AIR FORCE PUBLIC AFFAIRS AGENCY PRESENTS

VETERANS IN BLUE

VOLUME IV

Photo by Airman 1st Class Justyn Freeman

JOHN FLANDERS

BIOGRAPHY

Chief Master Sergeant (Ret.) John Flanders devoted 28 years of his life to the military before retiring in 1978. During World War II, Flanders joined the U.S. Merchant Marines when he was 18 years old. The Merchant Marines is a fleet of U.S. civilian-owned merchant vessels that handle commerce or transportation of goods and services. During his career, Flanders was able to travel to many places around the world, including Russia and Japan. After World War II, Flanders decided to enlist in the Air Force and was sent to Texas to be a Military training instructor immediately after he joined. His next assignment was to Germany, which launched him into the civil engineering career field. He was involved with many projects as a civil engineer, which took him to France and Vietnam. As Vietnam came to a close, Flanders was given another tour in Germany as a civil engineer, where he seized the opportunity to travel to locations such as Luxemburg, Belgium, Holland, Denmark, Austria, Switzerland, Italy and Spain. Flanders' last assignment was to Hill Air Force Base, Utah, where he served until retirement.

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Photos by Staff Sgt. Nadine Y. Barclay

RICHARD FRENCH

BIOGRAPHY

Lieutenant Colonel (Ret.) Richard French was a fighter pilot who flew 683 combat missions during his 27-year career in the U.S. Air Force. His aircraft sustained battle damage during 40 of these missions. French was wounded twice during his career; his most serious injury was during Vietnam when he was struck by ground-fire that split his helmet in two. He received nine stitches to his head and returned to flying operations the following day. He was awarded the Purple Heart for his actions. French is most proud of being selected to destroy the Thanh Hoa Bridge using guided bombs during Operation LINEBACKER I in Vietnam. This was a memorable accomplishment because the bridge had already consumed 873 sorties and cost the U.S. 11 aircraft. French earned many decorations during his career, including the Silver Star, two Distinguished Flying Crosses and 23 Air Medals. French retired in 1974 and said, "I am truly honored to have had this opportunity, to know that the people I worked with and for appreciated the things that I did; it makes this all worth it." Today, French is active in veterans' affairs and continues to seek ways to mentor today's Airmen on the deep appreciation others have for the sacrifices they made and continue to make.

