[Kenneth Newton Walker]

Kenneth N. Walker

Casting A Giant Shadow

> *What do you do with an unrestrained hero?*
>
> *Reprimand him, or Give Him a Medal?*
>
> *“I was told by ‘Chesty’ Puller years ago, there is only a hairline’s difference between a Navy Cross and a general court-martial.”*
>
> *~ Gregory “Pappy” Boyington*

Washington, D.C. was a long way from Denver, Colorado, especially so during the tense early months of World War II. Bob Pearson made the trip only because business called him to the Capitol. It was May 1942 and Bob had brought along his son, who recently graduated from high school. As something of a celebration before departing for home, the Pearsons scheduled lunch at the Willard Hotel with Army Air Force Lieutenant Colonel Kenneth N. Walker.

Bob and Ken Walker went back to their early school days in Denver, followed by a life-long friendship. When time, maturity, and occupational demands separated the two they maintained contact through a mutual interest in aviation. Young Lieutenant Walker had flown into Denver over the Labor Day Weekend in 1919 to take his friend on a sight-seeing tour over the mountains of Estes Park in his Army DH-4 airplane. Fifteen years later when Bob was living in Quincy, Illinois, Ken Walker had diverted from a cross-country flight to make an unauthorized visit to his friend.

The mood at the lunch table on this day early during the spring of 1941 was somewhat resigned; it was not the normal banter about kids and family. Lieutenant Colonel Walker's two sons were living on the West Coast with their mother after the first of two failed relationships—and divorces, in the past ten years. The only upbeat topic was Walker's military career, which seemed to be at its zenith. He had missed the First World War but was now being assigned to combat duty in the South Pacific. He would not miss the Second World War.

When lunch was finished, the two old friends shook hands and wished each other well. Before Bob Pearson turned to leave, Kenneth Walker looked him in the eyes and stated flatly: "I've made a terrible mess of things here. I doubt if I'll be back."

They were the last words Bob Pearson would ever hear from the scrappy kid he'd known since the two attended Denver's Maria Mitchell and Columbian Schools.

Kenneth Newton Walker

Kenneth Newton Walker was born in Cerrillos, New Mexico, in 1898, but moved with his mother to Denver in his early childhood. His father Wallace was an orphan who had been raised by a foster family with the surname Walker. Apparently, as a result of his own difficult childhood, Wallace Walker never learned to adapt to marriage and family. Early in Ken's life, he deserted his young family, leaving Kenneth embittered against his father for the rest of his life. It may indeed have been the lack of a solid father figure in his own childhood that contributed to many of Kenneth Walker's own problems in relating to a family when he later had one of his own.

In 1912, Kenneth and his mother moved to Kansas City where the young man attended and graduated from high school. In 1917 at age nineteen he returned alone to Denver to attend the YMCA Night School, and then to pursue studies in business administration at La Salle University. Ten days before Christmas Kenneth Walker joined the Aviation Section of the Army Signal Corps Enlisted Reserve. The following June, while American aviators were tasting their first aerial combat in France,

Kenneth Walker was becoming a pilot at the Air Service Flying School at Mather Field in California. World War I ended on November 11, 1918, the same month Walker was discharged from the Reserves and commissioned a second lieutenant in the U.S. Army Air Service.

The new and fledgling post-war Army Air Service was not the best place to be for a young officer looking to build a military career in the 1920s. It did provide those who chose the air over the ground an exciting, different kind of military lifestyle, coupled with some incredible challenges. Lieutenant Kenneth Walker adapted well to military life, always impeccably uniformed, orderly in the performance of his duties, and dedicated to the future of aviation. In September 1922 while stationed at Post Field in Oklahoma, he married Marguerite Potter, a beautiful, well-educated “Sooner Queen”. Three months later the young couple was sailing across the Pacific for a two-year tour of duty in the Philippine Islands.

The small group of pilots stationed at Camp Nichols in the Philippines, thousands of miles from home, were a social group. Marguerite quickly learned the custom, protocols, and nuances of hosting that are important to the future of any young military officer. The Walkers were a wonderful couple to all outward appearances, admired and envied by others, and well respected by all who knew them.

On the job, Lieutenant Walker was a hard, efficient worker—if anything a workaholic decades before the malady was given a name. Air Corps duty itself, half a world away from the mainland, was generally uncomplicated and occasionally interesting. Only hints of the personal problems that would later become too difficult to overcome were evident in those early years.

Walker served as commanding officer of the Air Intelligence Section at Camp Nichols, as well as in other roles. In December 1923 he was one of six pilots that flew an extended reconnaissance trip into Zamboanga. Before returning home early in 1925 the Walkers also enjoyed a brief vacation in China.

Back in the United States, Lieutenant Walker was assigned to Langley Field, Virginia, in the summer of 1925. He returned from his peaceful foreign service to find the Army Air Service engaged in a war at home…virtually a struggle for survival. Three years earlier General William Billy Mitchell had revolutionized aerial warfare by demonstrating that bombers could sink battleships. That revelation had not been a welcomed one; it was spurned by politicians and the traditional leadership of both the Army and the Navy. Mitchell had further ostracized himself from the military establishment by repeatedly calling for a reorganization of the U.S. Military to include America’s airmen as a separate branch of service. Ultimately the powerful men in the War Department attempted to end his crusade by reverting him to his permanent

rank as a colonel and banishing him to Fort Hood, Texas—far from Washington, D.C.

