and inquiries about the DFC Society and are always willing to either help locate missing award records or to provide information that would help recover information. Our office is located in San Diego, so is on Pacific time. Our staff typically works Monday through Friday to respond to questions about membership, benefits, scholarships, reunions or any other matters.

Member Services: mepark@dfcsociety.org

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Fellow Members and Friends,

One of the great privileges of serving as President of the Distinguished Flying Cross Society has been connecting with the incredible veterans who make this organization so special. Every conversation and every story shared reminds me that this Society is more than an association — it is a family bound together by service, sacrifice, courage, and love of country.



John Whiddon

I am encouraged by the work we are doing through our scholarship programs. Supporting young people as they pursue education, leadership, and service opportunities is one of the most important ways we can preserve the legacy of the Distinguished Flying Cross. These scholarships ensure that the values represented by this medal — integrity, courage, selflessness, and commitment — continue to inspire future generations.

Planning is underway for our 2027 reunion. Our reunions provide an opportunity to reconnect with old friends, meet new members, honor those who served before us, and share the stories that deserve to be remembered. Whether it is sitting together over coffee, attending ceremonies, or simply hearing one another's experiences, these moments remind us why this Society matters. I hope many of you will join us. More details to follow.

Last month twelve members of an Air Force KC-135 crew at Fairchild AFB were presented with Distinguished Flying Crosses. This month six airmen at Shaw AFB received DFC's for their roles in Operation Midnight Hammer that carried out a surprise attack on Iranian nuclear facilities. Their courage and professionalism reflect the best of our nation's military aviators and aircrew. While every generation serves under different circumstances, the qualities recognized by the Distinguished Flying Cross remain unchanged. We are honored to welcome these aircrews into the proud legacy of the Distinguished Flying Cross.

Finally, thank you for everything you do to keep the mission of the Distinguished Flying Cross Society moving forward. Your support, whether you are mentoring younger veterans, contributing to scholarships, preserving history, attending events, or simply sharing the story of the Distinguished Flying Cross with others, helps preserve the DFCS and ensures the legacy of the Distinguished Flying Cross endures.

Respectfully,

John

John Whiddon
President, Distinguished Flying Cross Society

DFCS Leadership

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John Whiddon

Executive Vice President
Warren Eastman

Secretary
Michael Hays

Vice President, Chapters
Marty Lenzini

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Susan Hayes
Phil Osterli
Daren Sorenson

Member Services
Mary Ellen Park

EDITOR'S CORNER

We are seeking news from our chapters. Send your **news stories** to me at the email address, below.

This issue's [Featured Articles](#) include part 3 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*. Part 3 is connected to [Honor Roll](#) DFC citations for missions flown in the F-15E. Also, Lt Colonel Sheldon A. Goldberg, Ph.D., relates his first-person account of the "Most Successful **Nite Owl FAC Mission**" flown against the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Vietnam.

Members are invited to write articles to be featured in the *Newsletter*. Also, I'm researching an article about women recipients of the DFC. To date, Mary Ellen Park and I have located about 28 women recipients through internet searches and personal knowledge. Please send me names!

The December 2024 edition of the *DFCS News Magazine*, edited by Lew Jennings, contained an extensive article about the de Havilland **Caribou**, flown by the Army and then the Air Force in Vietnam. The article noted that "On 5 Mar 1928, the De Havilland Aircraft Company of England incorporated a subsidiary business in Canada: De Havilland Canada (DHC) Ltd., ... The subsidiary was established initially to build the British **DH-60 Moth** aircraft for the training of Canadian airmen." To learn about Geoffrey de Havilland, the Moth, and how the original company came to be established in England, please see "[De Havilland - The Man and the Company](#)" by John White.

Reportedly, James Stewart and Clark Gable were the only two WWII-era Hollywood actors to be awarded both an Oscar and a DFC. I'm looking into this for a future article about their experience in combat.

Again, our [Taps](#) section features many recipients who have passed. This issue of Taps includes two WWII veterans, Capt Chuck Huebsch and John H. "Lucky" Luckadoo. A large proportion of us are Vietnam veterans, and we are getting pretty old. I have included links to full obituaries, where possible.

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 are a diary of the Navy's air war in Vietnam and a first-person account of the wind-down of the war in Afghanistan.

James C. (Jay) Miller
DFCS.Editor@DFCSociety.org

FEATURED ARTICLES

From Eaglet to Predator

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

Part 3. Continuation and Variants of the Strike Eagle.

During the entire time cited in the previous two parts of this article and to the present, the F-15E has undergone continued improvements in performance, including expanded avionics, improved weapons delivery capabilities, and extended range enhancements.

Israel's F-15I "Ra'am," introduced in 1998, was a modified F-15E Strike Eagle variant. Ra'am is a Hebrew verb meaning "to rise." According to Maya Carlin, writing in 2024 for *nationalinterest.org*, this variant was designed specifically for Israel by McDonnell Douglas. An IAF team of about 30—including pilots, armaments officers, programmers and systems experts—helped with logistics, development, and production. The first test flight occurred on 12 September 1997. Two months later, a group of Israeli airmen began a 6-week retraining course in the U.S. Heyl Ha'avir {the IDF Air Force} received its first Ra'am F-15I on 6 November 1997 at the Boeing plant in St. Louis, Missouri. After the ceremony, the plane was taken to Eglin AFB for a series of test flights.

Modifications for Heyl Ha'avir included greater takeoff weight and flight range, and unique systems manufactured by Israel's defense industries. These included an electronic warfare (EW) suite designed and built by Elisra specifically for the F-15I. Due to its modifications, the Ra'am was regarded as being the most advanced of the F-15 models.

In June 2002 the Republic of Korea Air Force (ROKAF) signed a contract with Boeing for 40 F-15K Slam Eagles. The first two F-15Ks were delivered to Korea at the Seoul Air Show in October 2005. The 40th ROKAF F-15K aircraft was delivered during the Red Flag exercise at Nellis Air Force Base in August 2008. In April 2008, Boeing received a contract to deliver another 21 F-15K aircraft to ROKAF. Boeing delivered the first six of 21 F-15Ks in 2010, with all the deliveries were completed by April 2012.

The F-15SG was intended to strengthen the air defense and strike capabilities of the Republic of Singapore Air Force (RSAF). In December 2005 the Government of

Singapore signed a contract with Boeing for 12 F-15SG fighter aircraft. The first F-15SG was rolled out in November 2008 and delivered in May 2009. The RSAF declared full operational capability of the F-15SG fighter in September 2013. The final batch of eight fighters was delivered between early 2016 and July 2017.

