“Ace Of Aces”
World War II
Alabama Medal of Honor Recipient

David S. McCampbell
Approximately 300,000 Alabamians donned service uniforms during the war, and tens of thousands trained in the state. Many women volunteered for one of the military auxiliaries, such as the Women's Army Corps, Women's Air Service Pilots (WASPs), or the Army Nurse Corps. More than 6,000 Alabamians lost their lives in military service: 4,600 in combat and 1,600 in non-combat situations. Twelve of the 469 recipients of the Medal of Honor in World War II were born in Alabama or entered service there.

From the days of the Wright brothers, Alabama has played a conspicuous role in aviation. During World War II so many aviators trained at Maxwell Field that it came to be said that the "road to Tokyo" led through Montgomery. Gunter Field, Montgomery's airport, became a flight school, and new aviation training facilities were built, including Craig Field outside Selma, Napier Field near Dothan, and Courtland Field in the Tennessee River Valley. One of the most important and pioneering projects was the Tuskegee Army Air Field, where nearly 1,000 African-Americans received their wings as pilots.

A few other notable aviators from Alabama were:

- **Asa Duncan** who served as chief of staff for Gen. Carl A. Spaatz, commander of the Eighth Air Force
- The five **Crommelin Brothers** all of whom served in the Pacific Theater. Two lost their lives as pilots during the war, and the eldest, John, served as flight officer on the USS Enterprise and later as chief of staff of a carrier task force.
- **Herbert Carter**, in the first class of African-American pilots to break the race barrier in military aviation, earned his wings at the Tuskegee Army Air Field.
- **Nancy Batson Crews** from Birmingham, an early member of the Women's Air Service Pilots, ferried military aircraft around the country to modification plants or ports of embarkation.

Besides the Belle of Birmingham (piloted by **Col. John M. Donalson**), there were two other aircraft (B-17s) that wore the Birmingham moniker. The first was the **Birmingham Blitzkrieg**, piloted by **Lt. Thomas Borders**, of Birmingham, AL with the 97th Bomb Group. His all-Alabama crew was credited with being the first in the 8th Air Force to down a German plane by ball turret gunner, **Kent West** from West Blocton, AL. The original **Birmingham Blitzkrieg** served with the 97th Bomb Group before becoming a lead assembly aircraft with the 525 Bomb Squadron. The job of an assembly aircraft was to help get bombers into formations safely. They would then lead the aircraft group as they headed off to their intended target. With that job done, they would then return to base.

Lt. Borders was transferred to North Africa with the 97thBG and was pilot of the second B-17 named the **Birmingham Blitzkrieg** where it was lost to flak and exploded in mid-air on a mission in December 1942. All on board were killed.

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**Vintage B-17 “Texas Raiders” To Visit Birmingham and The Southern Museum of Flight**

**The iconic B-17 Flying Fortress is coming to Birmingham**

May 14-16, 2021

with two other vintage warbirds (T-6 & C-45)

You want to be there! Check the Museum’s website for all the opportunities and particulars to visit and book a ride on historic and rare aircraft of World War II. 

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**THIRD AIRFORCE**
- Demopolis Army Air Field, 8 miles W-SW of Demopolis
  *Now: Demopolis Municipal Airport*
- Camp Sibert Army Air Field, 5 miles W-SW of Gadsden
  *Now: Northeast Alabama Regional Airport*

**USAAF TRAINING COMMAND**
- Courtland Army Air Field, 1 mile SW of Courtland
  *Now: Courtland Airport*
- Maxwell Field, 2 miles W of Montgomery
  *Now: Maxwell-Gunter Air Force Base*
- Craig Field, 5 miles SE of Selma
  *Now: Craig Field Airport*
- Napier Field, 7 miles NW of Dothan
  *Now: Adjacent to Dothan Regional Airport*
- Gunter Field, 2 miles NE of Montgomery
  *Now: Gunter Annex (Non-flying USAF facility)*
- Tuskegee Army Air Field, 7 miles NW of Tuskegee
  *Now: Sharpe Field a private airport*

**CONTRACT FLYING SCHOOLS**
- Bates Field, 10 miles W of Mobile—Contract Pilot School, Glider
  *Now: Mobile Regional Airport*
- Roberts Field Airport, 4 miles W of Birmingham
  *Now: Industrial site*
- Hargrove Van de Graaff Airport, 3 miles NW of Tuscaloosa
  *Now: Tuscaloosa National Airport*
- Decatur Field, 3 miles NW of Decatur
  *Now: Pryor Field Regional Airport*
- Moton Field, 4 miles NW of Tuskegee
  *Now: Moton Field Municipal Airport*

**AIR TECHNICAL SERVICE COMMAND**
- Birmingham Army Air Field, 5 miles NE of Birmingham
  *Now: Sumpter Smith Air National Guard Base at Birmingham-Shuttlesworth International Airport*
- Brookley Field, 4 miles S of Mobile
  *Now: Mobile Downtown Airport*

**MINOR AIRFIELDS**
- Fort McClellan Army Air Field, 6 miles NE Anniston
  *Now: Abandoned*
- Chilton CAA Intermediate Field, 1 mile NE of Clanton
  *Now: Chilton County Airport*
- Huntsville Arsenal Army Air Field, 6 miles SW of Huntsville
  *Now: Redstone Army Airfield*
- Thomas C. Russell Field, 2 miles S-SW of Alexander
  *Now: Undetermined USAF Use*
- Weedon Field, 4 miles N-NE of Eufaula
  *Now: Undetermined USAF Use*
The most notable fighter ace in Navy history was the late Captain David S. McCampbell. He and Lt. Commander Edward “Butch” O’Hare were among the few pilots awarded Medals of Honor for aerial combat. McCampbell’s came as the result of shooting down nine aircraft during one mission in the October 1944 Battle of Leyte Gulf.

David McCampbell attended the U.S. Naval Academy and began his 31 years of service in 1933. He received his "Wings of Gold" in 1938. After that he joined Fighting Squadron 4 (VF-4), followed by a three-year tour as a Landing Service Officer (LSO) aboard the USS Wasp. In the spring of 1944, McCampbell commanded Carrier Air Group 15, also known as the "Fabled Fifteen" and personally accrued 34 victories. The group as a whole earned 318 victories.

McCampbell’s 34 aerial victories during his World War II missions made him the Navy’s Ace of Aces. He was the only American airman to achieve "ace in a day" twice, shooting down seven Japanese bombers in a single afternoon. To add to his accomplishments, he shot down nine enemy aircraft in another mission, which was a new world record. He was the highest scoring American ace to survive the war. In recognition of his service and contributions, he was presented the Medal of Honor by President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

Capt. McCampbell is enshrined in the Naval Aviation Hall of Honor (1988), the National Aviation Hall of Fame (1996), and the Alabama Aviation Hall of Fame (1999).

Shown below are pictures from the premier showing of the World War II documentary, WWII: Alabama Remembers

Ken Burns (below) is interviewed during his visit to the Museum. Burns produced and directed this documentary that places a face on the Greatest Generation. Many World War II veterans, along with 500 other invited guests, attended the premier showing in November 2007. It was a touching and memorable event honoring Alabama’s heroes of this world war.

This excellent documentary can be found today on: https://www.pbs.org/video/alabama-public-television-documentaries-wwii-alabama-remembers/