

**W**hen the United States declared war on Germany in April 1917, all 37 of the young men at Southeastern Normal School in Durant, Okla., enlisted in the Army. Among them was a square-jawed senior, Ira Clarence Eaker, whose family had migrated to Oklahoma from a hard-scrabble farm in Texas.

Private Eaker was a week short of his 21st birthday, but he had been close to graduating and because of that was sent to an officer training camp. A few months later, he was commissioned as a second lieutenant in the infantry.

Events took a fateful turn in November 1917 when Eaker saw an airplane land with engine trouble at Fort Bliss, Texas, and offered to help. All it took was reconnecting the spark plug lead, which had come loose, but by sheerest chance the pilot was on a recruiting drive for the Aviation Section of the Signal Corps. He encouraged Eaker to apply, and he did. Eaker received his pilot's rating in July 1918 and was assigned to Rockwell Field near San Diego.

In early 1919, Col. H. H. "Hap" Arnold returned from the war front in France to take command at Rockwell. He brought Maj. Carl A. "Tooe" Spatz with him as his executive officer. When the post adjutant was lost in an air crash, Arnold and Spatz picked Eaker to replace him.

They were a smooth-working team, likened to the Three Musketeers by Eaker's biographer, James Parton, and the relationship was a lasting one. Arnold was the acknowledged leader, Spatz was his trusted deputy, and the competent and resourceful Eaker was the Third Musketeer.

The Musketeers soon went their separate ways, but they would be together again, many times, over the next 30 years and their friendship would continue for the rest of their lives. Eaker always called Arnold and his other seniors by their rank, with one exception: Spatz was always "Tooey."

#### **RISING STAR**

Eaker did not plan to stay in service, figuring he would be at a disadvantage in competing with West Point graduates. That

# The Third Musketeer

By John T. Correll

**When Ira Eaker met Hap Arnold and Tooe Spatz in 1919, it was the start of a lifelong partnership.**

fear was spectacularly unfounded. Eaker impressed almost everyone he encountered with his abilities and he soon became one of the rising stars of the air arm.

In 1922, Eaker was commander of the 5th Aero Squadron at Mitchel Field on Long Island, planning to leave the Army and go to law school. Maj. Gen. Mason M. Patrick, chief of the Air Service, was en route to Boston when his pilot was taken sick and landed at Mitchel. Eaker flew him the rest of the way to Boston and back to Washington the next day. Mason, who had authority to send a few of his officers to educational institutions, offered to sponsor Eaker at the Columbia University law school. The next semester, Eaker completed a course in contract law at Columbia.

In 1924, Eaker was in Washington as executive assistant in Patrick's office. Arnold was there, too, as chief of the Air Service information division. Arnold and Eaker worked together—despite cautions from Patrick—to support the firebrand Billy Mitchell in his challenge to the Army on behalf of airpower.

Arnold testified for Mitchell at his court-martial in 1925, as did Spaatz. Eaker's participation was behind the scenes. After the court-martial, Arnold "took on Mitchell's mantle as leader of the Young Turks in the Air Corps," said Parton.

Maj. Gen. James E. Fechet, Patrick's assistant and successor as chief of the Air Corps, as it had been redesignated, also liked Eaker, who in 1927 became his pilot and aide as well as executive officer in the Office of the Assistant Secretary of War.

However, Eaker's heart was never in headquarters duty. He continued to fly and established a solid reputation for airmanship. Captain Eaker led the Pan-American mission in 1925, a goodwill tour of 25 Central and South American countries intended to demonstrate the long reach of airpower.

He was one of the organizers of the pioneer aerial refueling operation of 1929, in which the *Question Mark*, a Fokker C-2 aircraft, set an endurance record by staying aloft for more than six days over southern California, refueled in flight 43 times by a hose from a tanker airplane overhead. Eaker was



*Left: Ira Eaker poses by his airplane in 1931. He was already a trusted colleague of Hap Arnold and Tooeey Spaatz and was making a name for himself as a pioneer airman. Here: Question Mark refuels over southern California during its historic endurance flight in 1929. Eaker was chief pilot.*



**Above: The crew of Question Mark and the Chief of the Air Corps at Bolling Field, D.C., in 1929. They are (l-r) Capt. Ross Hoyt, Capt. Ira Eaker, Maj. Gen. James Fechet, Air Corps chief, Maj. Carl Spaatz, Lt. Elwood Quesada, and MSgt. Roy Hooe.**

the chief pilot and recruited Spaatz to be flight commander and hose handler.