The SG was powered by two General Electric F110-GE-129C turbofan engines, with 29,000 lb of thrust each. The aircraft could fly at speeds exceeding Mach 2.5, operate at altitudes of 65,000 ft, and could perform high-G maneuvers. It featured a two-seat, night-vision goggle (NVG) compatible glass cockpit. The pilot's helmet included the Joint Helmet-Mounted Cueing System (JHMCS) display.

The aircraft had a payload capacity of 23,000 lb and 15 weapon stations. It could be armed with up to eight AIM-120 or AIM-9X air-to-air missiles when deployed in air-to-air attack mode, and 15,500 lb laser-guided bombs or Maverick air-to-surface missiles for air-to-ground roles. It featured the AIM-9X passive infrared target acquisition system that could intercept and destroy enemy aircraft. The fighter also carried an internal General Dynamics M-61A1 20mm Gatling gun on the right wing.

The aircraft was equipped with an APG-63 (V)3 active electronically scanned array (AESA) radar with air-to-air and air-to-surface capabilities to detect and engage targets over long distances. An onboard electronic warfare (EW) suite, comprising a radar jammer, a radar warning receiver, and a chaff/flare dispenser, provided defensive capability against radar-guided threats. A Link-16 military data link allowed the crew to exchange target information with other aircraft. The SG also incorporated an infrared search and track (IRST) system to detect and track jet aircraft, helicopters and other targets.

An optical guidance and navigation unit, including terrain following radar (TFR) and forward looking infrared (FLIR) cameras, allowed the pilot to operate the airplane at low altitudes under different weather conditions. The AN/AAQ-33 Sniper targeting pod, fitted with a laser spot tracker and FLIR cameras provided target sighting, detection and tracking capabilities.

The F-15SE Silent Eagle was a March 2009 proof of concept that demonstrated evolution in response to the changing demands of aerial warfare. The Silent Eagle had a reduced radar cross-section: the conformal fuel tanks were replaced with conformal weapons bays, and the twin vertical tails were canted 15 degrees outward, reducing their radar signature while providing a slight boost to lift.

In December 2011, Saudi Arabia signed a \$29.4 billion order to purchase 84 F-15SA aircraft and to upgrade its fleet of 70 F-15S aircraft to the SA configuration. The

first F-15SA was rolled out at Boeing's St. Louis facilities in April 2013. The final aircraft were delivered in December 2020. The F-15SA was developed to incorporate features from, and build upon, South Korea's F-15K Slam Eagle, Singapore's F-15SG, and the F-15SE Silent Eagle.

In 2017, Qatar signed a contract to acquire 36 F-15QA Advanced Eagles. The following information was provided by Wiley Stickney, writing for Bolt Flight (boltflight.com) in February 2025. The first F-15QA prototype completed its maiden flight in April 2020. The initial batch of aircraft was delivered to Qatar in August 2021, and the second batch was expected in 2024. The aircraft was equipped with two General Electric F110-GE-129 engines, each producing 29,000 lbs of thrust. This enabled the execution of high-angle maneuvers, including the Viking climb, a near-vertical ascent.

A highlight of the F-15QA was the AN/APG-82(V)1 Active Electronically Scanned Array (AESA) radar, boasting a detection range of up to 200 miles. The cockpit featured a 10x19-inch Large Area Display (LAD) touchscreen. "The integration of digital flight controls, helmet-mounted displays (HMD), and voice command functionality enhances operational efficiency and responsiveness in combat scenarios." The F-15QA could carry up to 22 air-to-air missiles or a mix of precision-guided munitions (PGMs) such as the AIM-120 AMRAAM for beyond-visual-range engagements, the AGM-88 HARM for anti-radar suppression, and the GBU-54 Laser JDAM for pinpoint precision strikes. For self-defense, the F-15QA was equipped with a Missile Approach Warning System (MAWS) to detect incoming threats, a Digital Electronic Warfare Suite (DEWS) for jamming enemy radars, and Radar Cross-Section (RCS) reduction measures.

"The F-15QA's success has directly influenced the F-15EX program for the U.S. Air Force, demonstrating the value of upgrading fourth-generation fighters to complement fifth-generation stealth aircraft." "While the F-35 is a stealth multi-role fighter, the F-15QA offers superior speed, range, and payload capacity, making it ideal for air dominance and long-range strike missions." (Stickney, 2025)

The F-15EX Advanced Eagle included a revised wing structure and digital fly-by-wire. The F-15EX, often referred to as the Eagle II, featured cutting-edge avionics, an advanced radar system, and the ability to carry the latest smart weapons. The digital flight control system enhanced aircraft stability, precision maneuvering, and responsiveness. The Eagle II was designed to complement newer stealth fighters such as the F-22 Raptor and F-35 Lightning II, but it maintained the F-15's proven capabilities in air superiority and multirole missions. It also

included a digital cockpit, advanced flight controls, and improved operational efficiency, ensuring that the F-15E would remain relevant in the modern era.

The F-15 continued its long history of development with the introduction of the F-15EX into operational service in 2024. The F-15EX was approved for full-rate production for the USAF in June of 2024. The annual National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) establishes the annual Department of Defense budget. Writing on 19 May 2024 for the *Aviationist*, Stefano D'Urso reported that,

After the U.S. Air Force planned to retire 250 aircraft in 2025, including 32 F-22A Raptor and 26 F-15E Strike Eagle fighters, the House Armed Services Committee is proposing significant changes [in the NDAA] to the Air Force's plans. The lawmakers, in fact, want to prevent the divestment of these tactical fighter jets ...

The Air Force planned to divest all Strike Eagles with the -220 engine by FY28, shrinking the fleet from 218 to 99 aircraft, using the freed-up resources to upgrade those 99 aircraft. The FY24 NDAA already limited the number of aircraft that could be retired from 119 to 68. ...

The FY25 NDAA is going to prevent the divestment of all 119 aircraft from happening for the foreseeable future, according to lawmakers.

The Aviationist also reported in May 2024,

The Air Force initially planned to acquire up to 144 F-15EX aircraft, however the number decreased to 104 last year. Now the number was reduced even more, with the FY 2025 budget request mentioning the Air Force will buy the last aircraft in 2025 and then end the production, capping the fleet at 98 aircraft. The FY25 NDAA plans to revert also this decision, authorizing \$271 million in advanced procurement spending for 24 additional aircraft to be added to the FY2026 budget, bringing the F-15EX fleet to 122 airframes. Whether these 24 aircraft will be in the new budget is yet to be seen.

