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Photo by Senior Airman Madelyn Brown

BILL GETZ

BIOGRAPHY

Lieutenant Colonel (Ret.) Bill Getz was a senior in high school when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor on December 7th, 1941. From that day forward, Getz knew his fate was forever changed. By age 19 he was commissioned as a second lieutenant. He piloted the B-24 during World War II while assigned to the 491st Bomb Group in England. The early morning of June 6, 1944, Getz and his crew began preparations for a mission. Getz took to the skies toward a German munitions depot in Coutances, France. Before reaching the target, the austere weather conditions made it impossible to drop their bombs accurately and they returned to base. Later that day, 25 aircraft took off for a second attempt. Only nine of those aircraft made it through the vision-crippling clouds. Getz led a lower element formation of three aircraft. A serendipitous break in the weather allowed for the formation to drop their bombs successfully. Getz flew 31 B-24 missions in 62 days during his time at the 491st Bomb Group. In his 20 years of military service, he flew 21 different types of aircraft before retiring as a lieutenant colonel. Today, Getz devotes his time to educating high school students about military history and writing novels. He has published four novels and is currently writing his fifth.

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Photo by Airman 1st Class David Cooper

VENESSA HAGAN

BIOGRAPHY

Colonel (Ret.) Venessa Hagan commissioned into the Air Force Nurse Corps, starting her career in the neonatal intensive care unit at Wilford Hall Ambulatory Surgical Center on Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio, Texas. Her career took her all the way to becoming interim Air Force Chief Nurse at the San Antonio Military Medical Center, where she oversaw professional and military development, improved retention and advanced specialty training. Hagan comes from a military family where her husband, father and four siblings have all served and is thankful for being raised in the military culture. In 1987, while stationed at Clark Air Base, Philippines, Hagan was named the Juanita Redmond Air Force Nurse of the Year in honor of her accomplishments throughout her career. Hagan is grateful for being able to serve in the Air Force where she contributed to the safety and freedom that she and her children share with the country. If she could recommend one thing to all the current and future Airmen, it would be to find a mentor they respect and follow in their footsteps so they may return the favor and, one day, become a mentor for a new Airman.

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Photo by Senior Airman Daniel Hughes

JOHN HAYES

BIOGRAPHY

Captain (Sep.) John Hayes embodies the sentiment of serving after a career of service. Hayes began his six years of active-duty service at Webb Air Force Base, Texas, after graduating in 1967 from Southern Methodist University as an Air Force ROTC cadet. Hayes' next assignment took him to Charleston Air Force Base, South Carolina, where he flew the C-141 Starlifter. While stationed at Charleston, he deployed to Vietnam for 10 months and flew 166 combat missions. Hayes was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for extraordinary aerial achievement as an EC-47 pilot at Da Nang Airfield, Vietnam, March 1, 1972. On that date, Hayes flew an extremely hazardous mission through adverse weather conditions and through the constant threat of hostile ground fire and attack. In spite of the dangers, he accomplished this highly intricate mission in support of friendly ground forces. Hayes separated from the Air Force and began the next chapter in his life as a commercial airline pilot for Braniff Airlines and later U.S. Airways. His entire flying career spanned from 1972 to 2005, with more than 24,000 flying hours upon his retirement. Always an Airman, though now out of uniform, Hayes continues to be part of veterans' organizations where he serves in various leadership roles.

AIM HIGH ... FLY, FIGHT, WIN

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Photo by Airman 1st Class Alexis Millican

EARL HENDRIX

BIOGRAPHY

Chief Master Sergeant (Ret.) Earl Hendrix began his Air Force career on his 18th birthday in 1957. He served as a bomb loader on multiple aircraft. While serving in Vietnam, a rocket pummeled his bunker, killing him and 17 others. When he was transported, he was tossed onto a concrete slab and his heart miraculously restarted. A medical examiner at the morgue found his pulse and sought immediate medical attention. From a beatless heart to a Purple Heart, Hendrix continued his 30-year career working on the flightline. In 1981, Hendrix served as the senior enlisted advisor at Moody Air Force Base, Georgia. He eventually retired there with his wife Kem.