Two months after the Walkers moved into their new home at Langley Field this political war at home reached critical mass. Two Naval air disasters in August prompted Colonel Mitchell to issue a prepared statement from Fort Hood charging, “These accidents are the direct result of the incompetency, criminal negligence and almost treasonable administration of the national defense by the Navy and War Departments.” Mitchell’s proffered gauntlet could not be ignored. In October, a seven-week trial began in Washington, D.C., that resulted in the court-martial of Billy Mitchell and his suspension from rank, command, and duty for five years. This sanction prompted the WWI hero and aviation pioneer to resign.

There can be no doubt that Colonel Mitchell issued his statement fully aware that it would result in his court-martial. Some people argued that he was an egotist seeking headlines; others that he saw himself as some sort of sacrificial lamb doing what he felt needed to be done to bring the plight of the American Air Service before the public. Whatever the motivation and reasoning, the court-martial of Billy Mitchell had a strong and sweeping impact on the men of the Air Service, as well as on the future of aviation:

• Billy Mitchell’s unprecedented insubordination established a new pattern for aggressive advocacy, but

• Mitchell’s subsequent conviction, as well as the (at least perceived) banishment of some of his strongest defenders and defense witnesses including Major Henry Hap Arnold, warned against going too far in aggressive advocacy.

• The evident truth of the sad state of American aviation, as testified to by Mitchell and others, prompted a certain level of internal damage control. Even before the trial began President Coolidge seated a distinguished panel under Dwight Morrow to review and suggest the feasibility of a separate air force. Though the Morrow Board rejected that concept, their hearings played a large role in the subsequent Air Corps Act of 1926. That sweeping legislation changed the name of the Army’s air arm from “Air Service” (denoting a role of support to ground forces) to “Air Corps,” indicating a more combat-oriented designation. It further led to increased funding for a 5-year buildup of the Army Air Corps.

• An ancillary effect of the Mitchell Trial may also have been the effect it had on one of the trial judges, General Douglas MacArthur. MacArthur was a boyhood friend of Billy Mitchell, the Mitchell and MacArthur families of Milwaukee enjoying a long and legendary friendship. When called to sit on the trail MacArthur described it as “One of the most distasteful orders I ever received.” Colonel Mitchell was convicted by a

secret vote of the eight judges and there were rumors (enhanced by statements made by MacArthur himself,) that Mitchell's boyhood friend had cast a dissenting vote in his conviction. But the true nature of that vote was never known, and many men of the U.S. Army Air Corps, most of whom idolized Billy Mitchell, never forgave Douglas MacArthur for "betraying his boyhood friend." Any study of World War II quickly shows suspicion of and distrust towards MacArthur from many Air Force pilots. Conversely, MacArthur didn't seem to fully understand or appreciate his airmen, or for that matter, to trust them.

A.C.T.S.

If the traditionalists of the Navy and War Departments were at a loss as to how to effectively administer their new air arms, it is not without reason. In 1926 heavier-than-air flight was only 23 years old and, as a U.S. military element, had seen only nine months of combat experience and testing. Even the young pilots who flew the airplanes and protested for an independent air force could not define their own role in warfare and the military establishment.

The internal search for identity began to take shape in earnest following the Air Corps Act of 1926. Despite the punishment administered to Colonel Mitchell, in the immediate aftermath of the trial, the new Army Air Corps found itself with not only increased funding but some new levels of autonomy. The Air Service Field Officer's School at Langley Field had been an important part of any budding Air Service officer's resume since 1921.

Following the Air Corps Act of 1926, the school was renamed the Air Corps Tactical School (ACTS). The school's mission changed from its original task of "preparing senior officers for higher Air Service command duty" to one of defining the role of the Air Corps, i.e. "Tactical Theory".

It was a timely and badly needed change, for the budding Air Corps did not yet fully understand its own role in warfare. Air theorists were divided into two camps: pursuit and bombers.

Though bombing raids were conducted throughout World War I and had become increasingly frequent in the latter months before the Armistice, it was the PURSUIT (fighter) pilots who emerged from The Great War as the Air Service heroes. The role of the fighter pilot, alone in the air and going man-to-man against enemy pilots, was far more glamorous than that of the bomber pilot droning over endless miles to drop his explosives and hopefully turn to fly back home.

Furthermore, it was the pursuit pilots who had given the Allies air superiority at St. Mihiel, the September 1918 offensive that first demonstrated the value of the

airplane in coordination with ground operations. The Knights of the Air had overwhelmed the air forces of the enemy, keeping their observation balloons and airplanes out of the skies so that the infantry could advance undetected and unmolested.

Ironically, the argument espoused by the Pursuit advocates at ACTS tended to substantiate the claims of the Army and Navy that aviation was an auxiliary to the ground forces, and therefore should not be separated from them. The pursuit airplane was another weapon in the arsenal of the ground commander, as a tank or artillery piece, to be deployed best as a defensive weapon.