In fact, the FY25 NDAA became Public Law 118-159, dated 23 Dec 2024 (three months after the beginning of FY25!). It stated in Section 150, Prohibition on Retirement of F-15E Aircraft and Requirement To Conduct Fighter Aircraft Capabilities and Requirements Study, (a) Prohibition on Retirement of F-15E Aircraft, (1) In General,

that "The Secretary of the Air Force may not retire, prepare to retire, or place in storage or on backup aircraft inventory status any F-15E aircraft until September 30, 2027." The FY26 NDAA bill, S. 2296, was introduced in the Senate on 15 July 2025. According to the Know Your Congress Project,

The [FY26] NDAA directly intervenes in the Air Force's plans to reshape its aircraft inventory. The bill includes explicit prohibitions on the retirement of ... F-15E Strike Eagle aircraft. This is a classic example of the persistent tension between the service and the legislature. The Air Force leadership argues that divesting these legacy platforms is essential to free up critical funding and personnel for modernization programs like the Next Generation Air Dominance fighter. However, many in Congress, influenced by constituent interests in districts where these aircraft are based and by differing assessments of their continued operational relevance, have consistently blocked these retirement plans. This dynamic creates a difficult cycle where the service's efforts to modernize are hampered by legislative mandates to maintain older, more costly systems, illustrating how strategic planning often collides with political and institutional realities. (*knowyourcongress.org*)

The F-15EX has become the baseline F-15 and will replace the F-15C/D gradually. Each F-15EX may cost \$90 to \$95 million. An article published by TWZ.com in April 2025 described proposed legislation from Republican leaders of the House and Senate Armed Services Committees. In that proposal, the F-15EX would get \$3.1 billion "to increase production." The FY2026 NDAA became public law on 18 Dec 2025, finally. In Section 142, it modifies the previous year's NDAA text about the F-15E. Retirement limits for the F-15E are set by fiscal year, with none in FY2026, and then no more than 21 retirements in FY2027, and 30 in FY2028. There are parallel limitations concerning internal USAF funding for personnel and maintenance, and aircraft status, through the end of FY2030. In Section 4201, there are Congressional authorizations for Research, Development, Test, and Engineering (RDT&E) for F-15E Squadrons and for the F-15EX, with the former being about \$233 million and the latter about \$78 million. There may be other types of funds in the NDAA that are applicable to the F-15 and F-1EX, but these were what I could find.

General Gabriel's statement, above, that the Strike Eagle would be a key element in U.S. tactical airpower, allowing operations "over long ranges in adverse weather conditions, day or night," has been substantiated.

The Most Successful Nite Owl FAC Mission

Lt Colonel Sheldon A. Goldberg, Ph.D.
497th TFS, May 1969—March 1970

The Ho Chi Minh Trail¹ was a network of roads that ran through Laos and comprised North Vietnam's logistic communications and supply route into South Vietnam. A centuries-old trail, it evolved from foot- and bicycle paths to dirt roads 18 feet wide, capable of two-way truck traffic capable of transporting up to 90 tons of supplies per day, often concealed under the triple canopy and artificial camouflage. By late-1967, 1,838.6 miles of vehicle-capable roads had been completed and in 1968, a petroleum pipeline was discovered that crossed into Laos through Mu Gia Pass.

The relative success of Operation Commando Hunt, which also began in 1968, forced the North Vietnamese transportation units to travel only from dusk to dawn. During this period, the U.S. threat increased due to the heavy concentrations of anti-aircraft artillery (AAA), with 23mm, 37mm, and 57mm guns to include from 1969, 85mm and even 100mm weapons. Estimates indicate that by the end of Commando Hunt, the trail was guarded by 1,500 guns.

On 1 November 1968, President Johnson ordered a complete bombing halt over North Vietnam anticipating peace talks in Paris between South and North Vietnam. The North Vietnamese failed to reciprocate, however, and continued sending supplies down the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Despite the number of sorties being flown against the trail, 7th Air Force saw a compelling need to complement the few night sorties flying against the traffic on the trail.

There already were several "fast" FACs² working the trail—the Misty FACs from Detachment 1, 416th Tactical Fighter Squadron, Phu Cat AB, Vietnam being the most well-known.³ Their role was find and mark targets, supervise strikes, and report the results in areas where it was too dangerous for the slow-moving, propeller-driven forward air controllers to operate.⁴ What they all had in common, with two minor exceptions, was that they all

flew in daylight hours. There was no nighttime fighter (fast) forward air control program in theatre, whereas there was a clear and compelling need for such capability.

Enter the Nite Owl FAC. In September 1969, ten months after the bombing pause began, Operation Pressure Points, the Owl FAC program, began with selected 497th Nite Owl squadron air crew becoming the first night-dedicated fast-moving Forward Air Controllers.

The official history of the 497th TFS states that the "new type mission," called Nite Owl FAC, began on 14 October 1969 following a four-day proof of concept test lasting six hours per night. [The tests] described the purpose of this new mission was to "slow down and possibly stop the truck traffic mainly in the Mu Gia Pass and secondarily in the Ban Karai Pass area."

Major Bill Garner, 8th TFW director of wing tactics and F-4 standardization/evaluation shop, had been reflecting that the bombing of North Vietnamese infrastructure, industry, and supply routes to the south had little impact on the course of the war effort. What was needed was a concentrated, round-the-clock effort that would halt the supply flow. He realized that to successfully starve the Vietcong in the south of weapons and supplies, a greatly expanded effort would be needed, one that would require far more firepower than was available at Ubon RTAFB and would therefore have to draw on the support of air assets from elsewhere in the theatre.

The plan Garner laid out was built around constant pressure that would have to be exerted by air crews dedicated to the forward control of other fighter aircraft. A night Forward Air Control (FAC) program would have to be developed and put in place and a group of night fighters would need to be trained for the task. Garner believed this should become the primary responsibility of the 497th TFS, the "Nite Owls," the only

1 [Ho Chi Minh trail](#), Wikipedia.

2 Forward Air Controllers. See the DFCS News Magazine, 2024-1, June 2024.

3 Schlight, Lt Col John, *Project CHECO Report*, "Jet Forward Air Controllers in Southeast Asia," 15 Oct 1969, Hq PACAF, pp 23-32.

4 Schlight, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

night-dedicated fighter squadron in the Air Force; 7th Air Force approval came surprisingly fast.

