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## Inside This Issue

26 OWS Heritage	2
Maj Gen Collens	3
Tactical Recon	3
Looking Back	4

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## AAF Weathermen Participated in D-Day Invasion

We heralded the role of Army Air Forces weather forecasters in the planning and execution of Operation OVERLORD in a previous edition of this newsletter. As we approach the 60th Anniversary of D-Day, we highlight the sacrifices of the weather observers who participated in the D-Day invasion.

In January 1944, GEN Dwight D. Eisenhower's headquarters requested "a weather service adequate to meet the needs of the ground forces supported by these Air Forces in the United Kingdom and in the European continental area or area over which the Allied Forces will operate." The Allied Expeditionary Air Force, through the Ninth Air Force, directed the 21st Weather Squadron "establish liaison with, and make provision for, giving meteorological service to the Headquarters, First U.S. Army Group, and such other subordinate units as the Commanding General, First U.S. Army Group may desire."

The 21st Weather Squadron had already been organized to work in mobile, fast moving conditions and was paired with the 40th Mobile Communications Squadron to deliver

weather information to Ninth Air Force tactical units as they moved across the English Channel.

Four weather observers were detailed to the 11th Tactical Air Communications Squadron, supporting the 82d and 101st Airborne Divisions. The training and combat experiences for these men varied widely.

Of the four, the best known is probably SSgt Robert A. Dodson, for whom Air Force Weather's Dodson Award is named. SSgt Dodson parachuted in with elements of the 82d Airborne near Sainte Mere Eglise. Injuring his knee in the landing, he nonetheless linked up with other airborne troopers, located his equipment bundles and made his way to the command post, where, for the next 36 hours, he helped turn back the German attacks. Once ground combat ceased, he started his weather observations, sending them back until June 21 when he was hospitalized in France and later England until his knee was healed.

SSgt Charles J. Staub was the first weatherman into Normandy. He jumped from 600 feet into

the hedgerow country with the 502d Parachute Infantry Regiment, 101st Airborne Division, at 0100 the morning of 6 June 1944. Linking up with troops from the 502d and 506th Parachute Regiments, they were making their way toward the rally point when German soldiers fired upon them. SSgt Staub was wounded three times by rifle fire and knocked unconscious by a grenade. Regaining consciousness at daybreak, he made his way almost two miles to a makeshift aid station. Eventually evacuated to a field hospital and then to England, he was then returned to the US.

Corporal Warren F. Wolf rode a glider in the second wave of the D-Day assault. Unfortunately, he was captured along with several other glider passengers, ending up the war in Stalag Luft 4 in what is now Poland. In late March 1945, he was part of the forced march west, being freed by a British armor unit on 17 April 1945. He was demobilized in November 1945 and re-enlisted in the Army Signal Corps in 1948.

*Continued on p. 4, "Weathermen Joined the D-Day Assault"*

## The 26th's Time at Barksdale Began in the 1950s



*T/Sgt Kauwell briefs a pilot at the Orlando Air Base weather station, 1943.*



*Lt Scott draws a North Atlantic and Western Hemispheric synoptic chart at the Orlando Air Base weather station, 1943.*



*T/Sgt Solow tests facsimile equipment at the Orlando Air Base weather station, 1943.*



*The 26th Weather Squadron began support of Second Air Force at Barksdale Air Force Base in 1951.*

In response to a request from the commanding general of the Army Air Forces School of Applied Tactics for an assigned weather squadron, the Army Air Forces headquarters constituted today's 26th Operational Weather Squadron on September 30, 1943, as the 26th Weather Squadron. The squadron activated on October 10, 1943, under the command of Lt Col Chester W. Cecil, Jr., at Orlando Army Air Base, Florida. In addition to his squadron duties, Colonel Cecil served as the 26th Weather Regional Control Officer and staff weather officer for the Army Air Forces School of Applied Tactics.

Later redesignated the Army Air Forces Tactical Air Center, the School of Applied Tactics was activated on October 16, 1942, to train selected officers under simulated combat conditions. More than 840 weather officers attended the Weather Staff Officer course conducted at the School of Applied Tactics during World War II.

