
The Round Tablette

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Tuesday, 22 April 2025

38:12 Volume 38 Number 12

Published by WWII History Round Table

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www.mn-ww2roundtable.org

Welcome to a special presentation by the Dr. Harold C. Deutsch World War II History Round Table in conjunction with Minnesota History Center *An Evening with Major John H. "LUCKY" Luckadoo* of the 100th Bomb Group. John will share stories of flying combat missions over the deadly skies of Hitler's Fortress Europa. He is joined by fellow 8th Air Force veterans.



The airplane complicated military planning throughout the inter-war years. Airpower theorists believed that military aviation would dramatically change warfare – strategic

bombing would make armies and navies obsolete and demanded heavy bombers at the expense of conventional forces.

During the 1920s US air power prophets, were influenced by an Italian officer, Giulio Douhet. He argued that air power would prevent the butchery of the Great War's Western Front; the airplane would decide future conflicts. Army and Navy aviation each had their own advocates, most notably Brigadier General William "Billy" Mitchell, and Admirals William Fullam, Bradley Fiske, and William Sims. Each service had a dedicated force of flying officers who believed in the need to develop air power for the nation's defense even to the exclusion of other weapon systems.

Army and Navy Joint Board of Aeronautics recognized the need for military aviation, particularly the tactical importance of air support for land and sea operations but dismissed the notion that air power might win wars. Air advocates scored some successes, though not an independent air force or the unification of all military aviation. The Army upgraded its 'Air Service' to an 'Air Corps' and added an Assistant Secretary of War (Air). The Navy did likewise and ordered that only naval aviators could command carriers, and other aviation-oriented posts.

Great Britain's Royal Air Force (RAF) and the US Army Air Forces (USAAF) both developed air doctrines on how to conduct strategic bombing. Attacking population centers (RAF) and industrial targets (USAAF) would lead to a quick victory and avoid the attrition of trench warfare. In addition, smaller enemy fighter aircraft could not interfere with properly designed bomber in formation.

Obviously, any diversion of resources to other services would seriously impair the bombers effectiveness.

When the Second World War in Europe began, the young men of the 1920s who dreamed of flying, high school and college kids from farm fields and towns across the nation flocked to the recruiting stations wanting to fly. Even women who wanted to fly eventually found their way to the Women's Airforce Service Pilots (WASPs). Too often they found death and danger as American servicemen confronted a wartime environment unlike any other.

As bombing operations progressed, differences in practice separated the two allies. The British soon realized that German fighters put up a far stronger defense in daytime than expected. Furthermore, bombing accuracy proved pathetically poor. The RAF came to believe that "area bombing" of population centers demoralized the German civilians and inspired internal dissent. The USAAF maintained its position of daylight precision bombing (due to the Norden bombsight) and its strategic focus on Germany's industrial capacities, such as ball bearing factories. American air commanders believed they could destroy Germany's ability to wage war.

In January 1942, Brig. Gen. Ira C. Eaker took command of the VIII Bomber Command (later, the 8th Air Force). He was expected to prove the theory and effectiveness of a daylight precision bombing campaign using the Norden bomb sight despite the experiences of the Royal Air Force. The belief that strategic bombing could destroy Germany's ability to wage war turned out to be a chimera. The German government developed their air defense systems with fighters, radar systems, and anti-aircraft guns and demonstrated both the German government's ability to protect its population and that bomber formations were terribly vulnerable to fighter attack. Moreover, bombing of craft-oriented (hand-made) German factories forced the dispersal of plants, often underground, and the shift to more mass production, though German airmen, sailors, and tankers complained of the poorer finish and quality. As the Allies destroyed Germany's industry, war production increased.

At the Casablanca conference in January 1943, Franklin Roosevelt, Winston Churchill, and the Combined Chiefs of Staff included strategic bombing as part of their overall plan for Germany's defeat. While skeptical of the bombing results up to that point, the Allies presented it as a "second front in the air" to a

If you are a veteran, or know a veteran, of one of these campaigns – contact Don Patton at cell 612-867-5144 or coldpatton@yahoo.com

grumbling Josef Stalin. The Western Allies proposed a Combined Bomber Offensive hoping to dislocate and destroy Germany's industrial and economic system and demoralize the population.

Despite Eaker's replacement in December 1943 by Lt. Gen. Jimmy Doolittle, bomber and aircrew losses remained horribly high until long-range fighters, like the P-51, became available and gave valuable protection for the bomber fleets, producing far more accurate strikes that destroyed German resources, especially oil, and transport nets, notably railroads. Albert Speer, German armaments minister, considered the degradation of the German oil industry by bombing the greatest threat to the Reich's economic war fighting capacity.