In 1936, Eaker would make aviation history again with the first transcontinental flight on instruments alone, from New York to Los Angeles.

He was well-satisfied with what he was doing and his progress in the Air Corps. "I don't think that many people ever visualized senior rank and status in their careers," he said, looking back years later. "It was only the expansion of the Second World War that gave all of us high rank."

## WINGMAN

The Musketeers were reunited in California in 1931. Arnold was commander of March Field, where Spaatz had command of a bombardment wing. Eaker was nearby at the University of Southern California, back in school on government sponsorship. He frequently went over to March on weekends to fly P-12s with Arnold and Spaatz. Arnold regarded Eaker as "on call" whenever he needed him.

After completing his degree in journalism in 1933, Eaker was assigned to March as commander of a pursuit squadron. He often went hunting and fishing in the Sierras with Arnold.

Soon they were back in Washington, Arnold as assistant chief of the Air Corps, Spaatz as the assistant exec in that office, and Eaker as assistant chief of the Air Corps Information Division. Arnold and Eaker published *The Flying Game*, the first of three books they wrote together, in 1936. Eaker, who was the better writer, did most of the work. *Winged Warfare* would follow in 1941, and *Army Flier* in 1942. Their families were friends as well, and the Eakers were frequent guests of the Arnolds.

In the late 1930s, Arnold was making his bid—by no means yet assured—for leadership of the Army air arm. He was chief of the Air Corps, but control of the force was split with a rival organizational entity called the "GHQ Air Force," to which the tactical squadrons were assigned.

One of his strengths, which helped him prevail, was the team he had assembled. "Arnold's troops were some of the handful who had served with him since the early days, the few who had

been there from the beginning and would remain to the end, no matter what the end was," said DeWitt S. Copp, author of *Forged in Fire*. Spaatz, chief of plans and "for 20 years Arnold's closest confidant in or out of the office, was there to advise and shape strategy." Eaker, Arnold's executive officer "and trusted wing man, was there to backstop his Chief in any encounter."

In 1940, Eaker was given command of a pursuit group at Hamilton Field, Calif., but it was not long before Arnold had another special task for him.

## PINETREE

When the United States entered the war following the attack on Pearl Harbor, Arnold told Eaker that he was sending him to England "to understudy the British and start our bombardment as soon as I can get you some planes and some crews." Eaker pointed out that all of his service had been in fighters. "Yes, I know that," Arnold said. That's what we want, the fighter spirit in bomber aviation."

Eaker was promoted to brigadier general as he undertook his assignment in January 1942. Arnold presented Eaker the stars he had first worn himself as a new brigadier general. (Many years later, Eaker gave the Arnold stars to Gen. Russell E. Dougherty, who passed them along to new generations of airmen.)

The mission to Britain had several aspects. Eaker was to establish a headquarters for VIII Bomber Command, which he would head, and prepare to receive the advance echelon of the parent unit, Eighth Air Force, which would be commanded by Spaatz, who was now a major general.

Eaker was also to pave the way for the organization and strategy Arnold wanted: a US air command that would cooperate with, but be independent of, the Royal Air Force, with daylight precision bombing as its core operational concept.

The British had a different idea. They wanted the Americans to blend into their established effort under British control and participate in the area bombing at night. The RAF had tried

precision bombing and failed at it. A directive in February 1942 said the primary objective should focus “on the morale of the enemy civil population and in particular industrial workers.” Prime Minister Winston Churchill’s scientific advisor called it “dehousing” the Germans.

When Eaker and his six-man party arrived Feb. 21, they got a cool reception from Maj. Gen. James E. Chaney, commander of US Army forces in the British isles. Chaney wanted no part of Arnold’s scheme for a separate air command under Spaatz and Eaker. Chaney was a problem until he was replaced in June by Maj. Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower, who got along well with Spaatz and Eaker.

The welcome was much warmer from Air Marshal Arthur T. “Bomber” Harris, the new chief of RAF Bomber Command. Harris was a strong advocate of city bombing but he liked Eaker and hoped to convert him to British thinking.

