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SCHOLARSHIP IN HONOR OF

LIEUTENANT GENERAL
IRA C. EAKER

U.S. AIR FORCE

Lieutenant General Ira C. Eaker

Since becoming a pilot at Kelly Field, Texas in 1918, Ira Eaker has been at or near the center of the development of airpower in the United States. He was a pioneer flyer, test pilot, World War II Commander of the Eighth Air Force, Commander in Chief of the Mediterranean Allied Air Forces, and Deputy Commanding General of the Army Air Forces. He served on the staff of all the Chiefs of the Air Arm from 1924 until 1947, working closely with Generals Mason M. Patrick, James E. Fechet, Benjamin D. Foulois, Oscar Westover, Henry H. (“Hap”) Arnold and Carl Spaatz.

Eaker began active military service at El Paso, Texas in 1917 as an Infantry second lieutenant. He was 21 and a recent graduate of Southeastern Normal School, Durant, Oklahoma. That same year he applied for pilot training. While at Rockwell Field, California, where he was serving early in 1919 with Col. H. H. “Hap” Arnold and Maj. Carl Spaatz, Eaker got his first opportunity to organize a unit. He volunteered for an assignment to recruit a squadron of 60 men, to help train it, and take it to the Philippines as the first increment of the Second Aero Squadron.

For the next few years Eaker acquired flying skills as well as experience in military organization and leadership. After two years in the Philippines and more than a year at Mitchel Field, New York, where he commanded the Fifth Aero Squadron, he was assigned as executive assistant in the Office of Air Service in Washington.

Until 1938, when the rumblings of war in Europe moved the U.S. to begin rearming, the needs of the small Air Corps were accorded a relatively low priority by the War Department. Airpower advocates, foreseeing the great potentials of aviation,

were impelled to draw public attention to the capabilities of the aircraft. Ira Eaker was one of the small group that led this effort. Possibly no advocate had greater sustained influence on public understanding of airpower during the 20s, 30s and early 40s than Eaker. He worked not only behind the scenes but in the forefront as a commander, an official spokesman, and a noted pilot.

He wrote speeches and prepared reports for General Patrick, Chief of the Air Corps in the mid-twenties, and later was chief pilot for General Fechet and the first Assistant Secretary of War for Air, F. Trubee Davison.

With Muir S. Fairchild he flew one of the amphibian planes, the San Francisco, that made the 23,000-mile Pan American Good Will Flight to 26 Latin American countries from December 1926 to May 1927. This plane is now in the National Air Museum (Smithsonian).

He was chief pilot for the “Question Mark,” which in 1929 set a world endurance record of more than 150 hours, using in-flight refueling.

In 1930 he made the first non-stop transcontinental flight, refueling in the air. In 1936 he made the first blind (instrument) transcontinental flight.

In August 1941, he was ordered to special duty with the Royal Air Force in England to fly new types of fighters, to observe British fighter-control methods and to report his findings to General Arnold. A few months later, in January, Eaker, then a brigadier general, was assigned to organize the VIII Bomber Command, to understudy the British system of night bomber operations, and to determine the feasibility of the proposed

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daylight bombing effort. He led the first United States heavy bomber raids on German-occupied Europe.

From December 1942 until January 1944 General Eaker commanded the Eighth Air Force and throughout 1944 and early 1945 he was Commander in Chief of the Mediterranean Allied Air Forces, which included the Twelfth and Fifteenth U.S. Air Forces and British Desert and Balkan Air Forces. He flew on many missions over Europe, including the first shuttle bombing raid from Italy to German targets, landing in Russia. He piloted a fighter plane in the invasion of Southern France in August 1944.

The Fifteenth Air Force in Italy, the counterpart of the Eighth Air Force in Britain, was highly effective in bombing German-held targets from the South. But there may have been no daylight bombing at all - and undoubtedly there would have been a less effective use of airpower - if it were not for General Eaker. It was he who persuaded Prime Minister Winston Churchill to withdraw British objection to American daylight bombing in favor of the less hazardous night bombing.

From April 1945 until August 1947, when he retired, General Eaker served with Generals "Hap" Arnold and Carl Spaatz as Deputy Commander of the Army Air Forces and Chief of the Air Staff.

Dear General Smith:

General Ira C. Eaker is a truly remarkable man. His old uniform carries twenty-two high decorations awarded by twelve nations and his list of accomplishments is long.

We create the General Ira C. Eaker scholarship because of great personal respect for this outstanding human being, and the desire that his life example, career attainments, and his personal traits shall serve as a beacon for young men in the United States Air Force for all time.



*Charles B. Thornton
Chairman of the Board
Litton Industries, Inc.*



The Falcon Foundation is a 501(c)(3), non-profit foundation. Its purpose is to provide scholarships to College or Preparatory Schools for motivated young people seeking admission to USAFA and a career in the Air Force.

Although it is a separate organization, the Falcon Foundation works closely with USAFA.