

**"SERVICE ABOVE SELF"**

***The RAF Eagle Squadrons***

PRESENTED BY

**The Friends of the Air Force  
Academy Library**

IN COOPERATION WITH

**The Special Collections Branch  
of the  
U.S. Air Force Academy Library**

The Friends of the Air Force Academy Library is a tax-exempt charitable foundation established during 1987 for the purpose of enhancing the quality of the Academy Library as an educational, research, scientific and cultural institution. The Friends enable the Library to acquire materials, to pursue projects, to create publications and to implement services beyond those made possible by funds allocated by the Air Force.

For information about membership contact:

Lt. General A.P. Clark, USAF (Ret)  
The Friends of the Academy Library  
Post Office Box 188  
US Air Force Academy, CO 80840-0188

15 MARCH THROUGH 15 MAY 1995



**U.S. AIR FORCE ACADEMY  
COLORADO**

## THE EAGLES STORY

The defeat of France by Nazi Germany in June, 1940, brought the chilling realization to the world that England stood alone as the bulwark of democracy in Europe. And since her army had been decisively defeated and forced to evacuate France at Dunkirk, it was only the Royal Air Force that could thwart Hitler's planned invasion of Britain. This situation was graphically reinforced by the Battle of Britain that raged in the skies during the last half of 1940. The RAF realized early in the war that outside help was needed if there were to be enough pilots to fly the Hurricanes and Spitfires, as well as the bombers, so critical to England's defense. Pilots were recruited from all over the world, including the United States. Although such recruiting was illegal in the U.S., even before the fall of France, an American expatriate, Colonel Charles Sweeny, was actively recruiting for American pilots. The crisis in England by mid-1940, caused the British to redouble their efforts to get more Americans into the RAF. This led to the formation of a group to actively recruit American pilots throughout the country, led by a World War I veteran pilot and American artist, Clayton Knight. This Clayton Knight Committee recruited hundreds of American pilots, sent them to a refresher flying school and, as the U.S. Government winked at the law, put them on ships out of Canada bound for England and service in the RAF. In addition, a large number of Americans simply went to Canada and joined the RCAF.

In late 1940, at the request of Charles Sweeny, Colonel Sweeny's nephew, the British Air Ministry had agreed to form one squadron made up of American pilots under British command, Number 71 Squadron of Fighter Command. Two others, Numbers 121 and 133 Squadrons were added in 1941. Together, they were known as the "Eagle Squadrons," and upon arrival in England, many of the Americans

were sent to these three units. The Squadrons built a strong reputation for excellence and 244 Americans and their 16 British commanders served as Eagles. On September 29, 1942, the three Eagle Squadrons transferred to the U.S. Army Air Forces forming the Fourth Fighter Group of the Eighth Air Force stationed at Debden. Most, but not all, of the Eagles transferred to the Fourth. During their time in the RAF, the Eagles destroyed over 73 German aircraft and the Fourth Fighter Group subsequently became the highest scoring unit in the Army Air Forces with 1052 enemy aircraft destroyed.

But it is not the number of aircraft destroyed that makes the Eagles such a legend. It was their willingness to put service above self and volunteer for the cause of freedom even though they did not have to go to war. And nearly half of the 244 paid the supreme price for their willingness to serve - 108 were killed in action and many more died in training or crossing the Atlantic. Another 34 became prisoners of war. Yet they had a duty to perform and when they agreed to serve in the RAF they resolved to be true to that duty and live "Service Above Self."

## THE EXHIBIT

At their annual reunion in 1989, the members of the Eagle Squadron Association, at the request of The Friends of the Air Force Academy Library, designated the Special Collections Branch of the Academy Library as the official repository for their records. Those items to be put into the Academy Library focused on official records, personal papers and diaries, log books, letters and photographs. Since that time, hundreds of items from nearly a score of Eagles have built the nucleus of a strong collection; one that has become a favorite of cadets for research.

In late 1994, the Friends of the Air Force Academy Library and the staff of the Special Collections Branch, determined that the Eagle Collection was complete enough to build a major exhibit about the



Eagles. This exhibit is taken from those items that have been given to the Academy, augmented by a number that have been identified by several Eagles for future donation. The displays do not include pieces from all of the individuals represented in the Eagle Collection, but rather items were selected to illustrate the broad scope of the collection as well as tell the story of the Eagles. The Eagle Collection is far from complete and the Academy is interested in obtaining additional archival material for the collection. Every semester cadets and other researchers are disappointed that there is not more in the Eagle Collection. Nonetheless, it is a good beginning, as this exhibit demonstrates, and we hope that Eagles not currently represented in the collection will donate their records before they are lost to future generations.

## ITEMS IN THE EXHIBIT

### Vertical Cases

The first case contains the official plaque of the Eagle Squadron Association. In case two are LeRoy Gover's RAF uniform, a picture of Gover with a Spitfire V, a Spitfire gun sight loaned by Reade Tilley and a copy of Spitfires, Thunderbolts and Warm Beer, a book about Gover's experiences in World War II. The third case features William Dunn's RAF uniform, a picture of Dunn by a P-51 after he transferred to the U.S. Army Air Forces and a copy of Dunn's autobiography, Fighter Pilot. Case four contains a World War II U.S. Army Air Forces uniform of the type worn by the Eagles after they transferred to the U.S. Army Air Forces and a painting of LeRoy Gover's P-47, the aircraft flown by the Fourth Fighter Group from March 1943 to March 1944. On the wall behind the exhibit is the British flag that flew over RAF Station Debden when the Eagles transferred to the U.S. Army Air Forces.

### Case 1

Focus is on the situation that caused young American men to join the RAF before American entry into World War II.