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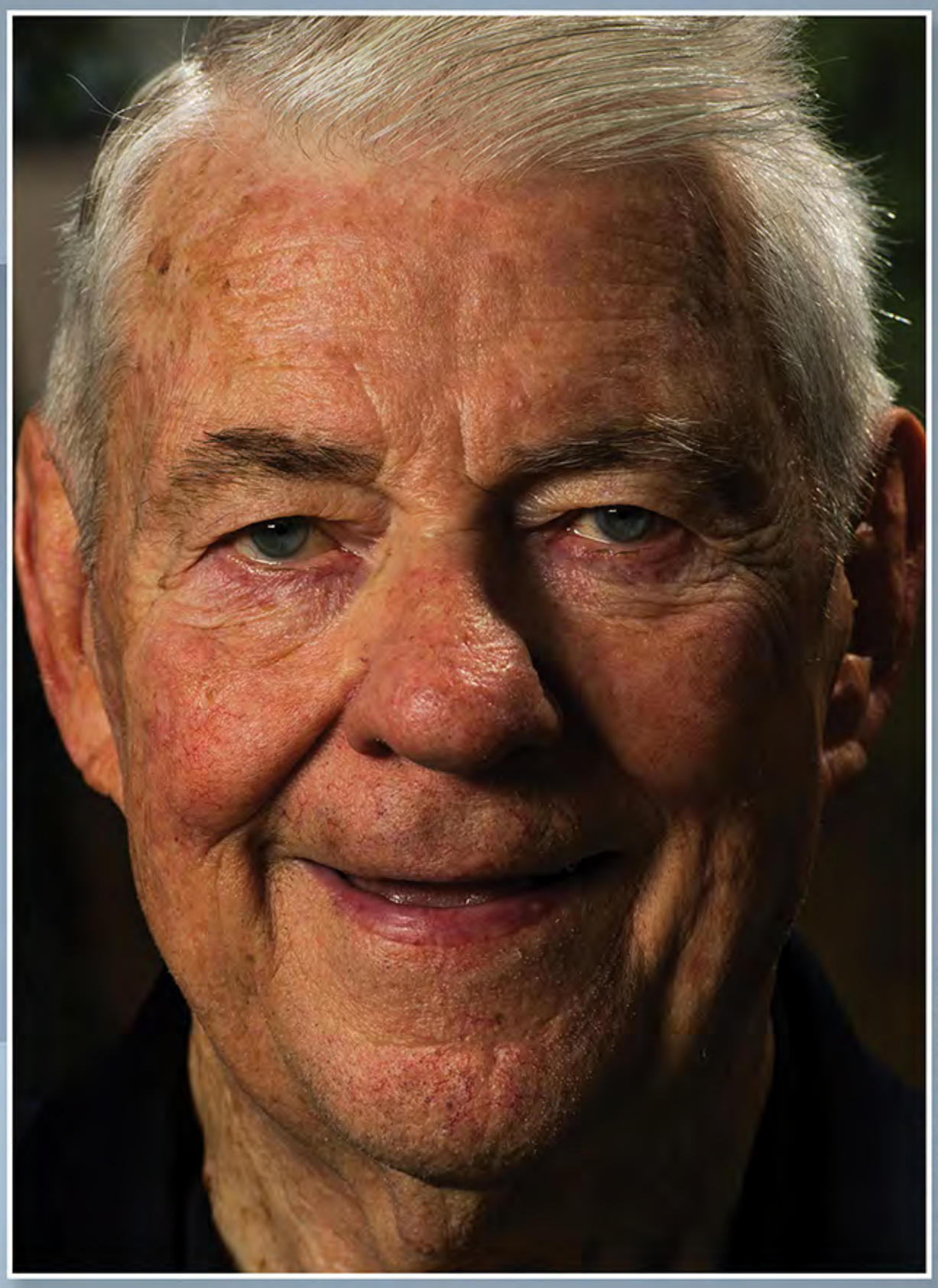

Photos by Staff Sgt. Jonathan Snyder

ROBERT GAYLOR

BIOGRAPHY

Chief Master Sergeant of The Air Force (Ret.) Robert Gaylor was inspired to join the military after seeing service members return from World War II to his hometown of Mulberry, Indiana. His emphasis on, and study of, strong leadership helped him become the fifth Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force (CMSAF). During his tenure as CMSAF from 1977 to 1979, he served as the personal adviser to the Chief of Staff of the Air Force, as well as other top Air Force leaders on issues regarding the welfare, readiness, morale and proper use and progress of the enlisted force. Gaylor joined the Air Force in September 1948 and was assigned to the security police career field. In 1971 he was assigned to Headquarters United States Air Forces in Europe (USAFE) at Ramstein Air Base, Germany, where he traveled to bases throughout the command teaching leadership skills, and started the USAFE Command Management and Leadership Center in 1972.

Gaylor currently travels around the world, speaking to Airmen on topics such as leadership, management, motivation, professionalism and Airmanship.

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Photos by Senior Master Sgt. Gary Rihn

HARRY GRIMM

BIOGRAPHY

Staff Sergeant (Sep.) Harry Grimm boarded a train in July 1943 for U.S. Army basic training and to eventually become an aerial gunner in the Army Air Corps. After months of training, he reported to the 351st Bomb Group and, within a week, was flying his first combat mission as a tail-gunner aboard a B-17. During the next nine months, Grimm flew a total of 35 missions, mainly targeting oil refineries and production facilities in Germany. He remembered "flying through flak so thick that you could hardly see the sun," in an area known as Flak Alley. He also remembers the German fighter that flew vertically up through the middle of his formation. Grimm shot the Luftwaffe aircraft in the belly as it passed, before another gunner scored hits on the cockpit. On his final mission, Grimm's aircraft developed engine trouble and was spewing oil; the crew barely made it back. Through all of it, Grimm said that he never thought of dying or retirement…only of doing his job on that mission. During his 27 months in the military, Grimm earned three Bronze Battle Stars and the Air Medal with five oak leaf clusters