Garner met with 7th AF planners in Saigon, where elements of the daily operations orders are written to build the nightly tasking scheme, including inflight refueling assets. Support from other Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps units would need to be assured and the 497th TFS, where the mission would be placed, would require their "Nite Owl" F-4 aircrews to be briefed and trained, particularly in the role of directing night strikes by aircraft other than their own

During the first official month of operation (18 Oct —17 Nov), Nite Owl FACs flew approximately 245 sorties and controlled 464 strikes south of the two passes. Pilot familiarity with the area improved as the Owl FACs gained more experience; One Nite Owl FAC crew was lost during this period and never recovered. The official history relates that "in spite of the loss of one aircrew the 497th had denied complete freedom of movement to the enemy in our primary target area."⁵

The wing's assessment of Owl FAC's performance in Operation Pressure Points was that the "long hours of detailed and professional planning began to take their toll against the enemy. The flow of supplies through this pass (Mu Gia) was severely impeded. According to Colonel "Punch" Jamison, who was at 7th Air Force at the time (having been Assistant Deputy Commander for Operations at Ubon earlier), Operation Pressure Points/Owl FAC Operation reduced truck traffic to 8% during its deployment⁶ The "Nite Owls" dramatically demonstrated that enemy lines of communication (LOC's) could be effectively interdicted at night using flares and cluster bombs (CBU) ordnance.⁷ The wing suggested to 7th Air Force that the second phase of this plan be implemented at Ban Karai Pass."⁸ The success of this program led to half the squadron effort being devoted to this program.

There is no question that the Owl FACs could not compete with the successes of the AC-130 "Spectre" gunships from the 16th Special Operations Squadron, but there are successes that can be told.⁹

According to the official squadron history, the best Nite Owl FAC success came on 25 December 1969 with 11 trucks killed and a similar number damaged. I, however, have a version of that night that differs from the official history. That night, Captain Doug Smith, my pilot, and I were the first Owl FAC crew tasked as Owl-01 to Mu Gia Pass. During our third and last 30-minute cycle in the target area a flight of F-4's from the 366th TFW "Gunfighters" were handed off to us.

It was a moonless night, making it difficult to pinpoint where the Gunfighters should place their ordnance, even under the flares we dropped. Luckily, after several errant bombs, one 500lb bomb struck the petroleum pipeline running through Mu Gia Pass, starting a fire. Using the light from the fire, they correctly placed a second 500lb bomb on the road hitting what turned out to be the first truck of a long convoy of trucks. On their last pass, a 366th TFW F-4 hit what appeared to be the 9th or 10th truck in convoy, starting a third fire. Shortly after that, two A-1's, armed with what I believe to have been Fuel-Air Explosive (FAE) bombs came to us. I directed them to attack between the two trucks on fire, and doing so caused a sheet of flame to cover the area. At this point, we had to return to Ubon, leaving the remainder of the attack and any other aircraft sent to the area to Owl-03 and the following Owl FACs that were covering Mu Gia that night.

The following morning, 26 December, when Lt Colonel Robert "Bob" Cass, 497th TFS commander returned from "stand up," he was grinning from ear to ear. According to my recollection, Lt. Colonel Cass related that Owl FAC crews had claimed 15 trucks destroyed and 15 damaged that night. All had been confirmed by photo recce early that morning.¹⁰ Regardless whether 11 or 15 trucks had been destroyed, this was the most successful night during the short duration of the Owl FAC program.

Despite this success, the entire night interdiction program was discontinued on 14 February 1970, the night of my last Owl FAC mission. The official reason why the mission was cancelled by 7th Air Force was that the interdiction effort was too expensive and the need for

5 479th History, Vol III, *Op. Cit.*, p. 13.

6 Email from Bill Garner to author, 4/28/21.

7 A line of communication is the route that connects an operating military unit with its supply base. Supplies and reinforcements are transported along the line of communication. *Wikipedia*.

8 History 8th Tac Fighter Wing, 1 Oct—31 Dec 1969, Vol. III, "supporting Documents," pp. 5, 15-16.

9 For an outstanding, warts and all history of the 16th SOS AC-130 program, see William Walter, *Ghostriders, 1968—1975, "Mors De Caelis" Combat History of the AC-130 Spectre Gunship, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia*, Louisville: Knox Press, 2022.

10 The official squadron history cites only 11 trucks destroyed, 11 trucks damaged. History of the 497th TFS in the "History of the 8th Tactical Fighter Wing, 1 Oct - 31 Dec 1969, Volume III, "Supporting Documents," pp. 15-16.

additional fighter strikes against the North Vietnamese offensive in northern Laos. Some, however, believe there was more to that, e.g., it was rumored that when the southward flow of supplies decreased measurably, the Army in the south complained it was being deprived of its mission.

The Owl FAC program was resurrected sometime in either late 1970 or early 1971 but with some changes, but the Owl FACs crews continued to "get theirs at night" until the war ended in 1973.

Please submit **your draft articles** to the editor at the email address, above.

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 last of these citations follow. These awards were made to some of our younger members who faced peril in combat. There have been some very recent awards, so please let me know what we've missed here (email address, above).



Hruby, John T. The President of the United States takes great pleasure in presenting the Distinguished Flying Cross to Captain John T. Hruby for extraordinary achievement while participating in aerial flight as an F-15E Instructor Pilot, 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 Hruby led Lance 31, employing 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 viable weapon for this critical mission. Severe weather in the target area made it necessary for him to perform multiple passes over numerous missile threat rings over the heavily defended airfield. With his flight low on fuel, Captain Hruby coordinated for an emergency tanker. After returning to the target area, his tenacity paid off. With weather conditions still less than favorable, his formation was forced into using precise release parameters never before attempted with this weapon. He scored a direct hit on his aimpoint and subsequently guided another weapon released by his wingman. Despite the unfavorable weather, Captain Hruby's unwavering spirit to carry out the mission prevented Serbian fighter aircraft from seeing the light of day. Additionally, his superior skills prevented any opportunities for inflicting collateral damage on non-military targets. The professional competence, aerial skill, and devotion to duty displayed by Captain Hruby reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.