Billy Mitchell had argued for a separate air force because he saw aviation not as a defensive weapon, auxiliary to the ground or naval forces, but as an offensive weapon. He demonstrated that airborne bombers could sink battleships. He argued that the best way to win the next war would be through using such bombers as offensive weapons, to strike at enemy industrial and economic targets. Those who adopted similar ideas for aerial warfare separated into the Bomber Camp, leading to several years of internal debate at ACTS. It was the kind of debate the Air Corps needed, for out of it came a new sense of identity. When Lieutenant Walker entered ACTS as a student in 1928, he quickly ascribed to the Bomber Camp, becoming one of its most vocal advocates.

From 1929 to 1934 Lieutenant Walker remained at ACTS as a bombardment instructor. While the Air Corps searched for its own identity, Lieutenant Walker had finally found his. Perhaps more than any man in history, Kenneth Walker defined the meaning of the term Strategic Bombardment for future wars. Though he would not live to see it, the air strategies debated and refined at ACTS during those five years ultimately lead to the defeat of Adolph Hitler in World War II.

> *“Victory smiles upon those who anticipate the changes in the character of war, not upon those who wait to adapt themselves after the changes occur.”*
>
> *~ Giulio Douhet*

Strategic Bombardment

General Billy Mitchell was not the only forward-thinking airmen of the early days of military aviation, nor the only one to have trouble convincing his country of the full potential of the airplane as a military weapon. In Italy, Guilio Douhet fought the same battle with similar results. Mitchell detractors, in fact, were prone to excuse the American visionary as one who had simply learned, then adopted, the ideas

and strategies of Douhet. It was no secret that Mitchell admired Douhet and, though he never referred to him in his own writings, he spoke of his ideas in many conversations.

In 1912 Douhet was appointed to lead Italy's first aviation battalion and went on to serve…and observe…the warfare of World War I. Though most often thought of in terms of aviation, his observations were wide-ranging and varied. His hypothesis was basically that technological advances (not only the airplane but also machine guns and poison gas,) made ground warfare obsolete, and gave the advantage to a defending army instead of the offensive force. He reasoned, for instance, that if one soldier in a trench had a gun that could fire one round per minute and it took an attacker one minute to cross the terrain that separated him from that position, two attackers working in tandem would over-run the position. Similarly, if the defender had a machine gun that could fire 100 rounds per minute, the enemy would have to send 101 attackers to seize the position held by a single man. If the position were protected with barbed wire it would increase the attackers' time to five minutes and would require 501 men to assault and overcome a lone defender. If the logic sounded strange, it was nevertheless, well-founded.

Douhet's primary interest, however, was in the airplane. He was unimpressed with the effect of Pursuit Warfare, except to fly protection for bombers. He wrote: "They (fighter planes) would be completely wasted in engagements with other fighters because only a few enemy planes are destroyed, no land is captured, and the enemy's will is unaffected. All glory—no results."

The operative words for Douhet were "The Enemy's Will", and from that, he developed his warfare doctrine of strategic bombing. In more modern vernacular, he believed that the best defense was a strong (aerial) offense:

1. Bomb and destroy the enemy's air force on the ground before they can marshal them against your own forces, and
2. Bomb and destroy your enemy's capability to make war (factories, industrial plants, economic centers).

Douhet's vision, though flawed in many ways, was decades ahead of his time. When Douhet wrote Il domino dell'aria in 1921, no nation on earth had long-range bombers capable of the kind of warfare Douhet prophesied. The fact that technology had not caught up to theory did not stop him from continuing to write, or from urging his nation to develop a separate Air Force with air officers capable of directing such warfare when that technology finally caught up.

Douhet's outlandish (at that time) ideas also did not prevent the cadre at ACTs from

adding a 5-page extract from his book to their files in 1921, or from using a 100-page translation for instruction the following year.

> *"The well-organized, well-planned, and well-flown*
> *air force (bombing) attack*
> *will constitute an offensive that cannot be stopped."*

Giulio Douhet would have loved those words, might have used the quote himself if had thought of it. That single sentence summarized nicely the strategic theory espoused in the hundreds of pages he had written since the end of World War I. That sentence, however, is most often attributed to United States Army Corps Lieutenant Kenneth N. Walker. It did summarize Walker's own thinking. (The first utterance of that now-famous litany may have actually been made by ACTS' assistant commandant, Major Walter H. Frank, who served as an umpire for aerial maneuvers held in Ohio in 1929.)

Ltc. C. L. Tinker and Lt. Walker (1931)

When Ken Walker graduated from ACTS in 1929 the prevailing doctrine at the school belonged to the Bomber Group, though there remained a fair contingent of pursuit advocates. One of Walker's ACTS instructors was Robert Old's, an air officer who had served as an aide to Billy Mitchell. Old's evangelistically shared Mitchell's concepts of strategic bombardment in the classroom, and Kenneth Walker became his star pupil. By the time Walker graduated in 1929 he was convinced that the bomber would soon replace pursuit aircraft as the predominant Air Corps weapon. When he returned the following year as an ACTS instructor himself, the combination of Old's and Walker was hard to argue against. During that first year at ACTS Walker also rewrote the bombardment text for the Air Corps, which was reprinted with only minor updates and corrections in 1931.