American aviators confronted a vastly more dangerous wartime environment than soldiers or sailors. Airmen faced death at high altitudes alone or going down in flames in a fiery crash. To soldiers and sailors, the Eighth Air Force had it easy: they lived on bases in England with good food, and "R & R," their time facing the enemy was measured in hours rather than weeks or months, they were the "glamorous flyboys." But Eighth Air Force air crews suffered disproportionately higher losses. Approximately 10,000 fighters and bombers were shot down over Europe, of the crews aboard 26,000 were KIA, while the 30,000 who survived, were made POWs. Nearly 3,000 managed to evade capture and escape, some to fight again, others to neutral territory to sit out the war. This small group through good luck, sheer chance, and the help of Resistance networks survived the unreal environment of being hunted

The Nazi Blitz failed to force Britain's surrender in 1940 and similarly, the German civilian morale remained unbroken by the bombing. Even so, Goebbels continued to be extremely sensitive to civilian reactions to the increasingly intense air strikes on German cities, especially amongst Berliners. Clearly, air power advocates overstated the importance.

John Luckadoo joined the USAAF in February of 1942. After pilot training he was sent to England in 1943 and was assigned to the 351st Bomber Squadron of the 100th Bomb Group. Surviving 25 combat missions between June 1943 and February 1944, he received the Distinguished Flying Cross and the Air Medal. Operations officer of the 351st, he was offered command of the 350th Bomber Sqdn. but refused and instead became the operations officer and instructor pilot in the 350th. Later in 1944, he returned to the US, assigned to Third Air Force.

The 100th Bomb Group was known as the 8th AF's "unlucky" unit although its losses were not abnormal. The 100th was known for its poor training and discipline, a reputation that continued in Brig. Gen. Curtis LeMay's

3rd Air Division.

<https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/bloody-100th-bomb-group>

FURTHER READINGS:

Kevin Mauer *Damn Lucky* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2022).

Donald Miller, *Masters of the Sky: America's Bomber Boys Who Fought the Air War Against Nazi Germany* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006).

Conrad C. Crane, *American Airpower Strategy in World War II: Bombs, Cities, Civilians, and Oil* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2016).

Roger Freeman, *The Mighty Eighth: A History of the U.S. 8th Army Air Force* (NY: Doubleday, 1970).

William Daugherty, *The US Eighth Air Force in World War II: Ira Eaker, Hap Arnold, and Building American Air Power, 1942-1943* (Volume 8) (American Military Studies), Denton, TX: University of North Texas Press, 2024.

Announcements:

Twin Cities Civil War Round Table – 20 May. 2025, *Civil War in the Rio Grande* –

www.tccwrt.com – e-mail: info@tccwrt.com

Minnesota Military Museum, Camp Ripley, 15000 Hwy 115, Little Falls, MN 56345. 320-616-6050.

<http://www.mnmilitarymuseum.org/>.

8th AF Historical Society of MN, KC Hall Bloomington, 2nd & 4th Wednesdays at 1100.

<https://www.8thmn.org>.

Friends of Ft. Snelling - www.fortsnelling.org

Fagen Fighters WWII Museum, Granite Falls, MN - Air show – TBA 2025 – 320-564-6644

<http://www.fagenfighterswwiimuseum.org>.

Wings of the North Airshow - Eden Prairie –TBA 2025 - Flying Cloud Airport - 952-746-6100 - www.wotn.org

Alliance Française 612-332-0436 - www.afmns.org

Friends of the National WW II Memorial –

<http://www.wwiimemorialfriends.org.US>

Pittsburg Veterans Breakfast Club

- <http://www.vbcphg.org>.

Western Naval Historical Association –

info@wnha.net

WWII Discussion Forum – [wwiidf.org](http://www.wwiidf.org)

History Happy Hour - Sundays, 3 pm -

www.historyhappyhour.com

CAF - Commemorative Air Force - 651-455-6942 -

www.cafmn.org

Honor Flight - Jerry Kyser - 651-338-2717 -

jkyser45@gmail.com

We need volunteers to drive our veterans to and from meetings. Please contact Don Patton at cell 612-867-5144 or coldpatton@yahoo.com

Round Table Schedule 2024–2025

13 May Patton's Tactician: War and Occupation

The Round Table is a 501(c)3 nonprofit.

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John Luckadoo Collection