Kaiser, Sebastian B. The President of the United States takes great pleasure in presenting the Distinguished Flying Cross (with Valor) to Captain Sebastian B. Kaiser for heroism in aerial flight while engaged in military operations involving conflict against an opposing Foreign Force as F-15E Instructor Weapons Systems Officer, 335th Expeditionary Fighter Squadron, 332 Air Expeditionary Wing, from 13 April 2024 through 14 April 2024. During this period, Captain Kaiser flew in a four-ship of F-15E Strike Eagles as part of a large-force Coalition Defensive Counterair mission to defeat an Iranian attack comprising over three hundred ballistic missiles, cruise missiles, and one-way unmanned aerial systems. As the first Coalition aircraft to establish a defensive combat air patrol, Captain Kaiser's formation detected and engaged the opening swarm of dozens of Iranian attack drones, initiating an hours-long aerial battle and enabling the Coalition Forces Air Component Commander's response plan. Maneuvering his F-15E at low altitude and in complete darkness Captain Kaiser personally engaged and destroyed seven drones. Concerned that an additional engagement could result in collateral damage, he expertly passed off targeting to a better-positioned aircraft, preserving civilian infrastructure without sacrificing the engagement. After exhausting his available missiles, he attempted to engage an additional drone with his remaining

weapon, a laser-guided Joint Direct Attack Munition. Out of weapons, he remained on station until he was at minimum fuel, using his sensors to assist other aircraft targeting follow-on drone swarms. Returning to base under Alarm Red, as PATRIOT missiles launched and Israeli interceptors detonated dozens of Iranian ballistic missiles overhead, Captain Kaiser navigated through active air defense artillery and intense falling debris, ensuring the safe recovery of his F-15E and aircrew. Captain Kaiser'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 Captain Kaiser reflected great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.



Patton, Jeffery S. (1) The President of the United States takes great pleasure in presenting the Distinguished Flying Cross to Captain Jeffery S. Patton for extraordinary achievement while participating in aerial flight as an F-15E Pilot, 391st Expeditionary Fighter Squadron, 332d Air Expeditionary Group, Ahmed Al Jaber Air Base, Kuwait on 25 October 2001. On that date, Captain Patton flew on his first combat mission over Afghanistan as wingman in a flight of two F-15E Strike Eagles tasked to strike a radar site and barracks facility near Maimana. Shortly after entering Afghani airspace he was re-tasked by the Combined Air Operations Center to a "highest priority" target in the vicinity of the Qandahar where fleeing Taliban leaders were detected seeking shelter in a roadside bunker complex. While enroute to the target, Captain Patton and the lead aircraft quickly developed a plan to destroy all eight roadside revetments and the leadership bunker. Under sporadic anti-aircraft artillery fire he demonstrated the highest degree of situational awareness and executed the coordinated attack flawlessly employing all nine of his guided bomb unit-12 laser guided bombs resulting in the destruction of eight separate targets. His flight departed for aerial refueling but was called back shortly thereafter to direct the employment of a flight of F-16's weapons onto the same target complex. Quickly grasping the non-standard tactic, Captain Patton maneuvered his aircraft into position to "buddy guide" two more guided bomb unit-12s onto the target completing the total annihilation of the bunker complex. By eliminating numerous enemy leaders, troops, equipment and infrastructure, Captain Patton directly contributed to the goal of rescuing the people of Afghanistan from the oppressive Taliban regime and furthered the goals of the United States war on terrorism. The professional competence, aerial skill and devotion to duty displayed by Captain Patton reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

(2) The President of the United States takes great pleasure in presenting the Distinguished Flying Cross (First Oak Leaf Cluster) to Captain Jeffery S. Patton for extraordinary achievement while participating in aerial flight as an F-15E Pilot, 391st Expeditionary Fighter Squadron, 332d Air Expeditionary Group, Ahmed Al Jaber Air Base, Kuwait on 30 November 2001. On that date, while Captain Patton flew as wingman in a flight of two F-15E Strike Eagles providing close air support for United States Special Forces ground troops, his flight was re-tasked to reconnoiter ridgelines and canals in the vicinity of the Qandahar Airfield. During the reconnaissance of the canals, enemy forces fired upon his flight with hand-held surface-to-air missiles forcing Captain Patton to expertly maneuver his aircraft, dispense countermeasures and thereby defeat the weapons threatening his flight. After the third of what was ultimately a total of eight missiles launched, his flight pinpointed the location of the enemy surface-to-air missile fire and de-conflicted with the ground forward air controller to ensure no friendly forces were in the immediate vicinity. Once cleared by the forward air controller, Captain Patton performed a surgical retaliatory attack successfully using four guided bomb unit-12 laser guided bombs to destroy the missile launch site. Utilizing their remaining 14 guided bomb unit-12s, his flight then decisively struck numerous targets in the vicinity of Qandahar Airfield and passed coordinated to a B-1 bomber that employed five guided bomb unit-32s to continue the destruction. Captain Patton's decisive action ensured air supremacy over Task Force 58 ground forces and directly contributed to their success resulting in fall of Qandahar Airfield the following day. The professional competence, aerial skill and devotion to duty displayed by Captain Patton reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.



Thibault, Jared T. The President of the United States takes pleasure in presenting the Distinguished Flying Cross to Captain Jared T. Thibault for extraordinary achievement while participating in aerial flight as F-15E Aircraft Commander, 492d Expeditionary Fighter Squadron, 332d Expeditionary Operations Group, 332d Air Expeditionary Wing, at an undisclosed location, on 6 June 2017. On that date, the airmanship and courage exhibited by Captain Thibault helped secure coalition air superiority in the skies over United States Special Operations Forces in Syria in support of Operation INHERENT RESOLVE. Immediately after arriving on station, Captain Thibault supported the defensive counter airplane commander in identifying a Syrian MiG-29 aircraft moving to attack ground forces identified as Vetted Syrian Opposition. Captain Thibault expertly maneuvered his aircraft through a low altitude intercept to an offensive position while his flight lead disrupted the MiG-29's rocket and strafe attacks, ready to employ should the MiG-29 attempt to engage his flight lead. After his flight lead had exhausted his defensive countermeasures, Captain Thibault moved into position and twice disrupted the MiG-29's attacks at great risk to himself and his aircraft. Captain Thibault demonstrated exceptional airmanship, placing his aircraft in harm's way to protect friendly forces while avoiding actions that could have provoked escalation between Coalition and Syrian forces. The professional competence, aerial skill, and devotion to duty displayed by Captain Thibault reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.