Like Douhet before him, Walker's written ideas were not predicated upon currently available technology. Looking to the future, Walker believed that American ingenuity and industrial power would create not only long-range bombers capable of carrying tons of bombs but the means to accurately deliver those bombs from a high altitude

beyond the range of anti-aircraft fire. Furthermore, his concepts were deviously simple in many regards. Strategic targets were not only factories that created weapons of warfare but factories that created smaller items necessary for the tools of war. One might bomb a factory that turned out tanks and destroy a few vehicles under construction. On the other hand, a well-aimed bombing attack on a ball-bearing factory that created the small items necessary to make a tank operate might well halt the entire production of enemy tanks (as well as other machinery that required ball-bearings) for a considerable period of time.

When classes began in 1930 Lieutenant Kenneth Walker was comfortable in the niche, he had worked so hard all his life to find. He was sometimes even referred to as the "high priest" of strategic bombing. Few dared argue "pursuit vs. bombing" with Kenneth Walker, and proponents of the latter strategy might well have steamrolled through the ongoing controversy in the years that followed but for a new student who arrived with the 1930 class at ACTS.

Claire L. Chennault arrived with a reputation as a top pursuit pilot with all the positives and negatives that are traditionally inherent in a good fighter pilot. No man alive could have swayed Kenneth Walker's belief that bombers would replace fighter planes. Conversely, even the irascible Kenneth Walker could not convince Chennault that bombers were second to a pursuit in the winning of wars. The stage was set for a classic clash of ideas which, despite its intensity, was ultimately good for ACTS and the future of aviation.

Despite their differences, the two men had much in common. Each was single-minded and obsessed with his personal theory for the future of combat aviation. Either man could become quite animated and emotional in the debates that followed. Chennault was a heavy smoker; Kenneth Walker smoked more. Students from the period did tend to give the edge to Walker, who generally was more vehement in his expressions than the blatantly blunt but soft-toned, southern-drawled Chennault. All knew that there could be no winner when the two men engaged in the "bomber vs. pursuit" debates, but the diatribe was at the very least, most entertaining. As the school year wore on it was not unusual during moments of relative boredom, for others to maneuver the two

opponents into a verbal battle. Observers later described the two men as “rabid”.

Lieutenant Walker did hold two advantages over Chennault. One was the overwhelming support of a majority of the cadre at ACTS for his position on bombardment. The other was the fact that Kenneth Walker was a popular instructor and well-liked by almost everyone who ever met him. Chennault had a rough exterior and an abrasive personality, personality traits some would say are two commodities that make up a good fighter pilot. All that aside, Chennault was not well-accepted or liked by many of the students, and he was hard-pressed for allies even among those who agreed with his position on pursuit vs. bombardment.

When Lieutenant Walker left ACTS in 1933, the five years of study and debate at Langley Field had crystallized into a well-defined doctrine of deployment and tactics for America’s air assets. It was based around high-altitude, daylight precision bombing attacks, neither of which the Air Corps had the technology to accomplish in 1933. Like Douhet, Kenneth Walker anticipated that the necessary heavy bombers and aerial targeting technology would develop in the future, and continued to be the leader in defining this role. He is often accredited with the creation of the term “bombardier”, which was sprinkled liberally through his writings as a synonym for the traditional term “bomber”.

Walker’s 1931 and subsequent writings spelled out what became generally accepted Air Corps theory for aerial warfare:

> *“Whenever we speak in terms of ‘air force’ we are thinking of bombardment aviation.”*
>
> *“Bombardment aviation, properly employed, can shatter a nation’s will to resist; it can destroy the economical and industrial structures which made possible the very existence of modern civilization.”*

As to the subject of a separate (from the Army and Navy) American Air Force, Walker believed as Billy Mitchell had proclaimed throughout the previous decade, that an adequate American Air Force would be our nation’s best, the first line of defense against aggression:

> *"No enemy would consider launching an invasion (against the United States) if he were convinced that we were in possession of a bombardment force capable of destroying (vital enemy establishments)."*
>
> *"The importance of an air force to our national security (should be appreciated) not in terms, for example, of a mere adjunct to our ground forces, such as cavalry or field artillery and designed only to further the infantry mission—but as a force with a distinct mission, of importance co-equal to that of the Army and the Navy."*

For Claire Chennault, the turning tide of Air Corps doctrine was a difficult defeat. In 1937 he resigned from the Air Corps citing health problems; he had been ill through much of his career. Many of his own theories of pursuit combat and his emphasis upon early warning systems were validated five years later when he commanded the famous Flying Tigers of the American Volunteer Group in the China-Burma theater. Time and World War II would further validate many of the concepts of both Walker and Chennault, and illustrate the associated weaknesses in their individual myopic views of air doctrine. Ultimately, their debates were critical to the growth and definition of the Air Corps that both men loved.

