AIR FORCE PUBLIC AFFAIRS AGENCY PRESENTS

VETERANS IN BLUE

VOLUME V

Photo by Airman First Class Scott Jackson

BEN BLOKER

BIOGRAPHY

Master Sergeant (Ret.) Ben Bloker joined the Air Force in August, 1990 as a military photographer. When asked why he joined he would exclaim, "because I like planes!" During his 24-year career as photographer, Bloker specialized in photojournalism and aerial photography. After logging more than 121 missions in 16 different aircraft, as well as being an integral part in documenting the bed down of the first operational F-22 squadron, some might say Bloker got his wish of being around planes. Throughout his career, he covered combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, and had the unique opportunity to work as a Stars and Stripes newspaper photographer in Kaiserslautern, Germany. Bloker spent the last few years of his military career as the Chief Enlisted Manager and Superintendent of the 2nd Combat Camera Squadron, Hill Air Force Base, Utah. He has been married to his wife Melody for 18 years and they have five children: Ian, Katherine, Grace, Hope and Jessica. Newly retired, Bloker wishes to spend his life as a hospitality host with the company Cadence International. As a hospitality host, he would open his home to military members to come, study, praise God and do a wide range of activities and hobbies together.

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Photo by Senior Airman Daniel Hughes

JACK BOND

BIOGRAPHY

Colonel (Ret.) Jack Bond began his Air Force career in 1951, after graduating from Texas A&M where he earned his commission through their ROTC Program. As a reconnaissance pilot during the Vietnam War, Bond flew 132 combat missions. During one of these missions he was shot down and eventually recovered by U.S. forces. After 23 years of service, Bond retired. Jack was not the only *Bond* to answer his nation's call. His older brother, Maj. Gen. Charles R. Bond Jr., preceded him in service and fought in World War II nearly 10 years earlier with the storied Flying Tigers of the 1st American Volunteer Group. The group was part of forces recruited under the authority of the president of the United States to help defend China against the Japanese, and first saw combat 12 days after Pearl Harbor. The Bond brothers developed a love for the group's heritage, attending Flying Tiger reunion events. Jack has upheld the Flying Tigers banner since his brother's passing in 2009. This year, Bond is chairman of the AVG (American Volunteer Group) Flying Tiger's 73rd Reunion occurring in Dallas. Through the Flying Tigers, his brother's memory and tales of his own experiences, he continues to spread the word about the U.S. Air Force's legacy of valor.

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Photo by Airman 1st Class Cliffton Dolezal

HARRY CANHAM

BIOGRAPHY

Colonel (Ret.) Harry Canham began his military career as a glider pilot in 1942 as part of the U.S. Army Air Corps during World War II. Highly successful after only a few missions, he was assigned a new aircraft -- the Martin B-26 Marauder, stationed in North Africa. After World War II, Canham also piloted an AC-130 Gunship. During the Vietnam War he was presented with his first Distinguished Flying Cross. While on a night reconnaissance mission, Jan. 16, 1972, he destroyed 12 hostile supply vehicles and ignited numerous secondary fires and explosions. Facing 22 rounds of hostile anti-aircraft fire, he put aside his personal safety and succeeded in destroying large caches of supplies and munitions destined for use against friendly forces.

Over the course of 32 years, Canham piloted more than 40 aircraft, recorded more than 22,000 flight hours and was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross five times.

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Photo by Senior Airman Tiffany DeNault

ROY COLE

BIOGRAPHY

Master Sergeant (Ret.) Roy Cole enlisted in the Air Force at the age of 18 out of Meridian, Mississippi, in October 1979. After graduating basic training he moved to Shaw Air Force Base, S.C., where he began in the supply career field, driving a fuel truck. In 1983, Cole changed career fields to F-16 Fuel Systems mechanic. In 1989, he received orders to Hill Air Force Base, Utah, for the second time in his career where he still lives to this day. Cole deployed five times while stationed at Hill -- four times to Saudi Arabia and once to Kuwait. Cole retired as a master sergeant in August 2000 after serving 21 years in the Air Force.

From 2000 to 2002, he worked as an A-10 Warthog mechanic until he was hired as a training manager and military testing proctor where he still works today.