Today, nearly 30 years after retiring, Hendrix is still a pillar of support in the Moody military and civilian communities attending events and speaking to Airmen. He claims he never really learned how to retire and is still a member of the United States Air Force, just in retired status. He said, "The oath of enlistment has no expiration date, which in my mind makes this a lifetime commitment that I will continue to fulfill every chance I get."

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Photo by Senior Airman Hailey Haux

PETER KARPAWITZ-GODT

BIOGRAPHY

Senior Master Sergeant (Ret.) Peter Karpawitz-Godt was raised the son of a police officer in the midst of WWII in Germany. After WWII, Karpawitz-Godt moved to America so he could enroll in college. In March of 1956, at the age 27, he became an Airman in the U.S. Air Force. After training to be a supply Airman, he was stationed with the 48th Fighter Bomber Wing in France. Throughout his Air Force career, Karpawitz-Godt and his wife moved around the world; eventually ending back in his home country. While serving in Germany, he found out it was his turn to go to war. Karpawitz-Godt was sent to support the Vietnam War where he was responsible for ensuring all aircraft in the Southeast Asia theater were equipped with all necessary supplies. After serving in Vietnam, Karpawitz-Godt was transferred back to Ramstein in 1974 where he retired 10 years later on the flightline. Even after his retirement, he continues to work for the Air Force as a clothing issue management clerk. Being in and around the military for more than 50 years, earning two Bronze Stars, a U.S. citizenship and much more, the passionate Vietnam veteran enjoys mentoring today's Airmen.

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Photo by Staff Sergeant Carlin Leslie

JAY KARPIN

BIOGRAPHY

Lieutenant (Sep.) Jay Karpin is an Army Air Corps veteran who served between 1944 and 1945. Karpin is a distinguished bombardier who flew more than 35 bombing missions during World War II. He began his career in the B-24 Liberator. After flying 12 missions, he was reassigned by General Jimmy Doolittle to the B-17 Flying Fortress, and flew 23 more missions. At the age of 19, Karpin was on one of the first crews flying over Omaha Beach on June 6 during the D-Day invasion, witnessing the battle on the ground, ultimately losing two aircraft from their formation. Karpin was awarded the Air Medal with 4 oak leaf clusters, 4 battle stars, a Presidential Group Citation from Franklin D. Roosevelt, the European-African-Middle Eastern Campaign Medal, a personal citation from General Jimmy Doolittle, and the Distinguished Flying Cross. Karpin would go on to train new bombardiers on the B-29 and then later provided key consultation on multiple aircraft. He helped develop groundbreaking air-to-air refueling capabilities on the F-84 Thunderjet and the F-105 Thunderchief, and was instrumental in the improved flying range of fighter aircraft. Today, Karpin runs an air quality consulting business for military and civilian aircraft.

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Photo by Staff Sergeant Julianne Showalter

SUZANNE LAFOREST

BIOGRAPHY

Major (Ret.) Suzanne LaForest was born March 18, 1949, in Manchester, New Hampshire, the second oldest of five siblings. After receiving a degree in nursing from the University of New Hampshire, she moved to Nashua to work as a critical care nurse at St. Joseph's Hospital. The recruiter at Pease Air National Guard Base contacted her and three weeks later she raised her right hand and was commissioned in the Air Force. By August 1989 she was at the 60th Medical Group, Travis Air Force Base, California, as the assistant nurse manager. In January 1991 LaForest deployed to Nocton Hall, England, in support of Operation Desert Storm. She led a team of 11 nurses caring for burn victims out of a converted World War II barracks. Through her faith and focus on her patients, LaForest made it home stronger than when she left. One of her favorite assignments was at the Air Force Academy in Colorado. LaForest ensured proper care to new cadets, and oversaw medical safety of the football team during games. She ended her career at Hill Air Force Base, Utah, with the 75th Medical Group. Since retiring in 2009, she remains a member of Team Hill through her volunteer work at the "clinics" pharmacy.