Problems at Home

When Lieutenant Walker departed ACTS in 1933, he had given the Army nearly fifteen years of his life and was still a first lieutenant. He had earned his silver bar upon being commissioned in the Regular Army in 1920, reverted back to the second lieutenant in 1922, and then reclaimed the first lieutenant in 1924. There were jokes that he was the most senior first lieutenant in the Air Corps.

From 1933 to 1935 Lieutenant Walker was assigned to the Command and General Staff School at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. The focus at CGSS was on training and preparing officers for higher command with ground forces, hardly the kind of curricula an air enthusiast like Walker wanted or felt he needed. Throughout his career, Walker had always been immaculate, impeccable in uniform and protocol, and well-organized in the performance of duty—perhaps even to a fault. But CGSS was important to the resume of an ambitious officer and Walker dutifully completed the course. He was promoted to captain shortly after graduating in 1935.

The Walker family at Fort Leavenworth in the fall of 1933 with two small boys, Kenneth N. Walker, Jr., who was now six years old, and an infant son named Douglas. Upon their arrival the elder Walker took his oldest son for his first airplane ride, flying in a two-seater to point out the family's new home below. It was a rare personal moment in the life of a man obsessed with his work; it was one of the few good memories of his father that Ken, Jr., was left. In the following year, things

only became worse.

Those who knew Ken Walker during his life were invariably attracted to him; he was an easily likable man. Still, those who knew him described him as obsessed with his work, unable to relax, and highly driven. These were the character traits that enabled him to define an air force, draft the plan to win World War II, and become an Air Force legend. They were also the flaws that led to two divorces and his subsequent comment in May 1942 that, “I’ve made a terrible mess of things here.”

In 1934 Marguerite and the two Walker boys moved to Roanoke, Virginia, (and later to California). Kenneth Walker remarried soon thereafter, fathering a son named John. Ken Walker maintained contact with his two older sons but quickly lost all contact with the infant when the second marriage ended shortly after John’s birth.

Perhaps the most notable event of the period during which Walker was serving in Kansas came late in 1934 when he was invited to testify before the Howell Commission of the newly formed Federal Aviation Commission. The hearings were part of an ongoing series of investigations by numerous boards and commissions into the “air forces” issue, prompted in large part by numerous fatal accidents following the ill-conceived policy of using Air Corps planes and pilots to fly the mail. Walker was joined by Robert Old’s, Donald Wilson, and ACTS friend and bombardment advocate Harold George.

Though nearly a decade had passed since the court-martial of Billy Mitchell, the response to his aggressive advocacy of a separate air force still weighed heavily on the minds of all airmen and tempered their remarks. War Department policy endorsed the opinion of the 1925 Morrow Board and subsequent 1934 Baker Board that the Air Corps should remain under the War Department and U.S. Army control. Walker and his fellow witnesses were cautioned by the general staff to ensure that their testimony adhered to this official policy.

Despite “official policy” and “the ghost of the court-martial of Billy Mitchell,” Lieutenant Walker and his fellow aviators mustered the courage to testify their convictions. George advised the board that the airplane was a method of waging war, not just a weapon like a rifle. Old’s advocated investing in building a strong air force, reminding the commission that “what we maintain during peace is what we have to fight with when war begins.”

Wilson addressed the air force as the primary tool for national defense, noting that the climate in Europe was already pointing towards potential for future conflict. Walker was succinct in his daring testimony. “National Defense is not the responsibility alone, of an Army, a Navy, or yet of an Air Force. It is the mission of the combined forces, in which each must play its part,” he advised. “Unless we

create an adequate and separate Air Force, this next war will begin in the air and end in the mud—in the mud and debris of the demolished industries that have brought us to our knees."

After hearing 191 witnesses the commission was quick to note the lack of any unanimity among those who testified and would not recommend a separate air force. "There is ample reason," the Commission did report, "to believe that aircraft have now passed far beyond their former position as useful auxiliaries, and must in the future be considered and utilized as an important means of exerting directly the will of the Commander in Chief."

The untainted testimony of Walker, Old's, George, and Wilson was a courageous action that might well have ended their careers. Ultimately General C. E. Kilbourne, Assistant Chief of Staff, War Plans Division, concluded that the four men who voiced their convictions despite official policy gave a "constructive presentation." Their actions appear to have had no negative influence on their careers; they also failed to obtain the independent air force they believed was necessary for the next war.

In 1935 as Captain Kenneth Walker settled into his new assignment with the 11th Bombardment Squadron, 7th Bomb Group at Hamilton Field, California, two events occurred that set the stage for the ultimate test of his theories of aerial bombardment.

One of the leaders in aircraft design in the early 1930s was Clairmont Egtvedt, a forward-thinking engineer who went on to become chairman of Boeing. While delivering an early fighter to the Navy he was struck by a Naval officer's observance that, despite all the progress in the field of aviation, there was still no counterpart to the battleship in the aerial arsenal. When the Army issued a challenge to aircraft manufacturers in 1934 to develop a multi-engine bomber capable of speeds above 200 miles an hour and with a service ceiling of 20,000 – 25,000 feet, the race was on to build the first battleship counterpart.

