

20<sup>th</sup> Fighter Wing Association

# Newsletter



15 December 2025



Welcome all ranks and AFSC's



# ***The purpose of the Association***

***To preserve the military history and foster esprit de corps of past and present members of the 20th Fighter Wing and all previous and subsequent military iterations of that organization. Membership in the Association will be open to past and present members of the 20th Fighter Wing, their spouses and such other persons who have an interest in the affairs of the Association.***

## ***2024/2025 Board Members***

Gino Passaro – President:  
Steve Homoki – Vice President  
Dave Roberts – Chaplain:  
Ron Obernier – Secretary  
Art Sevigny – Historian  
Missi Zender-Sakach - Treasurer  
Steve Brown –2025 Reunion  
Missi Zender-Sakach – Past Reunion Chair  
**?????????? – 2027 Reunion Chair HELP!!!!!!**

**There were no Association members stepping up to fill our Board positions. The current Board agreed, and was voted on, to serve another two years in their current positions. What happens after that is questionable. Hopefully some members will step up, take vacant positions, and keep the Association functioning. To help with the process the Board has agreed to be a shadow member to any new Board Member to help them get adjusted in the position.**

**If you are interested in any of these positions, please notify a Board Member and we will put you in the ballot for a vote at our annual meeting. If you have questions about any position, please contact the relevant Board member.**

## ***New Members Since Last Newsletter***

**A warm welcome to our new members:**

**Franklin "Tex" Roberts** 20th Transportation Sq. from 1985-87.

**Samuel Kent** 20th AMS, AGS, EMS and Trans Sq from 1978 thru 1988.

**Davis Cooper** 79TFS from 1981-85

**Gregory Chevront**

**Eric R. Thomsen** 79TFS during 1978.

**Anthony Lazarski** 79TFS during 1984-90.

**Price Osteen** 77TFS from 1987-90.

**John Mosco** 55TFS from 1988-89.

**George Earles** 79th and the 20 CTU from 1975-79

**James Tibbetts.** 79th, 77th, 78th TFS from 1993-96, 2000-2002.

**James Gagnon.** 79th TFS from 1980-85.

**Larry Edwards.** 55TFS from 1984-88.

**Cherie Brown (Thompson)** 20th TFW 1971-72, 1979-80, 1981-1986.  
Former spouse of Lt Gen Dale Thompson

**Stacey Borgmann.** 20th TFW 1971-72, 1979-80, 1981-1986. Stacy is the daughter of Lt Gen Dale Thompson

**Hopefully the Association can continue to attract former members to join. Please contact your 20<sup>th</sup> friends and encourage them to join our worthwhile organization!**

## *Fallen Heros*



**This Listing contains only those warriors identified to the Association since the last newsletter.**

(Authors Note: Brad passed away in 2024, but I failed to include him in that quarter's newsletter. So, to honor his memory I have posted it in this newsletter.)

**Lewis Brad Insley.** Lewis Brad Insley served the United States Air Force in many capacities during his distinguished career and the 20th TFW at RAF Upper Heyford during the years 1978-1981 and again from 1984-1989. While there he was a member of 55th/77thTFS and flew the F-111. Brad had over 5000 hours in the F-111. Many flyers learned the finer points of flying the Aardvark from Brad. He was a long-time member of the 20th FWA,

**John Engles.** John spent much of his career in Strategic Air Command as a navigator on the nuclear capable FB-111bomber. His postings included places like Nellis AFB Nevada, Offutt AFB Nebraska, Plattsburgh AFB New York, Upper Heyford AFB United Kingdom, and Kirtland AFB New Mexico.

**Jan B. Andre.** Jan joined the United States Air Force where he served proudly as a fighter pilot for twenty years. During his Air Force career, Jan and his family lived in Texas, England, Nevada, and Idaho. Some of his highest honors included achieving the Distinguished Flying Cross and the Air Medal (14 Clusters), being an instructor pilot, including flying with the Imperial Iranian Air Force, and serving as Forward Air Controller in the Viet Nam War.

**Edward "Rosy" Rosenthal.** served the United States Air Force in many capacities during his distinguished career and the 20th TFW at RAF Upper Heyford during the years 1975-78. He was assigned to the 79th TFS and flew the F-111. He later flew the F-16 on combat missions in Iraq and was with Southwest Airlines for over 15 years.