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Photo by Senior Airman Daniel Hughes

JEREMY LOCK

BIOGRAPHY

Master Sergeant (Ret.) Jeremy T. Lock served as an Air Force photojournalist for more than 20 years, traveling to more than 50 countries on six continents and providing the Air Force with mission critical combat imagery. Lock started his career as a film processor. He attended the Department of Defense Worldwide Military Photographers Workshop in 1999, then was later selected to attend the Military Photojournalist Training program held at Syracuse University. After graduation, Lock was assigned to the 1st Combat Camera Squadron at Charleston Air Force Base, South Carolina, where his passion for photography began to take shape. As a combat photographer, Lock learned how to be an asset while collecting military imagery on the battlefield, ultimately receiving a Bronze Star Medal for his actions. During his career, Lock pushed the boundaries of how the military told visual stories. He was recognized as the Military Photographer of the Year seven times, a record that stands to this day. His photos were featured in numerous publications, including National Geographic and the New York Times. Since retiring, Lock works as a freelance photographer in Dallas. He continues to give back to the photography community, heading the Department of Defense Photographers Workshop and Visual Information Awards Program, the very same events that helped him realize his passion more than two decades ago, bringing his career full circle.

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Photo by Technical Sergeant Aaron D. Allmon

LEO MAKELKY

BIOGRAPHY

Staff Sergeant (Sep.) Leo Makelky was working for Douglas Aircraft in California when he heard about the attacks on Pearl Harbor and instantly knew what he had to do. With the hope it would finally be his chance to get up in an airplane, the World War II veteran enlisted in 1943, one of the most difficult times for aircrews in the war. Although the missions were almost put to a stop because so many had been lost, the threat did not deter Makelky from following his dream to fly. After requesting to be an aerial gunner, Makelky was put on a fast track, landing a seat at the bottom ball turret of the B-17 Flying Fortress. Despite the constant threats and high number of lost missions, Makelky and his crew represented the “Mighty Eighth” during the crucial years of the war. "Every time we came back, we just told ourselves one last time," said Makelky. "We just kept saying that until we were finally finished." While each aircrew was required to do a total of 25 missions, usually not making it beyond 11, Makelky's crew continued on missions until finally, after their 35th successful mission, they were sent back to safety in the United States. He was honorably discharged shortly after in 1945. He currently resides in Minot, North Dakota.

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Photo by Staff Sergeant Nathan Maysonet

DAVE MERCIER

BIOGRAPHY

Staff Sergeant (Sep.) Dave Mercier knew at a young age that he wanted to be in law enforcement. "My father served for four years in the Air Force and I was born while he was still on active duty," said Mercier. "He was extremely proud of his service and I always remembered seeing his retirement order hanging on the wall." After graduating from high school in 1993, Mercier enlisted in the Air Force. Following basic training, Mercier went on to attend the security police training program where he was selected to become a military working dog handler. He was sent to Osan Air Base, Korea, and later to Laughlin Air Force Base, Texas. For the next five years he would develop his personal life and leadership skills. "I met my wife in Del Rio, Texas, and we had our first child here," said Mercier. "When my daughter was born, I had to really think about re-enlisting and what I wanted to do." Ultimately, Mercier decided it would be best after seven years of service to his country to move on and serve his local community. Mercier began working for the Del Rio Police Department as a patrol officer where he later became a detective. Mercier now serves as a supervisory probation officer for the United States Probation Office. "The lessons I learned as a military member have truly helped shape my career into what it is now," said Mercier. "The Air Force gave me the ability to promote quickly in my civilian job and better serve my community."

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Photo by Airman 1st Class Andrea C. Posey

DEXTER MITCHELL

BIOGRAPHY

Chief Master Sergeant (Ret.) Dexter Mitchell was introduced to the Air Force on a $50 bet to pass the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery test. After winning the bet, he told a recruiter he would take any job that would guarantee him an overseas assignment. Mitchell held many positions in the Air Force, including aircraft maintainer, first sergeant, senior noncommissioned officer academy instructor, maintenance chief and command chief. Mitchell said his experience as a first sergeant helped him most while he was active duty. During his career, his favorite assignment was in the United Kingdom because of the culture and the opportunity to experience Scotland, one of his favorite places in the world. Mitchell retired in 2012 after 30 years of service. After retiring, he traveled across the United States for a year with his wife, Kathryn. Mitchell currently works at the Airman and Family Readiness Center as a community readiness specialist in Hurlburt Field, Florida. Mitchell said although the Air Force changed him in a million ways, the biggest impact from his time in service was learning to appreciate how much people matter. He believes taking care of people is an essential part of being an Airman and feels the most satisfied when people thank him for helping them.