The Army Air Forces disbanded the 26th Weather Squadron on June 3, 1944, and squadron personnel were transferred in-place to Squadron B, 902d Army Air Forces Base Unit.

The newly independent United States Air Force

reconstituted the 26th Weather Squadron on May 18, 1948. On June 1, it activated the 26th at Brookley Air Force Base, near Mobile, Alabama. The Air Force assigned the 26th to the 104th Weather Group, which was later redesignated the 2104th Air Weather Group.

The 26th Weather Squadron was soon indirectly supporting Operation VITTLES as Brookley transports, including the limited-production C-74 *Globemaster I*, began participating in the Berlin Airlift.



*The 26th's current emblem was approved on November 3, 1965, replacing its first emblem approved in 1944.*

The 26th Weather Squadron was reassigned to the 2059th Air Weather Wing on October 24, 1950, as part of Air Weather Service's restructuring to eliminate the Weather Groups.

The 26th Weather Squadron moved its

headquarters to Barksdale Air Force Base, Louisiana, on September 10, 1951, in order to align itself with the headquarters of Strategic Air Command's Second Air Force at Barksdale for which the 26th had been given functional responsibility under Air Weather Service's new organizational scheme.

In continuing Air Weather Service reorganizations, the 26th was reassigned to the 2101st Air Weather Group on September 16, 1951, and to the 1st Weather Group on April 20, 1952. The squadron began its long association with the 3d Weather Wing on October 8, 1956, to which it was assigned until it was inactivated on June 30, 1972.

The 26th was again activated and assigned to the 3d Weather Wing on January 1, 1975. The 26th continued at Barksdale until the divestiture of Air Weather Service. The squadron was inactivated on July 31, 1991.

As part of Air Force Weather's re-engineering, the squadron was redesignated the 26th Operational Weather Squadron on February 5, 1999, and again activated at Barksdale on October 1, 1999, where it was assigned to Eighth Air Force's 608th Air Operations Group. ☆

### General Collens Remembers His Service with AWS

John W. Collens, III, began his military career during World War II as an aviation cadet and received his commission and pilot wings in April 1944. He flew 28 B-17 combat missions during World War II.

In March 1949 General Collens returned to active duty and after attending the weather officer course at Chanute Air Force Base, Illinois, he joined Air Weather Service. He flew 75 tactical weather reconnaissance missions in weather reconnaissance B-26 aircraft during the Korean War.

General Collens served as Vice Commander, Air Weather Service, from June 1971 to May 1973. He then assumed

command of the 9th Weather Reconnaissance Wing at McClellan Air Force Base, California. In February 1974 General Collens again returned to Scott Air Force Base as Commander, Air Weather Service.

In August 1975 he became Deputy Chief of Staff, Plans, Military Airlift Command, and in July 1977 became Chief of Staff. He was assigned as Deputy Inspector General, Headquarters, US Air Force, Washington, DC, in November 1978.

General Collens retired from active duty on October 1, 1979.

The Air Force Weather History Office conducted an interview with General

Collens in November 2002. The complete interview is available on request.

**MAJ GEN COLLENS:** *I always felt that indoctrination flights for all weather people should be conducted. No weather person should have as his total exposure to flight what he sees out the window of a commercial airliner. That doesn't do it.*

*He needs to be taken up in a two-seater airplane or whatever [and be asked] before he gets off the ground, "How high do you think those clouds are?" Assuming he doesn't have a ceilometer [then tell him]. "Okay, now we're going to go up and see how close you came. Now there's another cloud layer that you can see through the breaks in this lower layer. How high do you think that upper deck is?" ☆*



*Maj Gen John W. Collens, III*



*Brig Gen Collens is greeted at Bitburg Air Base, Germany, during his tenure as Air Weather Service commander.*

### AWS Observers flew Tactical Recon in Korea

In January 1951, Fifth Air Force activated the 6166th Tactical Weather Reconnaissance Flight at Taegu Air Base, Korea, to report en-route and over-target weather. The 30th Weather Squadron commander provided technical supervision; a pilot-weather officer commanded the flight; and volunteer weather observers flew on the combat weather reconnaissance missions of the 6166th.