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Photo by MIcah Garborino

CHARLES DEBELLEVUE

BIOGRAPHY

Colonel (Ret.) Charles B. DeBellevue had a passion for flight at an early age that drove him to join Air Force ROTC at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette. He joined at an unsettled time in American history -- the Vietnam War. Commissioned in 1968, the New Orleans native was assigned to the infamous "Triple Nickel" 555th Tactical Fighter Squadron. He was stationed at Udorn Royal Thai Air Force Base, Thailand as an F-4 Phantom weapons system officer. DeBellevue accumulated 550 combat hours, tallied six MiG kills during the war and was one of only five Vietnam fighter "Aces." During air engagements, "Nothing outside the cockpit was important," he said. DeBellevue eventually became a command pilot, collecting more than 3,000 flying hours. Among many awards, he earned the Air Force Cross, three Silver Stars, three Legions of Merit, and six Distinguished Flying Crosses. He said the Air Force cultivated great integrity, discipline, leadership, teamwork and training -- traits he will carry with him for the rest of his life. DeBellevue lives in Edmond, Okla. with his wife. Though he has retired from the Air Force, the service is still part of his life. He volunteers within the Air Force community, speaking with active duty and ROTC units about his experiences in the Air Force.

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Photo by Senior Airman Kristin High

STEVE DEPYSSLER

BIOGRAPHY

Colonel (Ret.) Steve dePyssler is a 38-year Army Air Corps and Air Force veteran. Born in 1919, he was drafted into the Army Air Corps in 1940 as World War II began. While on active duty, he served as every enlisted, warrant officer and officer grade up to O-6. He is the only known American to serve in four wars; World War II, Korea, French-Indo-China and Vietnam. In addition, he has deployed to Normandy, Holland, Germany, Japan, Laos, Cambodia, Hawaii, the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico and Guam, holding a variety of jobs to include three years working for the CIA during the Cuban Missile Crisis and Bay of Pigs Invasion. He retired at the age of 60 at Barksdale Air Force Base, Louisiana, and still remains involved with the retiree associate on base. DePyssler initiated the action for the Northwest Louisiana War Veterans Home, which construction began in April in Bossier City. The 90,000-square-foot, $24 million facility will have 156 beds and 165 jobs with an annual estimated payroll of $3.6 million. He also oversees the publication of two newspapers, the Military Retiree newspaper and a monthly for the Ark-La-Tex Chapter of the Military Officers Association of America hailing more than 20,000 readers a month.

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Photo by Tech Sgt. Charles Larkin

SUSAN DESJARDINS

BIOGRAPHY

Major General (Ret.) Susan Y. Desjardins served as a command pilot, accumulating more than 3,800 flying hours in the KC-10, C-17, C-5, KC-135R, KC-135A and T-37 aircraft. In 1980, she commissioned as part of the first female cadet class from the U.S. Air Force Academy. She was also the first female commander of the 437th Airlift Wing, Charleston Air Force Base, S.C. She then became the first female commandant of cadets at the U.S. Air Force Academy, Colorado Springs, Colo. She held staff positions at the major command, Joint Staff and Headquarters U.S. Air Force levels, including deputy military assistant to the Secretary of the Air Force. Desjardins attributes her success in the Air Force to her father, Albert E. Desjardins. She said, "He was a Korean War veteran and always challenged my thoughts on the traditional roles of men and women." Throughout her career, Desjardins counseled Airmen on equality and mentored cadets to never settle for less because of gender. Today, she serves her community as a board member of the American Independence Museum in Exeter, N.H. She is also a National Defense Committee Chair of the Daughters of the American Revolution.