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Photos by Technical Sgt. Eric Burks & Abner Guzman

CARY HATZINGER

BIOGRAPHY

Chief Master Sergeant (Ret.) Cary Hatzinger enlisted in the Air Force at age 23 and served at a variety of bases in Florida, Nevada, Utah, South Korea, Germany and California until he retired in 2009 as the 62nd Airlift Wing command chief at then-McChord Air Force Base, Wash. The best part of being a command chief, he said, was working with and taking care of Airmen. "I always remembered how much it meant to me when someone senior would come up to me and thank me for something," Hatzinger said. "So I made it my point, wherever I was, to thank Airmen for what they were doing…whether it was parking cars for the Air Force ball, deploying, or just doing their day-to-day mission." Heritage and service are things Hatzinger thinks epitomize the Air Force. "I think that in this day and age it's really easy to lose touch with our traditions and our heritage. I would encourage all leaders to bring Airmen up to respect and cherish that heritage. What we do is we serve. We serve the American public, we serve those we work with, and nothing is more noble than that."

Hatzinger currently serves as the 62nd Maintenance Group chief of plans, scheduling, documentation and analysis at McChord Field, Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Washington.

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Photos by Eric Gregory / LINCOLN JOURNAL STAR

BEN KUROKI

BIOGRAPHY

Technical Sergeant (Sep.) Ben Kuroki stood out just by serving in the U.S. Army Air Corps. Most Japanese-American personnel were kicked out of the Air Corps at the start of World War II, and those who enlisted later were often denied combat assignments. Kuroki persisted and was able to prove his loyalty to America. Shortly after the attack on Pearl Harbor, Kuroki volunteered to fight for his country and was initially placed on kitchen patrol duty. He eventually made it to England and was allowed to become an aerial gunner, joining an outfit called "The Flying Circus." There, he finally learned to shoot – in combat. Kuroki said he finally found peace and felt like he truly belonged when his fellow Airmen embraced him as part of their aircrew family. One of his crewmates dubbed Kuroki "The Most Honorable Son," which also became the nickname of their B-24. Kuroki was the only known Japanese-American to have participated in the Pacific Theater during the war. He logged 58 combined missions during World War II -- 30 on B-24s over Europe, including the legendary Ploesti raid, and 28 on B-29s over the Pacific. He earned a Distinguished Service Medal, three Distinguished Flying Crosses and an Air Medal with five oak leaf clusters.