Maj Gen John W. Collens, III, Air Weather Service commander 1974-1975,

joined the 6166th in March 1951 as a pilot-observer. General Collens recalls one memorable flight near Pyongyang, North Korea, when the Plexiglas nose of the RB-26 *Invader* in which Maj Gen Click D. Smith, Jr., was sitting, imploded, injuring both Smith and Collens. General Smith later served in weather reconnaissance with Air Weather Service. He retired from active duty in 1982 and died earlier this year.

The 6166th moved to Kimpo Air Base in August

1951. The squadron's RB-26s were painted black and stripped of weapons to increase their performance capabilities. *Lonesome Lil*, *Triple Nickel*, *No Sweat*, and *Snooper* were some of the colorful names the crews chose for their aircraft.

The missions of the 6166th were flown in all weather conditions and were far from safe. The final fate of the four-man crew on a mission to Pyongyang on February 22, 1952; is still unknown.

The 6166th inactivated in late 1953. ☆



*The crew of RB-26C Lonesome Lil prepares for a weather reconnaissance mission from Kimpo Air Base, Korea. (photo from the K-14 Tac Recon Reunion website - K14recon.best.vwh.net)*

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**In the next issue**  
28 OWS Lineage  
and more.

*"Provide the historical perspective for Air Force Weather to know its past, understand its present, and anticipate its future."*

## Looking Back at Air Force Weather

**April 14, 1943**, Headquarters, Army Air Forces activated the Weather Wing, predecessor to Air Weather Service and today's Air Force Weather Agency, at the Pentagon.

**April 10, 1952**, Air Weather Service's Data Control Unit—Detachment 1, Headquarters, Air Weather Service—moved from New Orleans, Louisiana, to Asheville, North Carolina, and was redesignated the Data Control Division, Headquarters, Air Weather Service.

**April 22, 1965**, Military Air Transport Service transferred two C-135Bs to Air Weather Service, the first of ten eventually modified to WC-135B configuration.

**May 3, 1943**, The Weather Wing headquarters moved from the Pentagon to the Municipal Building in Asheville, North Carolina.

**May 4, 1979**, Air Weather Service accepted responsibility for operating the polarimeter network of sites at Athens, Goose Bay, Osan Air Base, Palehua, Patrick Air Force Base, Ramey Air Force Base, Sagamore Hill, Shemya Air Force Base, and Taiwan.

**June 1, 1948**, The Department of Defense formed Military Air Transport Service by combining elements of Air Transport Command and Naval Air Transport Command. Air Weather Service was assigned to Military Air Transport Service, which was redesignated Military Airlift Command in 1966. Air Weather Service was assigned to Military Airlift Command until 1991.

**June 15, 1983**, Sacramento Air Logistics Center signed a contract with International Creative Data Industries for the AN/FMQ-8 temperature-dew point set to replace the AN/TMQ-11.

## Weathermen Joined the D-Day Assault

*Continued from page 1.*

Corporal Eugene Levine rode a glider into Normandy the afternoon of D-Day with the last elements of the 82d Airborne Div. After he joined up with the rest of the headquarters element later that night, he made his first observations. He sent them back to England on the morning of June 7. Once the 82d was pulled out of the lines in mid-July, he was reassigned to the Air Support Party for Headquarters, 1st Army, where he spent the rest of

the war as a weather observer.

After the capitulation of Germany, his unit was assigned to Fritzlar Airbase, near Kassell, Germany, where he served until returning home for discharge in December 1945.

The history of the 21st Weather Squadron for the period reports that there were more than 20 of the squadron's weather observers at sea and ready to come ashore at Normandy, but we only know the names of two.



*Construction on the Pentagon began in September 1941 and was completed in January 1943.*



*Air Weather Service operated the WC-135B from 1965 to 1975.*

*The winds and waves are always on the side of the ablest navigators*

Edward Gibbon  
*Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*

SSgt Patrick K. Kelly came ashore with the troops at Utah Beach on D-Day. After arriving onshore SSgt William Miller started sending observations the afternoon of D-Day.

Three days after the assault the first detachment of the 21st was operational. By the end of June, 14 detachments were operational. At the end of October 1944, the 21st Weather Squadron had almost 70 detachments operating in France. ☆