Headquarters for VIII Bomber Command, code name “Pinetree,” was at High Wycombe, 30 miles west of London, close to RAF Bomber Command headquarters. Eighth Air Force headquarters, “Widewing,” would be at Bushy Park, closer to London.

Many British, including Churchill, were charmed by Eaker. Air Chief Marshal Charles Portal, the RAF chief of staff, was one of his strongest supporters. Speaking at a public gathering at High Wycombe, Eaker said, “We won’t do much talking until we’ve done more fighting. After we’ve gone, we hope you’ll be glad we came.”

## DIVERSION

Spaatz arrived in June and the first B-17 bombers reached England in July. By then, Churchill had persuaded President Franklin D. Roosevelt to agree—against the advice of US generals and admirals—to a change in strategy. The Allies would delay the direct offensive across the English Channel and shift their emphasis to the Mediterranean, first in North Africa, where the British had been engaged against the Germans since 1940, and then into Italy and up through the “soft underbelly” of Europe.

Twelfth Air Force, code-named “Junior,” was spun off from Eighth Air Force and set up in North Africa. Junior siphoned 27,000 men and 1,100 airplanes from Eighth Air Force, and

Eaker’s VIII Bomber Command was left with less than 150 aircraft and even fewer crews.

Eisenhower was relieved of his post in Europe and appointed to command the newly created North Africa theater of operations. Air Chief Marshal Arthur Tedder was the commander in chief for Air, but Eisenhower took Spaatz with him as commander of the Northwest African Air Forces.

Eaker was promoted to major general in September 1942, but he did not have enough aircraft and crews to mount large bomber operations. More than half of his remaining resources were assigned to attacking German submarine pens—a high priority for the British—even though bombing had little effect on these hardened facilities.

To the horror of Arnold and his colleagues, Churchill had almost convinced Roosevelt to halt the daylight precision bombing and join the British in nighttime operations against German cities and other area targets.

## EAKER OF THE EIGHTH

Eaker took command of Eighth Air Force in December 1942. The appointment was understood to be temporary, until Spaatz returned from the Mediterranean, but it lasted for a year during which Eaker’s name became forever linked with Eighth Air Force.

In January 1943, Eaker got an urgent summons from Arnold to come to the big Allied conference in Casablanca, Morocco, where Roosevelt was on the verge of agreeing to Churchill’s proposal for a bombing strategy change. If anybody could talk Churchill out of his determination, it was Eaker.

They met for 30 minutes in Churchill’s villa and Eaker persuaded Churchill that the two bombing efforts complemented each other and kept round-the-clock pressure on the Germans. “I decided to back Eaker and his theme, and I turned round completely and withdrew my opposition to the daylight bombing by the Fortresses,” Churchill said in his memoirs.

More of Eaker’s aircraft and crews were transferred to North Africa in January 1943, so Eighth Air Force was operating against Germany with less than 100 heavy bombers. Replace-

*Eaker, now a brigadier general, speaks with members of the press after a B-17 combat mission over Europe in April 1942.*





**Gen. Dwight Eisenhower (l) presented Eaker (c) with an Oak Leaf cluster for his Distinguished Service Medal as Spaatz (r) looked on. Eaker retired shortly thereafter, in 1947.**

ments were offset by losses in ensuing months, and there were seldom more than 200 B-17s flying out of England.

Even so, Arnold was not satisfied with the sortie rate or the results. He understood that Eaker was shorthanded but thought he should be getting more missions from the resources he did have. Arnold was never critical of Spaatz but he did not hesitate to lash out at the junior Musketeer, urging Eaker to “toughen up” and crack down on subordinates who did not produce. Spaatz was unfailingly supportive of Eaker and acted as a buffer between him and Arnold.

Arnold was under great pressure himself to deliver results from airpower in Europe. He pushed on relentlessly despite a heart attack in March 1943, the first of a number that would eventually kill him. There was encouragement for Eaker as well. On a visit to England in September 1943, Arnold announced Eaker’s promotion to lieutenant general and his designation as commander of all US air forces in the European theater of operations.