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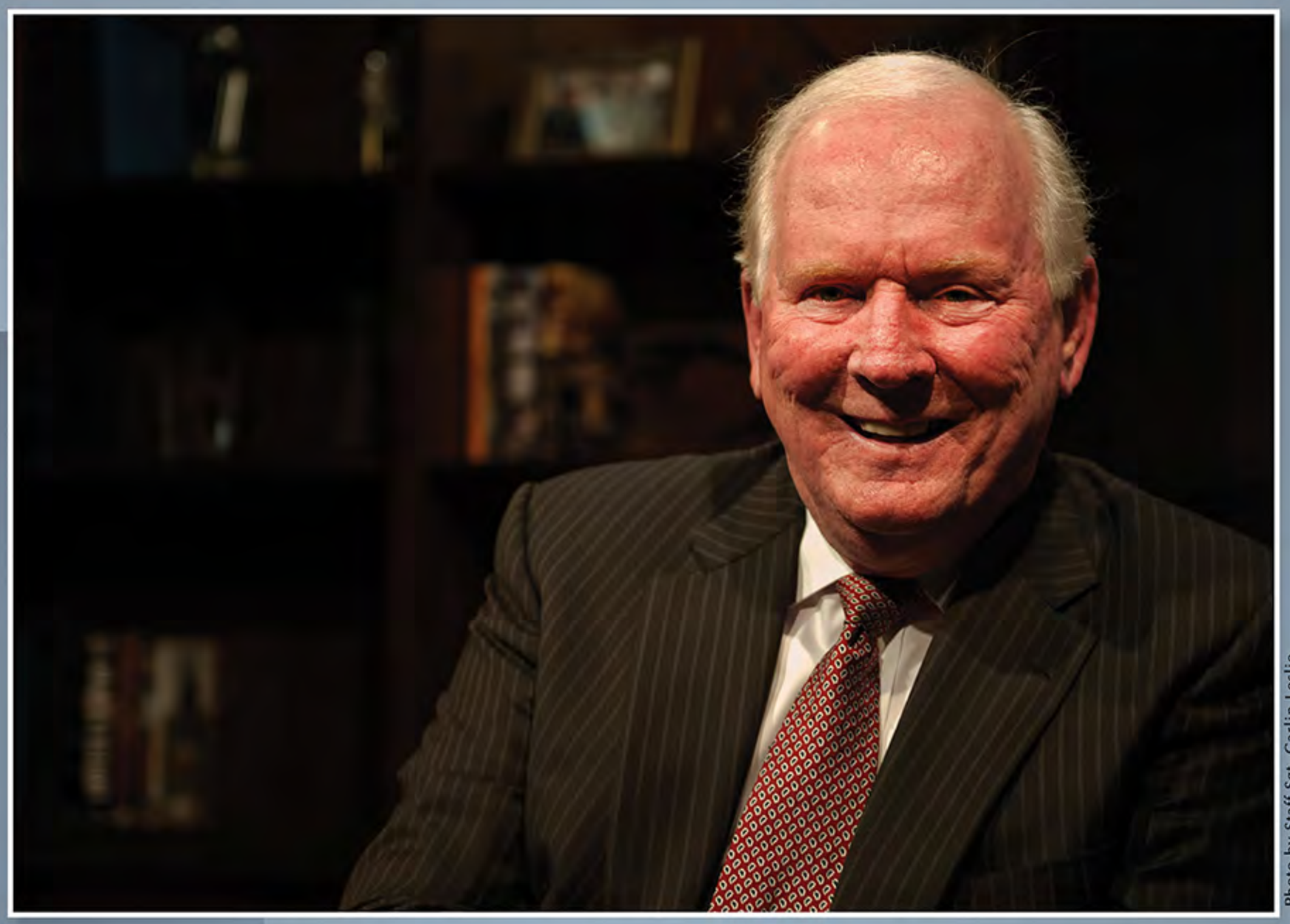

Photo by Staff Sgt. Carlin Leslie

MIKE LOUGHRAN

BIOGRAPHY

Colonel (Ret.) Mike Loughran is an Air Force veteran who served between 1968 and 1997. Loughran began his career as a B-52 co-pilot, and then was swiftly sent to train on the C-7 Caribou at Dyess Air Force Base, Texas. Loughran became a Caribou instructor pilot and trained the Vietnam Air Force to become instructor pilots in the airframe. After Vietnam, during his time as 416th Bomb Wing commander, the President directed that Strategic Air Command (SAC) stand down from the bomber alert posture that was a centerpiece of its nuclear deterrence mission. As part of a broader Air Force reorganization, SAC closed and Air Combat Command (ACC) took over the bomber forces. Dedicated professional Airmen successfully adapted to the fundamental mission and organizational changes. ACC brought new challenges by focusing on a broader conventional bomber operational mission set. His take on the Air Force for the future: "I think the Air Force is going to maintain a very technical orientation, continue to leverage the opportunity of available aircraft and will continue to succeed based on the dedication, knowledge and professionalism of our Airmen."