Welton, George O. The President of the United States takes great pleasure in presenting the Distinguished Flying Cross (With Valor) to Captain George O. Welton for heroism in aerial flight while engaged in military operations involving conflict against an opposing foreign force as Deputy Mission Commander and F-15E Instructor Weapon Systems Officer, 335th Expeditionary Fighter Squadron, 332d Air Expeditionary Wing, on 13 April 2024. During this period, Captain Welton led a Coalition Defensive Counterair mission to defeat an Iranian attack comprising over three hundred ballistic missiles, cruise missiles, and one-way unmanned aerial systems. From the cockpit of his F-15E, he took tactical control of a lane defended by eight United States and Coalition fighter aircraft, while battle-managing a 430 nautical-mile-wide area of responsibility. As the initial onslaught of drone swarms approached, Captain Welton descended to low altitude in complete darkness, personally engaging six drones. Despite an intense task load in his own cockpit, he continued to control the larger fight in his lane, at one point preventing potential fratricide by stopping his wingman from shooting without a clear field of fire. When his formation expended all available missiles, having achieved twenty-four kills, he pulled Coalition fighters forward and continued to direct targeting, directly enabling an additional kill. Returning to base under Alarm Red, as PATRIOT missiles launched and Israeli interceptors detonated dozens of Iranian ballistic missiles overhead, Captain Welton led his formation through active air defense artillery and intense falling debris, ensuring the safe recovery of four F-15Es and eight aircrew. Captain Welton's intrepid leadership directly enabled the destruction of over seventy Iranian one-way attack drones by Coalition aircraft and 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 scale regional conflict. The outstanding heroism and selfless devotion to duty displayed by Captain Welton reflected great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

DFC SOCIETY SCHOLARSHIP AWARDS

The DFC Society has actively promoted and funded scholarship programs since 1998. Through the continuing generosity of our members and both private individuals and corporate sponsors, the DFCS has awarded scholarships annually to outstanding students. These students have all been direct descendants or legally adopted children of DFC Society members.

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.

Major Edward (Eddie) I. Carroll (1946—2025), U.S. Army (ret.), was awarded the DFC twice. He was born 15 Mar 1946 in Brooklyn NY, and passed away on 5 Dec 2025 in Westminster CO. He enlisted in the US Army Reserve in 1966 and completed basic training and Engineering AIT. He was selected for OCS and commissioned a 2Lt in the Corps of Engineers. He then attended Helicopter Flight School. He completed a tour in Korea in 1972, and then attended the Engineer Officer Advanced Course. He completed a 30-year career in the Army. (forwarded from the Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association Aviator. Also, see [here](#).)

His DFC citations read, in part, (1) "The President of the United States takes great pleasure in presenting the Distinguished Flying Cross to First Lieutenant Edward I. Carroll for heroism ... in the Republic of Vietnam. First Lieutenant Carroll distinguished himself by exceptionally valorous actions on 26 February 1969 while serving as a Pilot with Company A, 9th Aviation Battalion, 9th Infantry Division, on a medical evacuation mission east of Cai Be. ..." (2) "The President of the United States takes great pleasure in presenting the Distinguished Flying Cross to Captain Edward I. Carroll for heroism ... in the Republic of Vietnam. Captain Carroll distinguished himself by exceptionally valorous actions on 6 June 1969 while serving as an Aviation Section Commander with Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 2d Brigade, on a medical evacuation mission north of Ben Tre. ..."

Richard T. (Tricky) Cross (1945—2025) U.S. Army (ret.), was drafted into the U.S. Army while in college, trained as an Infantryman, and assigned to Officer Candidate School. He was commissioned as a 2Lt and sent to flight school for the UH-1 Huey. He retired from the Army in 1991, he went back to college to finish his bachelor's and master's degrees in Geography. He had many different interests, but teaching became his passion.

His DFC citation reads, in part, "The President of the United States takes great pleasure in presenting the Distinguished Flying Cross to Captain Richard T. Cross for heroism while participating in aerial flight ... in the Republic of Vietnam ... on 22 October 1970 ... When word came down that some friendly units were in need of resupply, Captain Cross and other members of the Night Hawk crew were given the assignment. They hovered above the units and dropped the emergency supply of pyrotechnics to them." [Obituary 1](#). [Obituary 2](#).

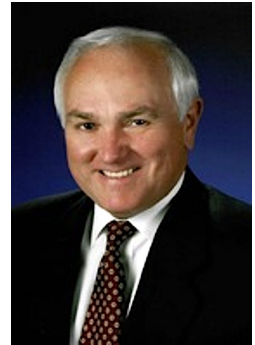


CW4 Larry L. Fann (1947—2026), U.S. Army (ret.), passed away on 25 Jan 2026 in Abilene TX. He completed Warrant Officer Flight Training (WOFT), the rotary wing aviator course, and CH-47 Chinook Transition Course. In Vietnam he served with the 147th ASHC (Hillclimbers) in Vung Tau and later Can Tho, IV Corps, supporting the 7th and 9th ARVN Divisions and the 21st Vietnamese Marine Division. WO Fann held the positions of Aircraft Commander and Instructor Pilot. He flew 1,694 Combat Flight Hours. After Vietnam, he left active duty and joined the California National Guard flying the CH-47A/B. He served in the Guard/Reserves in California, Washington, and Hawaii. He retired in 1997 as a CW4. He then served over 30 years with the FAA, retiring as an Aviation Safety Inspector in 2004.

His DFC citation reads, in part, "...these men distinguished themselves by exceptionally valorous actions while serving as aircraft commanders of cargo helicopters during an aerial flame ammunitions bombardment of Nui Sai Vei Mountain in the northwestern part of the IV Corps Tactical Zone. Though faced with extremely low cloud cover over this known enemy stronghold, which contained numerous enemy machine gun positions, these men skillfully and

expertly maneuvered their aircraft along the entire length of the mountain complex at precariously low altitudes and utilizing their outstanding flying ability, they maneuvered their giant helicopters to provide accurate and effective placement of their highly sensitive cargo on the target areas. ..." [VHPA](#). [Obituary 1](#). [Obituary 2](#).

Colonel Charles R. Harr (1946-2026), U.S. Air Force (ret.), passed away on 19 Feb 2026 in Knoxville TN. Charlie retired from the USAF as a Colonel after flying fighter aircraft for 26 years. He was a combat veteran of both Vietnam (F-100D Super Sabre) and Desert Storm and was awarded the DFC three times. After retirement from the USAF, he became a Certified Financial Planner at Patriot Investment Management. [Obituary](#).