**George Bristol.** George served the United States Air Force in many capacities during his distinguished career and the 20th TFW at RAF Wethersfield, England during the years 1955-58 flying the F-100. He was a long-time member of the 20th Fighter Wing Association.

**Jo Anne Hendrix.** Jo Anne was the dear wife of long-time association member Bill Hendrix and will be remembered as a vibrant member of the F-100 community at RAF Wethersfield (1962-65). She persevered as an Air Force wife, moving to Las Vegas, England and Louisiana.

**George "Pete" Peterson.** George served the United States Air Force in many capacities during his distinguished career and the 20th TFW at RAF Upper Heyford, England during the years 1974-76 as Wing Assistant Director of Operations and as Vice Commander. Pete flew the F-111. He was a long-time member of the 20th Fighter Wing Association

**Jim Peterson.** Jim was the NCOIC of the Data Automation Section, RAF Upper Heyford, UK 1969-1972. No further information provided.

## **A bit of History**

by Art Seigny

### **COUNTRY CLUB GETS READY FOR WAR**

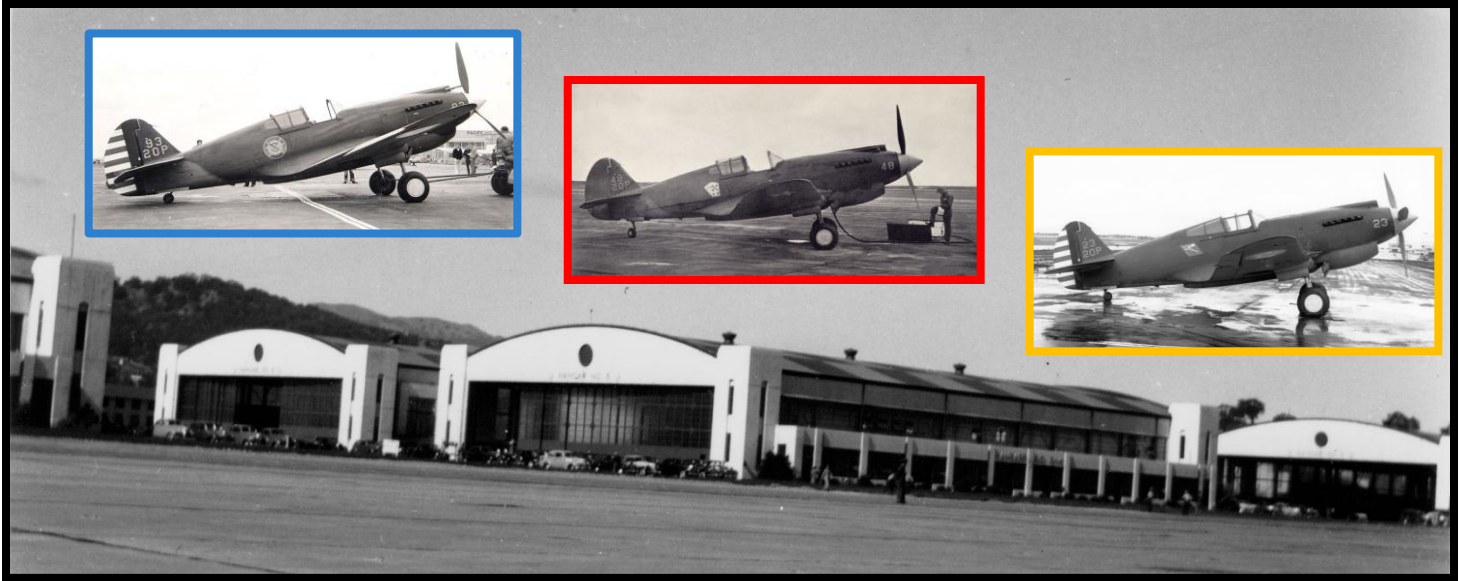
The 20th Pursuit Group, 55th and 77th Pursuit Squadrons came into existence in November 1930 as part of the Air Corps Act of 1926 which authorized the Five-Year expansion program for military aviation. The 79th Pursuit Squadron's activation was delayed until 1933.