On July 28, 1935, Egtvedt unveiled his new 4-engine, all-metal Boeing Test Bomber Model 229, the forerunner of the B-17. In test flights the giant battleship of the air averaged 252 miles per hour, setting a non-stop speed record from Seattle to Wright Field in Dayton, Ohio. The technology was finally catching up to theory, and the Air Corps, at last, had a bomber capable of

operating from its home base to transport tons of bombs and deliver them on an enemy target hundreds of miles away. Five .30-caliber and .50-caliber machine guns spread throughout the bomber's 70-foot length, providing it with a veritable wall of protection against enemy fighters. Though technical details remained shrouded in secrecy, the large Boeing bomber captured the attention of all who saw her, and the press reports referred to it as a Flying Fortress. The moniker would stick for generations.

That same year inventor Carl Norden introduced a new bombsight. It was a complicated device into which a bombardier dialed such variables as airspeed, drift, and altitude while scanning the countryside below through an optical lens. Once set, the gyroscopes could control the airplane and drop its bombs on a target mile below. The new invention was so accurate that bombardiers often exclaimed they could drop a bomb into a pickle barrel from 20,000 feet. When asked once if that assessment was true, Norden reportedly responded, "Which pickle would you like to hit."

Coupled with the Flying Fortress, the Norden Bomb Sight at last made possible the kind of high-altitude, daylight bombing of distant enemies that Douhet had envisioned and that men like Kenneth Walker had believed would someday be possible.

Even more than the B-17, the bomb site was shrouded in utmost secrecy. During World War II more than 45,000 bombardiers were trained in its use. Each swore an oath to carefully guard the secrets of the Norden Bomb Sight. In the field, a similar oath to protect the sight from falling into enemy hands was repeated by bombardiers before their missions.

During the war, the sight was normally installed before each mission, then removed upon completion and carefully guarded. When Colonel Jimmy Doolittle conducted his famous Tokyo bombing raid in April 1942, one of the first concerns was for protecting the secret of the Norden Bomb Sight. All of Doolittle's bombers were stripped of the Norden Sight, and replaced with a more rudimentary aiming device.

The Bombardier's Oath

Mindful of the secret trust about to be placed in me by my Commander in Chief, the President of the United States, by whose direction I have been chosen for bombardier training…

And mindful of the fact that I am to become guardian of one of my country's most priceless military assets, the American bombsight…

I do here, in the presence of Almighty God, swear by the Bombardier's Code of Honor to keep inviolate the secrecy of any and all confidential information revealed to me, and further to uphold the honor and integrity of the Army Air Forces, if need be, with my life itself.

The B-17 prototype (Model 299) was destroyed in a crash on October 30, 1935, only three months after it was unveiled in Seattle. But the merits of the new Flying Fortress were obvious and the Air Corps ordered more. The first of fourteen bombers in the initial service-test order were delivered in 1937. On December 23, 1937, in Denver, Colorado, newspaper headlines reported: "FLYING FORTRESS CRACKS UP IN DENVER BUT CREW OF NINE ESCAPES INJURY." The bomber that failed in its attempt to lift off from Denver Municipal Airport, that then jumped a six-foot embankment and slid half-a-mile to come to rest in the middle of a highway, was piloted by a hometown boy—Kenneth Walker. His "presence of mind" and "expert maneuvering" were credited with preventing loss of life or more extensive damage. Two months after the Denver crash Kenneth Walker was assigned to a 3-year tour of duty in Hawaii, first as operations officer for the 5th Bomb Group and then ironically enough, as commander of the 18th Pursuit Group based out of Wheeler Field. Even among the Pursuit pilots, bombardment's "high priest" was a well-liked officer. Kenneth Walker was the kind of commander who always looked out for the men who served under him, and such an attitude was greatly appreciated.

Unfortunately, Ken Walker the father never learned to relate so well to his own family. During the summer of 1940 Ken Walker, Jr., came to visit his father in Hawaii for a month. It was their first time together since the divorce. The two enjoyed a few sight-seeing trips but the elder Walker seemed unable to find his niche as a father or to find the ways to express his love. Marguerite later recalled, "He was a good father…. but his career came first."

AWPD-1: The Plan to Defeat Hitler

The year 1941 was a good year for the Army Air Corps. On July 20, the organization was expanded and renamed the "U. S. Army Air Force". Air Corps Chief Henry Hap Arnold got a new title…Chief of the Army Air Force…and a few months later he got a third star making him a lieutenant general. General Arnold's role placed him in a position

to report directly to the Army's Chief of Staff, General George C. Marshall. The Army Air Force, while not yet independent of or co-equal with the Army, had at last taken a major step towards both high-level recognition and new levels of autonomy.

General Arnold's Assistant Chief, Plans, was Brigadier General Carl A. "Tooey" Spaatz, an old friend of Ken Walker from his days at ACTS. In January 1941 Lieutenant Colonel Kenneth Walker returned from Hawaii for a position in General Spaatz's office, which also employed old friend Robert Olds. Since both Arnold and Spaatz leaned more towards an air force built around bombardment over the pursuit, the climate was ripe for Walker's doctrines to flourish.