Captain John Reginald "Reg" Harrison (1943-2025), U.S. Air Force (ret.), passed away on 7 October 2025 in Fredericksburg VA. After he attended Marietta College in Ohio, where he met his future wife, Susan, he enlisted in the U.S. Army. His passion for flying soon led him to transfer to the U.S. Air Force. As a B-52 Stratofortress pilot, Reg flew more than 150 missions in Vietnam. He was awarded the DFC three times for bombing missions flown in 1972 over heavily-defended targets in North Vietnam. In 1976, Reg survived the crash of a KC-135 Stratotanker in Alpena MI that killed 15 others. Following a long recovery, he was medically retired. Over the next four decades, Reg served veterans through the American Legion, DAV, AmVets, VFW, and The First Litchfield Artillery, and served on church and town councils. The First Litchfield Artillery Regiment fired its cannon at Morris Town Beach in honor of Harrison, who served as commander of the regiment. [Obituary](#). [Crash](#). [Artillery salute](#).



Charles (Chuck) H. Huebsch (1921-2018), Captain, U.S. Army Air Forces, passed away on 22 Sep 2018. He was born in Los Angeles CA, graduated from Los Angeles HS in 1938, worked at his family's third-generation plumbing business, and took over the business after WWII. In 1940, an experimental P-38 Lightning, then a project of the small Lockheed Company in nearby Glendale, did a fly-over at the Santa Anita race track. Chuck dreamed of the opportunity to fly it. Reality set in with the advent of the war and Chuck enlisted in the Army Air Corps in October 1942. He volunteered for Photo Reconnaissance so that he could fly the P-38. He spent three years on active duty and flew 76 successful missions over enemy territory in the South Pacific. He was awarded the DFC for evading Japanese Zeros. In so doing, he had to land his plane, the "Paper Doll," on a sandy beach on Daru island near New Guinea,. He lived among the island natives for two weeks until help arrived. [Obituary](#).

Lieutenant Colonel Richard "Dick" Jonas (1939-2026), U.S. Air Force (ret.), passed away on 8 February 2026 in the Prescott AZ VA Hospital. Dick served four years as an infantryman in the Georgia Army National Guard while attending Valdosta State College, graduating in 1965 with a BS in Physics and Math. He entered the Air Force and was commissioned through Officer Training School. He flew 125 missions in Vietnam in the F-4 Phantom, and was awarded three DFCs and thirteen Air Medals. The citation for his second award reads, in part, "for heroism while participating in aerial flight as an F-4D Pilot in Southeast Asia on 17 May 1968. On that date, Lieutenant Jonas participated in a flight of two F-4s that were instructed to attack a storage area and gun positions along a heavily defended, vital line of communication and supply leading into South Vietnam [the Ho Chi Minh Trail]." He logged



over 2000 hours in the F-4, and then logged over 1000 hours in the F-16 Fighting Falcon. On 16 June 1982, while flying a tactical weapons check he experienced catastrophic engine failure and had to eject. Dick retired from the Air Force in 1986 with 22 years of service and became an Air Force Junior ROTC instructor. He retired from 15 years of teaching in 2004, becoming a military folk music producer. He had recorded his first albums of military ballads in 1969, after returning from Vietnam. He produced 32 albums and published three books about military folk music. He published four books in a series about fighter pilot philosophy, called [A Fighter Pilot Looks at the World Upside Down](#). He held the copyright to 120 musical compositions. [Obituary](#). [Life story](#). [Facebook video](#). [Facebook post](#). [Youtube video](#). [Dick Jonas' website](#). [Albums](#). [AZ Hall of Fame](#). [F-16 crash](#).

Lieutenant Colonel David Litwack (1932—2026), U.S. Air Force (ret.), passed away on 16 Feb 2026. He was a command pilot and aeronautical engineer. After earning a degree in Aeronautical Engineering from New York University, he was commissioned as a USAF 2Lt. Across 21 years he flew the F-102 Delta Dagger, F-86H Sabre, and OV-10 Bronco. As a Forward Air Controller in Vietnam ("Nail" FAC), He was awarded the DFC twice. He earned a Master's Degree in Aerospace Engineering from the AF Institute of Technology and later served as a Test Pilot and Chief of the Guided Munitions Test and Evaluation Section. He concluded his active duty career at the Pentagon as Program Element Monitor for Air-to-Air missiles in 1977. After retirement he continued his government service with the same research laboratory at Eglin AFB.

His DFC citations read, in part, (1) "The President of the United States takes great pleasure in presenting the Distinguished Flying Cross to Major Litwack for extraordinary achievement while participating in aerial flight as an OV-10 Forward Air Controller in Southeast Asia on 11 May 1969. ... the successful rescue of an injured Marine pilot who had been forced to eject from his damaged aircraft while flying over heavily defended hostile territory." (2) "The President of the United States takes great pleasure in presenting the Distinguished Flying Cross to Major Litwack for extraordinary achievement while participating in aerial flight as an OV-10 Forward Air Controller in Southeast Asia on 2 June 1969. ... the successful destruction of a gun site protecting a strategic storage area for hostile forces." [Obituary](#).



John H. "Lucky" Luckadoo (1922—2025), U.S. Army Air Forces. The Major left formation the evening of 1 September 2025. He was the last living pilot of the original cadre of pilots assigned to the U.S. Army Eighth Air Force's legendary [100th Bomb Group](#) in World War II. He joined the U.S. Army Air Forces after the attack on Pearl Harbor. As a member of the inaugural group assigned to the 100th Bomb Group, known as "The Bloody Hundredth," he was one of only four copilots out of his class of 40 to survive a full tour of 25 combat missions in the B-17. Major Luckadoo resided in Dallas TX and enjoyed a successful career in real estate. The book "DAMN LUCKY" by Kevin Maurer is the story of John Luckadoo's wartime experiences. [Obituary](#). [Website](#).



Major Henry F Sullivan, Jr. (1932—2026), U.S. Air Force (ret.), passed away on 28 March 2026 in San Antonio TX Texas. Upon graduation from high school in Rhode Island, he entered the USAF and received his commission in 1954 along with his rating as navigator. His tours of duty included Tachikawa AB, Japan, Kadena AB, Okinawa, and Mather AFB CA. His DFC was awarded for action in Vietnam on 13 February 1971 over the Ho Chi Minh Trail as a crewmember in the Lockheed AC-130 Spectre gunship. His picture is in Jeff Noecker's book, *Call Sign Spectre*. Chapter 10, about 13 pages back under "crew photos" at the bottom on the left. He retired from Randolph AFB TX in 1972, having accumulated over



12,000 flying hours in various aircraft. He was elected into Membership of the Institution of Navigation, at the Royal Geographical Society, Kensington Gore, London on 15 January 1968. Sullivan and his wife, the former Martha Ritchey of Paris TX, retired in San Antonio TX, where he was employed by Ernst and Young until retiring after sixteen years. He was then employed for four years at Six Flags Fiesta Texas. [Obituary 1](#). [Obituary 2](#).