Through much of the 1930s the 20th and its squadrons, in addition to routine training, took part in air power demonstrations for the general public as a way of gaining public support for aviation. By the late 1930s war clouds were forming and the “Golden Age” of aviation was about to end with a transition to wartime footing.

In 1962 retired Lt Gen Ira Eaker spoke at the 20th’s first reunion held at the Air Force Academy where he described the transition to a war mentality. In January 1941 Lt Col Eaker took command of the 20th at Hamilton Field, California and he was not impressed. Eaker described the 20th as having the air of a “Country Club” with flying being one of the many diversions. Eaker said at first his instinct was to be critical, but he realized nobody had told these boys that they’d be at war by the end of the year. Eaker had attended briefings from Charles Lindbergh and others who had firsthand knowledge of German air power. Eaker and General Arnold shared the belief that the US joining the war was inevitable.

Eaker held the belief that you could tell a lot about a unit by the condition of its mess. When he arrived on a cold morning in January 1941, he went down to look at the 20th’s mess which was set up in a hangar. His description was that the food was poor, cold and unappetizing. He found that there were no officers to be found in the mess. This was not a good start for the 20th.

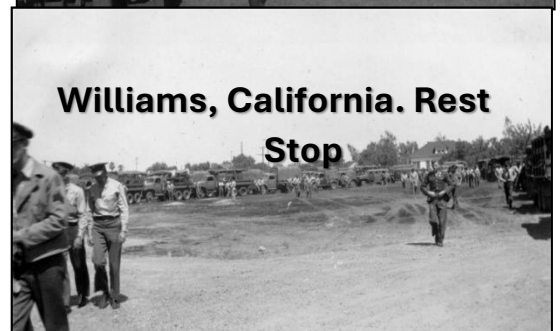
The next morning, he ordered all the officers to be present at the mess and in his words, “I launched my program, well designed to ensure that I was soon to be the most unpopular Group C.O. the 20th had ever had.” He went on to say that the 20th “responded magnificently to his cruelties.” He soon found the 20th was composed of good people who needed a little leadership.



*The specific hangar used for the mess is lost to history, but it was one of these. Above P-40s of the three squadrons*

Within a few months the 20th was fully equipped with 100 P-40Cs, around 100 young and enthusiastic pilots, and all the transportation and support equipment that was required. The 20th had reached full mission capable status and was ready for war. In June 1941 the hammer dropped. Eaker received a cable from General Arnold to crate up all his P-40s for shipment to China. **(Historian's note:** my research shows that the aircraft actually were sent to Russia. In 1995 a P-40C which was recovered from Russia was being restored by Fighter Rebuilders in Chino, California. Thomas Cleaver, aviation author, visited the facility. While they were removing layers of paint from the aircraft, they uncovered the USAAC olive drab paint and the markings of the 77th Pursuit Squadron. This aircraft now resides at the Flying Heritage & Combat Armor Museum, Everett, Washington.)

Losing all their combat aircraft was a huge blow to the unit which had made so



much progress under Eaker's leadership. Col Eaker was well aware of the negative effect this would have on the unit. To address the issue of losing all their aircraft Col Eaker called all his officers together and informed them of the news and then said that they would quickly prepare their aircraft for shipment. He went on to say after the packing was done the entire unit would form a truck convoy and conduct a practice march from Hamilton Field to Medford, Oregon and camp along the Rogue River at the Elks' picnic ground (now owned by actor James Belushi). In his words, "If they wouldn't let us fly, we would all go fishing."



The 20th camped for ten days along the Rogue. They still had two AT-6 Texans at nearby Medford Airport, which reportedly flew 22 hours per day to keep their pilots current. At least that's what the record said. It is believed there may have been some creative bookkeeping on those flights. Additionally, they conducted their pistol training and an aggressive physical fitness program with plenty of time left to play tourist by visiting Oregon Caves and Crater Lake among other areas.

In September 1941 Col Eaker received orders to England to be an observer. Lt Col Jesse Auton relieved Col Eaker and by the end of August 1941 the 20th had received new P-40E aircraft and regained full mission capability status. By this time the US was well aware that we were ill-prepared for the type of war the Germans had conducted in Europe.