A major project of the Plans Division that year was the reorganization of the Air Corps to provide some degree of independence in operation. General Arnold was granted an air staff comparable to the Army's General Staff and some of the first problems to be addressed were related to that reorganization. Another of Ken Walker's jobs, ironically enough, was to provide guidance and assistance to retired Captain Richard Alworth of the Central Aircraft Manufacturing Company (CAMCO). This was a project initially rejected by General Arnold, who had been in turn overruled by the President himself.

Though the war was raging in Europe the United States was still at peace and operating under an outward policy of neutrality. Inside the highest levels of government, however, there was increasing concern over Nazi aggression in Europe and Japanese expansion and aggression in Asia and the Pacific. CAMCO was a highly secret organization with a quasi-official sanction to send American pilots and equipment to China to fight in her defense as part of the AVG, the American Volunteer Group. The man who organized and led that defense, the man whom Kenneth Walker indirectly worked for in the spring of 1941, was Claire Chennault.

In July, President Roosevelt requested a plan from both the War Department and the Department of the Navy to examine and estimate the production requirements necessary to defeat potential enemies should the United States be forced to choose sides in the ongoing war. For three weeks the Army's War Plans Division (WPD) met to speculate and draft their report. The most elusive information needed for that report dealt with air assets. It was elusive because there was no precedent upon which to base an estimate.

Among the WPD staff was Lieutenant Colonel Clayton Bissell, a World War I ace. Bissell suggested that the WPD obtain assistance from General Arnold's new (under the reorganization of 1941) Air War Plans Division (AWPD) which was headed up by Lieutenant Colonel Harold George. When the WPD agreed to call for advice, George provided a counteroffer: the AWPD would actually write the air annex for the report.

It was a monumental task with an impossible deadline. The new AWPD consisted primarily of three planning officers: George, Lieutenant Colonel Kenneth Walker, and Major Haywood Hansell. These were being called upon to accomplish a job that should have been prepared by scores of officers over a period of months. Their deadline for completion was fewer than two weeks away. Even so, it was the opportunity for which airmen had pleaded for decades. Major Hansell summed up the three men's motivation when he said, "We realized instinctively that a major milestone had been reached. Suddenly, without anywhere near the opposition we expected, we found ourselves able to plan our own future."

For nine days the three men developed and wrote a plan for organizing, equipping, deploying, and employing the Army Air Force to defeat Germany and/or Japan should the United States be dragged into the war. Not only was the future of the Air Force at stake in their efforts, perhaps the fate of the entire country. The men walked a fine line, balancing what they believed would be necessary to win that war, against a historical reluctance to properly finance and support airpower.

The three men also had to revisit the argument of bombers vs. pursuit, and recommend the number of air assets accordingly. As could be expected, bombardment won out, but the pursuit was not ignored. At midnight on August 11 the finished plan, subsequently labeled AWPD-1, was turned over to the War Department. The three men had not only measured, predicted, and advised as to the air assets the looming war might require, but they developed a tactical air plan for defeating the enemy. The foundation of that victory, they postulated, would be built upon massive, daylight bombing missions to cripple the enemy's ability to sustain the war and pave the way for a land invasion. Though the plan saw some revisions in the years that followed, it is not over-simplistic to note that it was this very plan indeed, that ultimately led to the defeat of the Third Reich. (Ironically, the tactics put forth in AWPD-1 are strikingly similar to the U.S. Air Force bombing campaign that brought Baghdad and Sadam Hussein to their knees more than half-a-century later.)

In retrospect, historians today are amazed that three men could so thoroughly have defined that war plan in just nine days. The fact is, AWPD-1 was formulated by hundreds of airmen. A balanced and strategically sound war plan annex was delivered to the President in September 1941 because of the five years of debate that had caused occasional concern at ACTS a decade earlier. The three men of AWPD had simply recalled all they had heard and then committed those lessons to paper.

Ken Jr. and Douglas (Walker) met their father at the airport in Los Angeles. There had been a similar meeting when he came through Los Angeles en route from Hawaii to Washington. On that earlier occasion, the first time Douglas remembered his father at all, he wore a business suit and took his son's shopping and then to lunch. This time, he wore his uniform—first khakis, then the three went to his hotel where he changed into full dress. He bought a bouquet of flowers for Marguerite, then he and the boys boarded a trolley to her home in Glendale.

> *"You can imagine the immense pride I experienced," Douglas later wrote, "as the passengers on the crowded trolley began to realize there was a general officer standing among them."*
>
> *Only nine years old, Douglas also felt "an odd sensation of verification. Here I was, like everyone I knew, with a father." He remembered little more about the visit, except that his father kissed his mother politely on the cheek, then stood in the kitchen door and talked to her as she finished preparing their meal.*
>
> *Kenneth Walker had done all he could do in the States. The next day, he boarded a plane and turned his face toward the Southwest Pacific.*
>
> *Martha Byrd*
> *Kenneth Walker, Airpower's Untempered Crusader*

The Flying General

Newly promoted Brigadier General Kenneth Walker arrived in Australia in July 1942 to find the Far East American Air Force (FEAAF) in a state of total disarray. The command supposedly consisted of five bombardment groups, three pursuit groups, two transport squadrons, and one photographic squadron. Most were grossly under strength and trying to conduct warfare in badly battered equipment. One of the bombardment groups was the 19th, which had been nearly decimated in the Philippines during the first weeks of the war. Those bombers that had survived were beaten up, battle-scarred, worn down, and unreliable. The 19th Bomb Group's B-17s were so far beyond reliability that General MacArthur, even after his harrowing escape from Corregidor in a battered PT boat, had refused to fly out of harm's way at Mindanao in one of

them.