James R. (Jim) Thorne, (1942—2025), U.S. Army (Ret.), passed away on 10 Dec 2025 in Horseshoe Bay TX. He attended Southwest Texas State University briefly before joining the Army. Upon his return from Vietnam, he graduated with a degree in Aviation Management. While assigned to Ft Hood TX, he graduated from Baylor Law School and established the Thorne and Peeler law firm. He had a successful career in law, oil, real estate, and cattle investing before retiring and moving to Horseshoe Bay in 2001. In Angel Fire NM, he served on the David Westphall Veterans Foundation Board of Directors. The Foundation supports the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. In 1999, he earned the title of [World Shovel Racing Champion](#) in Angel Fire. The event was broadcast as part of the X Games on ESPN. [Obituary 1](#). [Obituary 2](#). [Obituary 3](#).

Ed. note. The following DFC recipients were not members of the DFC Society, but notable for other reasons. Thus, their passing is reported here.

Colonel Clarence E. “Bud” Anderson (1922—2024), U.S. Air Force (ret.), DFC recipient (five). On 30 March 2026, more than 100 people gathered at Arlington National Cemetery to honor and remember aviation legend Col. Anderson, the last surviving World War II triple ace and one of the most distinguished fighter pilots in American history. Air Force Chief of Staff General Ken Wilsbach marched behind the casket of *Brigadier General* Clarence “Bud” Anderson during his interment at Arlington National Cemetery.

Anderson’s journey to becoming an aviation legend began in the 1920s, when he was growing up on a California farm and became fascinated by airplanes flying overhead. In 1941, at age 19, he earned his private pilot’s license. He joined the Army Air Corps Aviation Cadet Program in January 1942, shortly after the United States entered World War II, and was commissioned in the U.S. Army Air Forces (USAAF) later that year.

During World War II, Anderson served two tours with the USAAF’s 363rd Fighter Squadron, flying P-51 Mustangs that escorted heavy bombers—helping to win Allied air supremacy over Europe. He flew 116 individual combat missions that resulted in 16 ¼ kills, earning him “triple ace” status. After World War II, Anderson remained in the Army and then the Air Force, after it was established as a separate service branch in 1947. As a fighter pilot, test pilot, and combat and operational commander, Anderson logged over 7,500 flight hours and flew more than 130 types of aircraft.



General John Shaud (1933—2026), U.S. Air Force (ret.), DFC recipient, passed away in McLean VA on 13 March 2026 of complications following a stroke. Gen. Shaud logged 5,600 flying hours over his career in the B-47, B-52, RF-4C, T-38, and C-21A aircraft, among others, including 251 combat hours in Vietnam in the RF-4C. He was awarded the Air Medal with five oak leaf clusters in addition to the DFC. Gen. Shaud commanded Air Training Command (ATC) at Randolph Air Force Base TX from 1986 to 1988, (**Ed. Note.** This is when I met him. Good guy!). He completed his career as Chief of Staff, Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE) in Belgium from 1988 to 1991, when he retired. [Story](#). [Wikipedia](#).

Members of the DFCS 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.

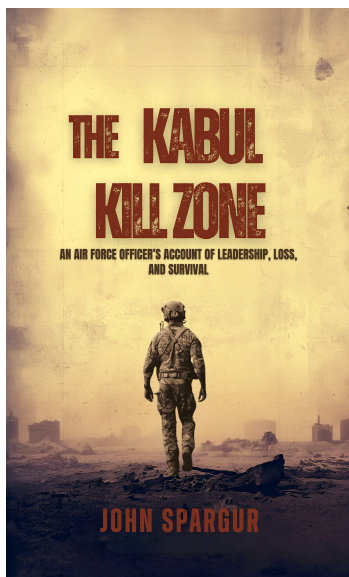
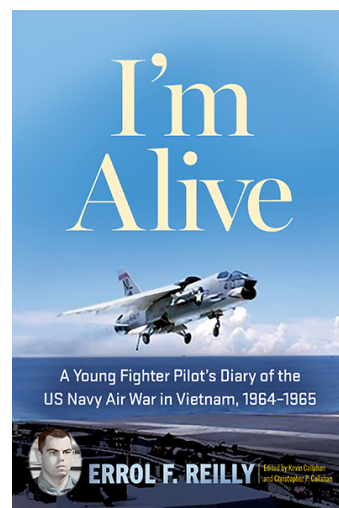
BOOK NOOK

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 Newsletter editor to discuss advertising your books here (email address, above).

I'm Alive: A Young Fighter Pilot's Diary of the US Navy Air War in Vietnam, 1964-1965

Kevin Callahan, Chris Callahan (eds.)

"I'm Alive" is the compelling diary of DFCS member, Errol F. Reilly (CDR, USN, Ret.; 1938–2006). Lieutenant Junior Grade (LTJG) Reilly was a 26-year-old Navy F-8 Crusader pilot. He wrote the diary aboard the aircraft carrier USS *Coral Sea* during his first Vietnam combat cruise. In writing that is colorful, perceptive, and, at times, both humorous and heartbreaking, Reilly chronicles his daily experiences "living, playing, and fighting" within the context of the Navy's fledgling air war. Edited by his stepsons. [Published by University of North Texas Press](#), 2026, and available from many sources. [Article](#). [Obit](#).



The Kabul Kill Zone

John Spargur

Assigned as NATO Chief of Strategic Basing at ISAF Headquarters, Major John Spargur found himself at the operational nerve center of America's longest war, working under a four-star general and liaising with CIA operatives who were tracking high-value targets across the country. Every base closure he planned, every withdrawal timeline he adjusted, carried consequences that rippled far beyond the conference room. *The Kabul Kill Zone* is a searingly honest memoir that takes listeners into the chaos of a war entering its final phase. From a harrowing encounter at a Taliban checkpoint after dark to navigating the suffocating weight of bureaucracy while soldiers died, Spargur holds nothing back. *The Kabul Kill Zone* is a compelling testament to resilience, duty, and the quiet cost of war that never makes the headlines. [Amazon](#).

SEND US A MESSAGE

We welcome questions and inquiries about the DFC Society and are always willing to either help locate missing award records or to provide information that would help recover information. Our office is located in San Diego, so is on Pacific time. Our staff typically works Monday through Friday to respond to questions about membership, benefits, scholarships, reunions or any other matters.

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