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Photo by Airman 1st Class Mozer Da Cunha

GEORGE FINCK

BIOGRAPHY

Lieutenant Colonel (Ret.) George Finck joined the Air Force in 1956, ultimately becoming a command pilot with more than 11,000 flying hours in the C-11B, C-54, C-131, C-7A, T-29 and C-135. Additionally, he has logged more than 1,150 hours in combat. During his career, Finck was awarded the Air Force Cross for extraordinary heroism in the face of an armed enemy during his time spent in Cam Ranh Bay, Vietnam. "I was awarded the Air Force cross for making the first night combat air drop ever in the C-7A Caribou," said Finck. Also, he was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross and the Air Medal with five oak leaf clusters. Finck retired from the Air Force in 1978, but plays a very active role with the Veteran's Affairs office on Barksdale Air Force Base, Louisiana. Following his retirement, he helped establish and taught Air Force ROTC cadets at Haughton High School from 1980 to 1996. His unit was the largest in the nation spanning a six-year period. His unit established records for the number of ROTC scholarships and military academy appointments awarded to his cadets. Finck is a life member of the American Legion, Veteran of Foreign Wars, Disabled American Veterans and the Legion of Valor.

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Photo by Senior Airman Kaylee Clark

DAVID FITTON

BIOGRAPHY

Colonel (Ret.) David Fitton, Jr. remembers the thrill of flying from 30 years of service like it was yesterday. A veteran of three wars, Fitton embodies the spirit and character of fighter pilot history. Fitton attended the U.S Military Academy at West Point during World War II. He earned his Army Air Corp wings and his second lieutenant bars June 6, 1944; D-Day. After pilot training, he was deployed to the Pacific theater, arriving on Iwo Jima, August, 1945 where he was assigned to the 20th Air Force, 414th Fighter Group, 437th Squadron. During his assignment, he participated in one of the longest fighter missions of the war, flying from Iwo Jima to Japan and back -- a flight lasting eight hours and five minutes. After the war, Fitton transferred to Clark Field, Philippines where the 414th Fighter Group merged with the 18th Fighter Group and where he started flying the P-51. During the Korean War, Fitton flew the F-86A with the Fourth Fighter Group in Teagu, Korea. In Vietnam, he served as the director of personnel. Fitton's distinguished accomplishments include the Air Medal with two oak leaf clusters and two Legions of Merit.

AIM HIGH ... FLY, FIGHT, WIN

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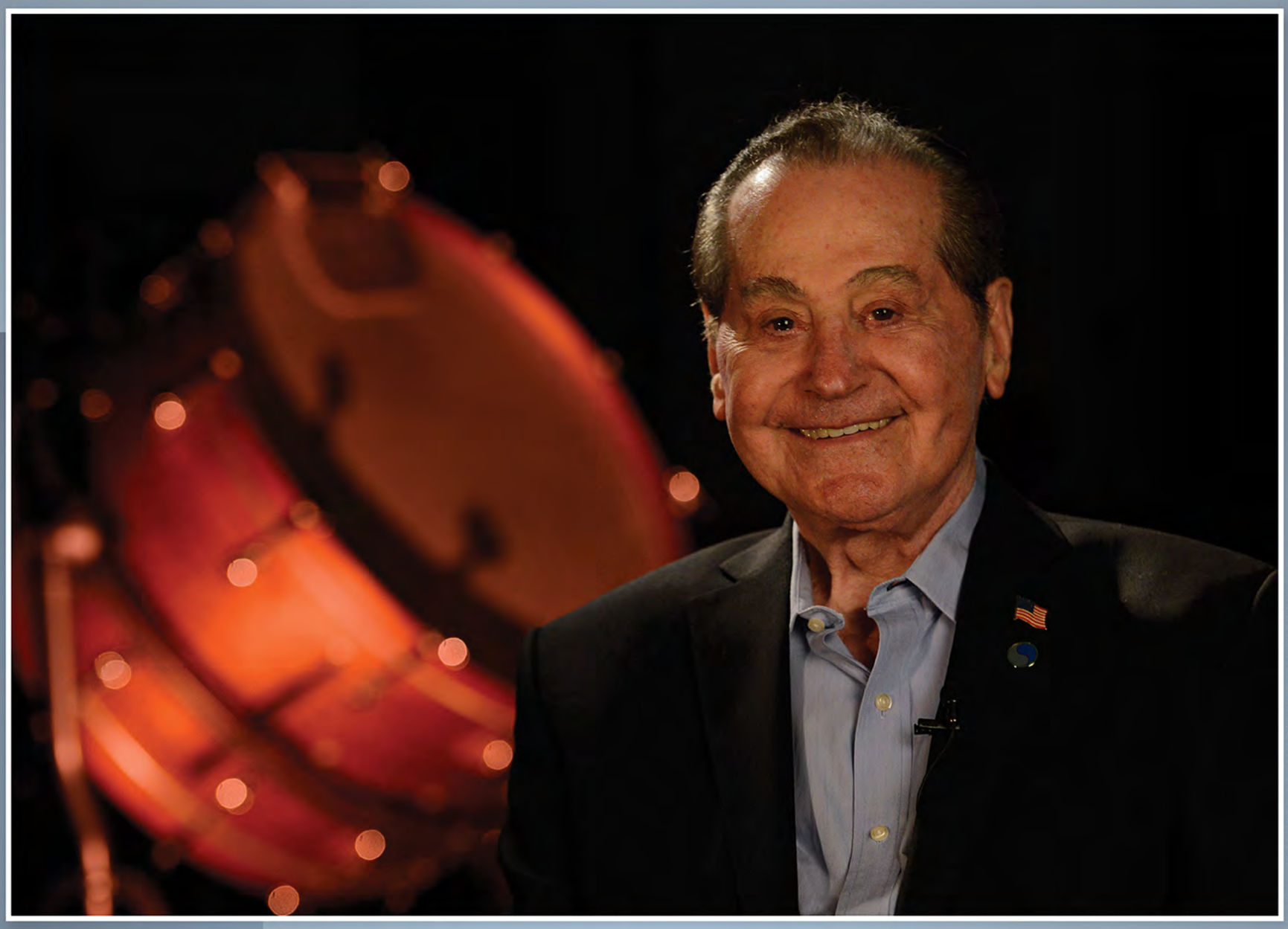