To address our deficiencies a series of maneuvers were held in the fall of 1941. In September the 20th deployed to Esler Field, Louisiana to take part in Louisiana Maneuvers. The maneuvers were not so much a contest as they were an experiment. Some of the deficiencies discovered were: equipment breakdowns; failure to lead from the front; shortage of repair crews; uncoordinated attacks; poorly worded orders and jumbled



*The 20th Fighter Group's P-40s at Esler Field*



*20th Fighter Group*

defenses. Clearly the US had a lot of work to do.

The 20th then moved to Groton, Connecticut. The history is vague about what actions were taken at Groton. The 20<sup>th</sup> might have been incorporating what they learned in Louisiana in preparation for the next maneuvers. In November 1941, the 20th moved to Morris Field North Carolina (Now Charlotte International Airport) to take part in the Carolina maneuvers. Col Eaker had returned to the US and was an observer of the maneuvers and commented that the 20th “gave a good account of themselves.” Some improvements were shown during the maneuvers, but deficiencies still existed in overall leadership, training and coordinated close air support. To correct deficiencies in close air support identified during the Louisiana maneuvers, aircraft radios were modified to communicate with ground forces. Unfortunately, the radio modifications resulted in lost communication over anything but short distances which resulted in no command and control with their headquarters. Still much to work out.

Following the maneuvers the 20th boarded a train on November 30th bound for Hamilton Field, arriving at Hamilton Field at 1700 hrs. on December 5th, 1941. Two days later everything changed. For a brief period, the 20th flew patrols off the San Francisco coast which were fairly uneventful save a problem with Air Corps markings (see October 2016 newsletter).

In February 1942 the 20th permanently left Hamilton Field for various fields in the Carolinas, Florida and the Pacific Northwest where the three squadrons of the 20th were tasked with creating new combat units for the rapidly expanding Air Corps. In January 1943 the 20th moved to March Field, California where they converted to the P-38 Lockheed Lightning. Finally, in August 1943, the entire unit boarded three trains bound for the East Coast and the RMS Queen Elizabeth. Next stop-England-and another story.

## **20<sup>th</sup> Fighter Wing News**

**Bill Hoge provided this account from Col Kevin “Flint” Hicok,**

## **the 20<sup>th</sup> FW/CC**

Thanks for reaching out! I would say that you can let them know that the team did amazing stuff this summer. While around 1,000 folks from the 20 FW deployed to the Middle-East to run the largest air force base in CENTCOM, the remaining team helped keep headquarters operations for both AFCENT and ARCENT running at full-speed as they both surged during Operations ROUGH RIDER and MIDNIGHT HAMMER among several others.

The Wing downrange was awarded the Gallant Unit Citation (only the eighth unit to be awarded the award in its history) and at one point held seven fighter squadrons of F-16s (two from the 20 FW...the 55FS and 79FS), F-35As, and F-35Bs (from the USMC) alongside the second largest air refueling group in the world and several C2ISR and rescue aircraft. At one point, every service in the Department had missions that the Wing was responsible for.

Across the Wing's units downrange, over 20 Silver Stars were submitted for OMH and over 60 DFCs and 250 Air Medals were also submitted for both Operations (and others) throughout the summer. Our home station folks had a few get submitted by AFCENT for Meritorious Service and Commendation/Achievement Medals along with personal notes of thanks from Lt Gen France.

The 55 FS was largely responsible for the 20 FW's fighter contribution to this summer's operations downing several UAS's in the CENTCOM AOR and providing SEAD support to both ORR and OMH. I've attached our draft submission for their attempt at winning the RAYTHEON Trophy this year, having shot a few 9Xs and shooting the first combat employed HARMs in over a decade. We hope to get them all back over the next couple of weeks and at that point we will have returned all the 20 FW members to Homeplate in what was the largest deployment for Shaw Air Force Base and the 20 FW since Desert Storm.