Case contents. The Denver Post, September, 1939. Life, August 19, 1940. Daily Sketch, June 18, 1940. FBI Report on the activities of the Clayton Knight Committee. Telegram informing Wendell

Pendleton to report to RAF refresher training. RAF aircraft identification book. Picture of LeRoy Gover cranking the inertial starter on a Long Wing Eagle Rock biplane in the 1930s.

### Case 2

Emphasis is on the training received by those who volunteered for the RAF.

Case contents. Life, October 13, 1941. Picture of Walter Wicker at RCAF flight training. Picture of LeRoy Gover and his instructor standing beside the wreckage of their Stearman, PT-17 near Bakersfield, CA. Picture of Class #25, RAF refresher training, Bakersfield, CA., 1941. Picture of Clark Gable visiting RAF refresher training at Bakersfield. LeRoy Gover's diary. Picture of George Middleton, Mick Lambert and LeRoy Gover flying PT-17s at Bakersfield. Morris Fessler's log book. Letter from Reade Tilley to his son, Reade Tilley, Jr. Letter from LeRoy Gover to his parents.

### Case 3

Details the trip from Canada across the North Atlantic to England, becoming members of the RAF and experiences at the RAF Operational Training Unit.

Case contents. Letter of permission for LeRoy Gover to leave the U.S. and go to Canada. Letter of instruction to Wendell Pendleton regarding his passage to England. Photographs of LeRoy Gover's voyage across the North Atlantic. Photograph of Number 66 Squadron, RAF Fighter Command, May 1942. RAF "Pilot's Aircraft Identification Book." Map of England issued to RAF pilots. Mick Lambert's log book. Certificate appointing Harold Strickland a Pilot Officer in the RAF.

### Case 4

Focus is on the formation of the three Eagle Squadrons, Numbers 71, 121 and 133 of RAF Fighter Command as well as initial combat with the Germans.

Case contents. Insignia of the three Eagle Squadrons. Joe Kelly and his Spitfire with an Eagle emblem on its nose. Pilots notes on the Spitfire and the Rolls-Royce engine. Chesley Peterson's log book. Picture of Harold Strickland climbing out of his Spitfire after a mission. Eagle shoulder patch. Newspaper clipping about Reade Tilley's flying exploits. Douglas Booth's RAF picture, dog tags and identity card. Operation Record Book of 121 Squadron.



### Case 5

Portrays squadron activity both in combat and at leisure.

Case contents. D.K. Willis' log book. Photo of a funeral procession for an Eagle killed in an aircraft accident. Spitfire altimeter and clock. Photograph of Eagles waiting in dispersal hut on 30 minute alert. Photo of Eagle signatures on the wall of the Crackers Club. Picture of "The Thatched" in J.S. Childers, War Eagles. LeRoy Gover's diary. "Forget-Me-Nots for Fighters." Douglas Booth's flying goggles. Luftwaffe badge sent to Jim Goodson by a German pilot Goodson shot down in World War II. German Luftwaffe pilot wings. Gregory Daymond's RAF Distinguished Flying Cross. Luftwaffe officer's ceremonial dagger.

### Case 6

Emphasis is on the transfer of the three Eagle Squadrons to the U.S. Army Air Forces where they formed the Fourth Fighter Group of the Eighth Air Force.

Case contents. Photo of a Spitfire ground crew. Photo of an Eagle Squadron Spitfire being parked at the completion of a mission. Photo of Eugene Tobin outside the dispersal hut at North Weald holding 71 Squadron's status board, June 1941. Photo of Lt. Colonel Peterson looking at U.S. Distinguished Flying Cross awarded to RAF Wing Commander Duke-Woolley. Orders assigning several former Eagles to the 336th Fighter Squadron. Life, November 2, 1942. Douglas Booth's log book. Letter appointing LeRoy Gover a Second Lieutenant in the U.S. Army Air Forces. Letter of appreciation sent to each Eagle after transfer to the U.S. Army Air Forces. Letter of appreciation from Air Chief Marshal Sir Charles Porter to Major General Carl Spaatz. Letter of thanks from Major General Carl Spaatz to Air Marshal Sir Charles Porter.

### Case 7

Focus is on the experiences of the Fourth Fighter Group.

Case contents. Photo of P-47 crash, Debden, 1943. Photograph of a crashed and burned P-47, Debden, 1943. Photo of P-51 armorers, "B" Flight, 334th Fighter Squadron, Fourth Fighter Group. Photo of 336th Fighter Squadron status board, Debden,

1943. LeRoy Gover's Log Book. Picture of Wilson Edwards beside his P-47. Strip map of LeRoy Gover's last P-47 mission into Germany. V-Mail letter. Letter from LeRoy Gover to his parents. Photo of a Republic P-47. Photo of former Eagles Carroll McColpin, Sam Mauriello, Jim Daley and Reade Tilley.

### Case 8

Sacrifice is the theme of this case. It portrays the danger of flying in World War II and the willingness of the Eagles to commit themselves to a cause bigger than themselves regardless of the consequences.

Case contents.

Photograph of LeRoy Gover's class at RAF operational training. LeRoy Gover's diary. Photo of an end of mission debriefing. Telegram notifying Wilson Edwards' family that he was missing in action. Wilson Edwards' POW dog tags and identification card. Photo of Eagle POWs in Stalag Luft III. Silk RAF evasion map. U.S. Army Air Forces escape and evasion kit. RAF brandy flask. RAF survival knife. RAF waterproof match case. Several button compasses. Evasion photo of Glen Smart. Copy of the speech given by Prime Minister Thatcher on the occasion of the dedication of a monument to the Eagle Squadrons. Photo of the Eagle Squadrons monument in Grosvenor Square, London. Eagle Roll of Honor.