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Photo by Technical Sgt. Jason Robertson

PHILIP MORGAN

BIOGRAPHY

Buck Sergeant (Ret.) Philip B. Morgan is a Gadson, Ala., native who served his country in the United States Air Force as a security police Airman with the 55th Security Police Squadron at Offutt Air Force Base, Neb. During his enlistment he supported Air Force One missions for Presidents Ronald Reagan and George H. W. Bush. During Operation DESERT STORM, he was deployed to Saudi Arabia. He described the operations tempo during the war as, "I was so busy maintaining security that I didn't have time to worry about the dangers." During one Operation DESERT STORM mission, Morgan's Air Force career was ended after suffering an injury.

For the past 18 years, Morgan has been employed by the U.S. Postal Service. He is a World War II re-enactor with the Commemorative Air Force Dixie Wing in Peachtree, Georgia.

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Photo by Skyler Nugent

PAT NUGENT

BIOGRAPHY

Senior Master Sergeant (Ret.) Pat Nugent joined the Air Force wanting to become a jet engine mechanic, but he quickly found out that Air Force needs come first and he was sent to school to become a parachute rigger. With a passion for photography, Nugent was able to cross-train to a new career field, enjoying assignments in Nebraska and Colorado before getting assigned to the Air Force's "Thunderbirds." That assignment led to a competitive selection as a photojournalist and resulted in advanced training at Syracuse University. While stationed in Germany, Nugent covered the Rhein-Main Air Base bombing and the return of hostages Father Martin Jenco and David Jacobson, as well as those kidnapped from the Italian cruise ship "Achille Lauro." Nugent also covered Operations DESERT SHIELD, DESERT STORM, PROVIDE HOPE and the Panama invasion. He supervised the "Prototype" Electronic Imaging Center during the early and groundbreaking days that introduced digital photography to the Department of Defense.

Nugent retired in 1992 after 23 years of service and continues to participate in military photography workshops and the Military Photographer of the Year program.

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Photo by Staff Sgt. Nadine Y. Barclay

GAILLARD PECK

BIOGRAPHY

Colonel (Ret.) Gaillard Peck, Jr. changed history when he co-founded the MiG operation at Tonopah, Nev., paving the way for more than 6,000 Airmen, Sailors and Marines to fight the MiG-17, MiG-21 and MiG-23 in combat operations overseas. He started his aviation career at age 16, flying in the backseat of a T-38 with his father, an Army Air Corps officer who later transitioned to the newly created U.S. Air Force. Peck received his commission from the Air Force Academy in 1962. During his time as a fighter pilot in the 8th Tactical Fighter Wing at Ubon Royal Thai Air Force Base, Thailand, in the 433rd Tactical Fighter Squadron, he flew 163 combat missions in Vietnam and Laos. Peck served as the vice commander of the 18th Wing at Kadena AB, Japan, and later commanded the 26th Tactical Reconnaissance Wing at Zweibrucken AB, Germany. Peck's most cherished lesson from his Air Force career is that it provided sound values and understanding of MacArthur's famous speech on duty, honor and country.

Peck currently serves as the subject matter expert for the Air Force Weapons School at Nellis AFB, Nevada.