In a meeting with Eaker in 1976, Albert Speer, Germany’s minister of armaments and war production, gave an assessment from the enemy’s perspective. “You in fact had started a second front long before you crossed the Channel with ground forces in June 1944,” Speer said. “Air Marshal Milch told me that your combined air effort forced us to keep 900,000 men tied down on the so-called ‘West Wall’ to defend against your bombers. ... I suspect that well over a million Germans were ultimately engaged in anti-aircraft defenses, as well as 10,000 or more anti-aircraft guns. Without this great drain on our manpower, logistics, and weapons, we might well have knocked Russia out of the war before your invasion of France.”

In November 1943, Twelfth Air Force in the Mediterranean divided into two parts, the bombers going to the newly created Fifteenth Air Force with Twelfth Air Force becoming a fighter command.

## **EAKER DEPARTS**

Eaker’s tour at Eighth Air Force ended in January 1944 with the return of Eisenhower and Spaatz to England. “It is necessary to find a good man for the post of air commander in chief of the Mediterranean,” said Supreme Allied Commander Eisenhower in a message to Gen. George C. Marshall, the Army Chief of Staff. “It would appear to me to be something of a waste to have both Spaatz and Eaker in England.”

Spaatz was named commander of US Strategic Air Forces in Europe, which included both the Mediterranean and European theaters.

Eaker’s new job was commander in chief of Mediterranean Allied Air Forces, making him head of two American and two British air forces. In an editorial entitled “General Eaker Moves Up,” the *New York Times* called it “a well-deserved promotion,” but Eaker did not see it that way. He was deeply disappointed to leave Eighth Air Force as the war was reaching a critical juncture.

“It is an entirely different kind of job and requires different technique for the employment of your aircraft,” Arnold wrote to Eaker. “I am of the opinion it will do you a considerable amount of good. It will increase your experience and give you a reputation along other lines than that in which you were engaged in England. In other words, you should come out of this a bigger man by far than you went into it.”

Spaatz had operational control of the air forces in both Italy and England but he made a practice of routing directives for Fifteenth Air Force through Eaker, who was authorized to make alterations as he thought best because of weather or unpredictable factors.

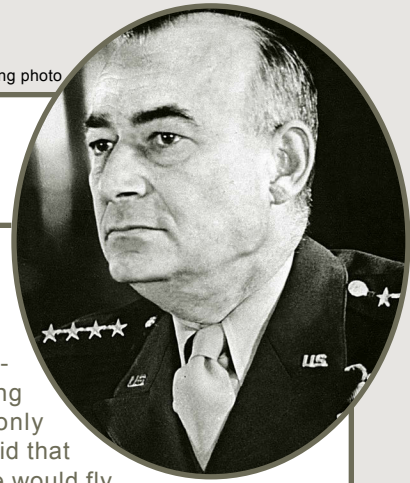
Eaker carried out Operations Strangle—the interdiction campaign in Italy—and Diadem—the Allied advance on Rome—but his driving interest was in working with Spaatz on Operation Pointblank, the American part of the combined bomber offensive against Germany.

Arnold’s criticism abated. “The tension between the two men, which had reached such strained extremes the year before, now was almost completely gone,” Parton said. “They had returned to their longtime roles of revered patron and respected protégé.”

However, Eaker would not remain in his post to see the end of the war. In January 1945, Hap Arnold had his fourth heart attack and Marshall decided to bring Eaker back to Washington to take over some of the load. Eaker became deputy commanding general of the Army Air Forces in April.

Arnold retired in January 1946. Eaker continued as deputy to Spaatz, who followed Arnold as commanding general of the AAF. When Eaker himself retired in August 1947, a few weeks before

## Joseph McNarney: The Famous General You've Likely Never Heard Of



You probably know that Henry H. H. “Hap” Arnold was the Army Air Force’s first four-star general (date of rank March 19, 1943), but who was the second?

It wasn’t Arnold’s chosen successor, Carl A. “Tooe” Spaatz. He followed Arnold as leader of the AAF and was the first Chief of Staff of the independent Air Force, but he was the fourth Air Force officer promoted to four-star grade. (DOR March 11, 1945.)