## ***From our Members***

***Submitted by Glenn “Klown” Harmon:***

### **Combat Certified**

My first assignment as a 2LT was to the 55th FS at RAF Upper Heyford. At my initial Nuclear Certification in 1979, during the Q&A session, Cal Johnson, 20th FW Wing EWO, asked how I would identify threats in the target area. With confidence and enthusiasm, I addressed the SA-2 and pulled out a harmonica from my flight suit pocket and accurately mimicked the search and acquisition tones of the Fan Song radar to everyone's amusement. Sid Dodd, 55th FS Commander, dropped his head in his hands in disbelief and said something like "Holy Smoke, they sent me a Clown!" I guess it stuck huh? I passed!



***Submitted by Steve Emory:***

A couple of months ago, I was looking over the latest membership roster from Ron when I spied a name that triggered memories from decades ago.....Arley McRae....always had a great ring to it like a pro ball player, bronc buster or bull rider.

The Arley McRae I knew was a first lieutenant, or brand-new captain, at Myrtle Beach AFB, when I was a kid, 11 or 12 years old. Arley McRae and his fellow jocks were in our squadron, the 356<sup>th</sup> “Green Demons” flying brand new F-100s all with polished skins and flashy paint jobs like hot rods. Those were magical times. Our wing commander was Gabby Gabreski and his DO was Rex Barber.....now there’s a pair to draw to.

Arley McRae and some of the other bachelors in the squadron had rented a grand old mansion that looked like a former plantation house in the lush backwater, a little way from the beach. It was a beautiful place with a huge, manicured lawn, big trees with large canopies and Spanish Moss hanging from the branches. It was like fantasy land to a young kid.

Arley and his buddies had the world by the tail and were enjoying the ride. It was the squadron's favorite party place, for all the families, including kids. ....and those guys really knew how to throw a party.

One of my fondest "pictures" is of those lieutenants having a grand old time horsing around in the crowd, taking pot shots at each other....great fun. Arley had picked up a nickname in the past, back in his hometown, I believe...."Gator". Gator McRae had a great ring to it.....but, Arley was taking some heat from one of his cronies during the party, who was declaring to all within shouting distance, "Can't be Gator....not big enough to be a Gator....it's gotta be "Lizard". The crowd roared, the fight started.....not really.... all in good fun, but the story had a life of its own and got told more than once at the bar and in the squadron. Arley McRae was a giant, really, regardless of his height.

After we left Myrtle Beach, I didn't see him again until the early '70s. I had just come back from a long tour in Spectre Gunships in SEA and was over at Eglin Main looking for a job as the Gunships looked like they were going the way of the dinosaur.....that's a whole 'nother story. I was walking down the sidewalk at the TAC Warfare Center, which at the time looked more like Clark Field than Eglin Main. Here was this VIP walking down the sidewalk with a cluster of handlers hovering over him, giving him a tour, and obviously preparing him to go in for a meeting. It was a cool winter day. The VIP had an open light overcoat on with a flash of a star on the shoulder. The coat was hanging open and I caught the nametag on his blues.... "McRae". A quick glance as he passed, and, sure enough, it was now Brigadier General Arley McRae. Being a junior captain, I decided it was probably not a good time or place to interrupt him and his group with something he may not even remember, so I saluted and pressed on.

By the way, I got that job at TAWC that afternoon. My boss was John Locke, a Notre Dame grad, so we got along great right from the start. He had been an F-111 WSO at Nellis and Upper Heyford and loved it. He said he'd try to get me a slot in 111s. Sure enough, after three years, he came through.....and that's how I finally ended up a couple of months ago reading the latest 20FWA membership roster.....and spotted Arley McRae's name.... and... Weathersfield.....61-64.... had to have been right after Myrtle Beach. It's got to be him, I said to myself. There was his

telephone number.....no email. What the hell? Give it a go.

Hello, is this General McRae? Yes it is, he answered. You don't know me, but were you ever stationed at Myrtle Beach? ....one of the "Green Demons" in the 356th, lived in that grand old mansion known as "Seascape" on the water, and do you remember, at one of your parties, carousing around with a bunch of lieutenants howling over the difference between a certain gator and lizard? I swear I thought I heard him chuckle a tiny bit over that. Sure 'nough. After almost 70 years, and a half an hour on the phone, it was "Gator" McRae, bigger than life....all over again. What a day! What a great ray of sunshine!