Photo by Airman 1st Class Krystal Ardrey

ARNALD GABRIEL

BIOGRAPHY

Colonel (Ret.) Arnald Gabriel started his 36-year military career when he joined the Army June 28, 1943. After a brief time in the Army Air Corps as an aviation cadet, he transferred back into the Army to prepare for the upcoming raid on Omaha Beach in Normandy, France. Gabriel was assigned to the 29th Infantry Division as a machine gunner in April, 1944. On June 6, 1944, he landed on Omaha Beach with the 116th Regiment. Gabriel was awarded two Bronze Star medals, the Combat Infantry Badge and the French Croix de Guerre. After World War II, he separated from the Army and enrolled in Ithaca College, New York, where he reconnected with his lifelong love of music. In 1951, Gabriel rejoined the military as a warrant officer in the Air Force and became a conductor for the Air Force Band. His leadership was instrumental in developing the Air Force Band into what it is today. His dedication and service has earned him numerous awards including induction into the Bands of America Hall of Fame and being named the first Conductor Emeritus, or conductor for life, with the United States Air Force Band. Today, Gabriel is often the guest conductor for several organizations including the Army National Guard Band and the Virginia Grand Military Band. He also spends time collaborating and mentoring musicians.

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Photo by Senior Airman Camilla Elizeu

TAP GAOTEOTE

BIOGRAPHY

Technical Sergeant (Sep.) Tap Gaoteote entered the U.S. Air Force through the Delayed Entry Program in September 1997, however he did not leave for basic training until January 1998 when an opening for his job was available. During his 16 years in the U.S. Air Force, he served as an aircraft armament systems. Gaoteote was responsible for loading, unloading and positioning munitions on aircraft. He recalls his five deployments in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom as the highlights of his career as well as some of the scariest moments of his life. During a deployment to Southwest Asia, a member of Gaoteote's team was taking pictures of a classified area. When they arrived at a checkpoint, the Iraqi military put the barrel of their weapons in his face in an attempt to scare them all because he was the biggest guy in the group. In September 2013, Gaoteote decided to transition into the Air National Guard. With the information Gaoteote was given during his pre-separation class, he came up with the idea to start his own business; a food truck that serves Airmen traditional Samoan food at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Arizona. To help his business grow, Gaoteote uses management and prioritizing skills as well as the 'creating a process' skills he learned while in the Air Force.