It wasn’t George C. Kenney, wartime commander of air forces in the South Pacific. Kenney, who had strong support from Army Gen. Douglas MacArthur, was the third AAF four-star. (DOR March 9, 1945, making him two days senior to Spaatz.) Nor was it Ira Eaker or Jimmy Doolittle. They left active duty as lieutenant generals and did not become four-stars until 1985, by special act of Congress.

AAF’s second four-star was Joseph T. McNarney, with a DOR of March 7, 1945, deliberately timed to give him two days seniority over the competition.

McNarney is seldom remembered today. He was not one of the big names of World War II and, even in 1945, not famous. But he was well-known where it counted. His colleagues rated him highly and most important, Army Chief of Staff Gen. George C. Marshall thought he was one of the best and smartest officers in the Army.

McNarney was commissioned as a second lieutenant of infantry at West Point in 1915, earned his wings in 1917, transferred to the aviation section of the Signal Corps and flew in France in World War I.

He spent the 1920s and 1930s mostly in staff and non-operational assignments. He was both a student and an instructor at the Field Officers School, which later became the fabled Air Corps tactical school. McNarney was also an instructor at the Army War College from 1933 to 1935.

For a time, he was assistant chief of staff at GHQ Air Force, which encompassed all of the tactical units of the

Air Corps. When his friend Maj. Gen. Frank Andrews, commander of GHQ Air Force, expressed concern that McNarney was no longer flying much—he was averaging only about 50 hours a year—he said that if he got a flying command, he would fly.

He was not among those campaigning most intensely for airpower independence.

Nevertheless, he steadily established a reputation as dependable, tough, capable, and—always—extremely intelligent. McNarney got his first star in April 1941 and was sent to London at chief of staff of the Special Observers Group.

By 1942, he was back in Washington, had advanced to lieutenant general, and was deputy chief of staff of the Army. Marshall assigned him to lead a major reorganization in which the service took on its wartime structure of three separate and autonomous commands: the Army Air Forces, the Army Ground Forces, and the Services of Supply. McNarney finally got into the field in October 1944 as deputy supreme allied commander in the Mediterranean Theater and commanding general of Army Air Forces in the Mediterranean.

Following his promotion to four-star rank, McNarney succeeded Eisenhower as commanding general of US Forces in the European Theater and commander in chief of US occupation forces in Germany. He returned Stateside in 1947 as senior member of the United Nations Military Staff Committee in New York. After that, he was commander of Air Materiel Command and chief of the Department of Defense Management Committee until his retirement in 1952.

McNarney was president of Consolidated Vultee Aircraft and president of the Convair division of General Dynamics following a merger of the companies. He died in 1972.

the Air Force became a separate service, Eisenhower sent him four “good luck” coins—one each from Britain, Africa, France, and the US—that Ike had carried in his pocket throughout the war. He hoped they would remind Eaker of the “days we spent together in World War II.”

### THE LAST MUSKETEER

Eaker, 51, still had work ahead of him. He was vice president of Hughes Tool Co. and Hughes Aircraft from 1947 to 1957 and of Douglas Aircraft from 1957 to 1961. He hit his stride, however, with a weekly column syndicated to 180 newspapers for 18 years in the 1960s and 1970s. He was a frequent speaker for Air Force professional military education classes, especially at Squadron Officer School. Eaker characteristically took time to notice and encourage younger members of the force.

He and Spaatz built a fishing cabin on a remote cliff overlooking the Rogue River in Oregon. They gloried in the lack of electricity or a telephone and hosted groups of their cronies who came to fish and play poker. Eaker won often. He had learned

to play as a child, sitting in the laps of cowboys who believed he brought them luck.

Eaker, who died in 1987, was the last of the Musketeers. Arnold had passed away in 1950, Spaatz in 1974. Eaker was active in his later years. “Until April 1981, he regularly put in a seven-day week at his office, walking the two miles from his house every day that weather permitted,” Parton said.

There was one final honor. In 1985, Eaker was promoted to four-star general on the retired list by special act of Congress. Eaker’s fourth star was presented in the Pentagon two weeks after his 89th birthday. Gen Charles A. Gabriel, Air Force Chief of Staff, pinned one shoulder, and Eaker’s wife, Ruth, pinned the other. It was the first time Eaker had ever worn the blue uniform. The Air Force had still been part of the Army when he left in 1947. ✪

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