By the way, I passed the story on to Gino a while back. He said I ought to write it up for the Newsletter. I told him I would, but would need to get the general's blessing before it went in the paper. I sent a letter to Gator and told him we were planning to recreate the story in the newsletter, but only if he would be happy to see it there. If you're reading this in the newsletter, then Gator, General Arley McRae that is, gave us the thumbs up.

Cheers! Steve

**Submitted by Vrenda Bates (Daughter of Alfred B Brand:**

My dad [Alfred B Brand (aka AB Brand), retired Lt. Col is no longer able to travel and has not been able to attend the past several reunions. This year, many in our family purchased a reunion shirt and wore them this past weekend at our family's Veteran's Day gathering to honor my dad. I thought I would share this with you-we plan to wear the shirt on patriotic days throughout the year.



**Submitted by Nick Frasca:**

Just took former IWSO and colleague Mike Frederick flying. Took off from Sarasota and picked him up at Whitted Airport, downtown St Petersburg, FL where he lives. Both of us were at Heyford but at different times. However, we flew together in the training squadron at Mountain Home. Flew around the Tampa St Pete area, did touch and goes at some of the local airports. L to R: Frederick, Frasca.



## **2025 20th FWA Reunion**

### **Oct 30 – Nov 2, 2025**

(Our 2025 Tucson Reunion recap which follows was authored by **Andrew (Ski) Dembosky.**)

The 20th Fighter Wing Association enjoyed much camaraderie and aviation history during its 30 October to 2 November 2025 reunion in Tucson, AZ.

Numerous emails and newsletters from 20 FWA Secretary Ron Obernier (20 FMS) and advertisements in the Daedalus Flyer and Mig Sweep garnered over 120 attendees including veteran weapons loaders, supply officers, pilots, WSOs, and a chaplain.

Steve Brown (77 FS) organized the reunion with great events such as a tour of the Titan Missile Museum and silo, the fantastic Pima Air & Space Museum with every airplane we've flown, a golf tournament, and of course great meals and functions at the Desert Diamond Hotel.

Association historian Art Sevigny (77 FS and 20 FW) provided the 20th flag from World War II, numerous squadron history books, pictures, and banners to give a real sense of the wing's many accomplishments since its establishment in 1927, and its component squadrons who trace their lineages to World War I.

Nightly visits to a well-stocked hospitality room allowed members and guests to share stories and reminisce.

For the final night's banquet, Association President Gino Passaro (55 FS and 79 FS) introduced guest speaker Richard "Downtown" Brown (79 FS and 20 FW) whose 4,650 hours distinguish him as having more F-111 hours than any American pilot. We're all generally familiar with the famous 1986 Operation El Dorado Canyon, the raid on Tripoli requiring over 14 hours of flying time. Dick Brown put us "in the cockpit" by describing the challenging air refuelings and harrowing low-level flying as he and his squadron mates rushed toward the Libyan coast through triple-A and SAMs to successfully attack their targets.

To close out the banquet, Bill Hoge (79 FS and 55 FS) recounted the outstanding current combat accomplishments of the 20th FW. He read an email from 20 FW/CC Col "Flint" Hicok and then listed the wing's numerous recent combat actions around the globe, including supporting the B-2 raid against Iran, which greatly impressed all the attendees.

## Photos from the reunion













## **2027 20<sup>th</sup> FWA Reunion**

**This event is problematic. No member has volunteered to host the reunion. The Board is looking into getting a reunion planner to set this up. We are looking at locations in the Mid-Atlantic and points South for the event. Cities included are New Orleans, Charleston, and Williamsburg.**

**Our 20<sup>th</sup> onsite liaison, Bill Hoge, has suggested possibly Shaw AFB for 2027. So that is under consideration, but has logistics issues. Maybe a good location for an off-reunion year event depending on how many members will attend.**

**If you would like to attend an off-year event at Shaw please let us know by March 30, 2026. The Wing will host us, and we can get events scheduled with the various squadrons and club.**

**If you would like to volunteer to host a reunion, please contact the Board with your proposed location. If you would like to assist the already busy Board with helping pull off the 27 reunion at the above locations, please contact the board again.**