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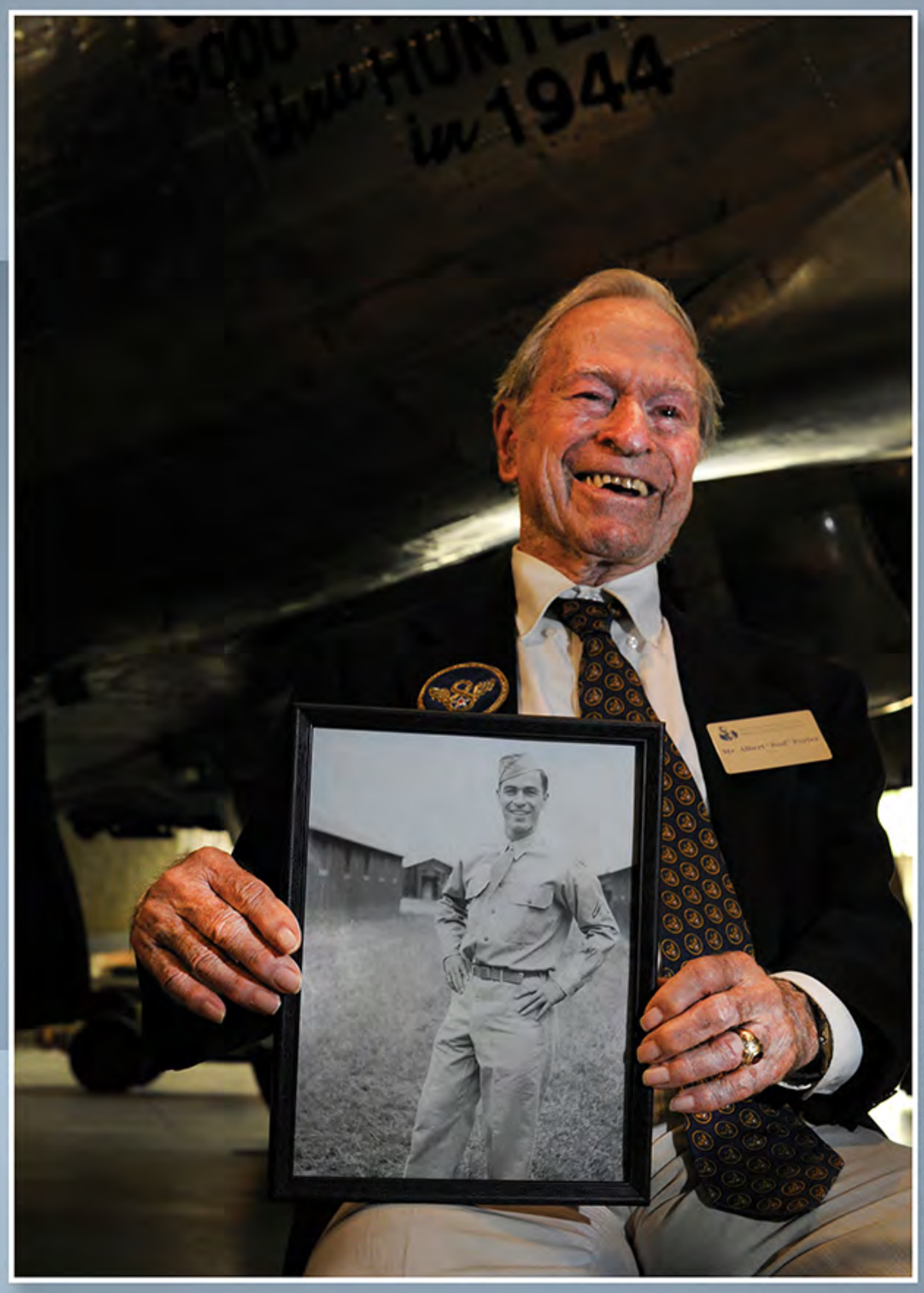

Photo by Senior Airman Sandra Welch

ALBERT PORTER

BIOGRAPHY

Sergeant (Sep.) Albert Porter is a World War II Army Air Corps veteran who served on B-17 Flying Fortress bombers between 1942 and 1945. He initially trained as a radio operator, but because of his short stature, he was redesignated as a ball turret gunner. Porter was stationed in England as a member of the "Mighty Eighth" Air Force where his unit flew missions throughout the European theater of operations. Porter narrowly escaped death on his first mission when his B-17 was riddled with flak; however, he went on to complete 10 more missions. Porter earned an Achievement Medal, a European-African-Middle Eastern Campaign Medal, a World War II Victory Medal, a Unit Citation and a Good Conduct Medal. Of his experience flying missions over Europe, he said, "You have no idea the awesome power of thousands of bombers at the same time…but I was there and part of the greatest Air Force ever created. There will never be an Air Force like it."

Porter currently resides in Savannah, Georgia.