That incident had been the final straw in another of the major problems in the FEAAF, a lack of confidence in the command structure. MacArthur not only had no confidence in the airplanes of his air force, but he also had no confidence in his air commander Lieutenant General George Brett. After the fiasco at Mindanao MacArthur had wired Washington, D.C., to have his air chief immediately replaced. General Arnold assigned the one man he believed could accomplish two goals: organize his air force, and, stand face-to-face with MacArthur who had a reputation of being exceedingly demanding of his top commanders. That man was a World War I veteran who had flown 75 combat missions, shot down two enemy planes, survived being shot down himself, and earned the Distinguished Service Cross and Silver Star. He was Major General George Kenney.

When General Walker arrived at Brisbane early in July along with Brigadier General Enis C. Whitehead, Kenney was still en route and Brett was still in charge. There was little that could be done immediately to correct the problems in MacArthur's air force, for Brett himself had been locked out of MacArthur's headquarters for three months. Though MacArthur knew nothing of air operations, because he had virtually no confidence in the airmen or their machines, he made all the decisions. His chief of staff General Richard K. Sutherland, an equally obstinate and perhaps even more overbearing commander than MacArthur himself, ordered all air missions.

To occupy Walker and Whitehead until General Kenney arrived, Brett instructed the two men to make separate inspection tours of the various squadrons throughout the theater. Despite the fact that General Sutherland was now directing all air operations, Brett also asked Walker to evaluate current bombardment methods and strategies in the hope that things might change with the arrival of Kenney.

In an interview after the war, General Whitehead stated that upon his arrival in Australia he was, "shocked by the confusion and lack of organization" he found. The inspection tours the two new American generals in Australia conducted through the month of July served only to reflect that his observation was an understatement. The airmen themselves knew that their Supreme Allied Commander had no confidence in his air arm, and it seemed that every American officer in Australia with a star on his collar also had a "chip on his shoulder". Morale was at a very low ebb.

The Air Force’s newest general proved to be something different. As Ken Walker toured the squadrons throughout Australia, he appeared to honestly care about what was happening and seemed genuinely interested in the work the men were doing. General Walker wanted to fly missions with his men, to take the same risks that they took, and to fully understand what they were facing. The man with a star on his collar actually even waited in the chow line with them instead, of seeking any preference because of his rank. One story circulated that a corporal in line ahead of the general once offered to exchange places, but Walker declined to say he would wait his turn. At that very moment, a second lieutenant passed through, confidently cutting into the front of the line. General Walker, the story continued, left his position and walked to the serving line where he took the upstart young officer by the arm and escorted him to the end of the line to await his turn.

And fly General Walker did! His first flight on a B-17 was an unarmed reconnaissance mission that saw no enemy fighter resistance. Walker later admitted, “I was foolishly disappointed for a while.” A short time later Japanese anti-aircraft fire erupted from below and Walker recalled, “Shell fragments sounded like hail on the wings, and we got one fair-sized hole in the right-wing. It was my first time under fire, but I was so interested that I forgot to feel concerned.”

Walker’s flights had a purpose beyond a drive for excitement. The high priest of strategic bombardment wanted to test and observe the doctrines he had preached for more than a decade. Unfortunately, the war in the South Pacific was outside the scope of the massive bombardment of an enemy industry that Walker had always believed would cripple a foe. The Japanese had no industrial complexes in the theater. Instead, the targets were against ships that flooded the region with war materials and Japanese troops. These ships were a far smaller target than a large factory, and were often underway, making them difficult moving targets. For all the bombs that rained from the B-17s operating out of Australia, little damage was being done. Thus, Walker’s repeated missions with his fliers became a method of observing their effect and revising tactics.

Walker's decision to fly with his men and share their risks had an immediate and profoundly positive impact on morale. This was noted, along with the value of his first-hand observations, when he was awarded the Silver Star in August.

Captain Fred Dollenburg, Walker's aide and pilot once told news reporters, "The general figures he can't tell the boys how to go out and get shot at unless he's willing to get shot at too."

Regarding Walker's uncommon practice (for a general officer) of waiting in chow lines, mingling with his men on a personal level, and treating the lowest ranking man with dignity and respect, clerk/typist William Travis recalled, "(General Walker was) the best soldier I ever knew, from every point of view. Even without the externals of rank, you knew he was the general."

For gallantry in action over Port Moresby, New Guinea, during July 1942. This Officer took part in four different missions over enemy territory, each time being subjected to heavy enemy fire from anti-aircraft and fighter planes. The large amount of first-hand information gained by General Walker has proved of inestimable value in the performance of his duties. His complete disregard for personal safety, above and beyond the call of duty, has proved highly stimulating to the morale of all Air Force personnel with whom he has come in contact. Such courage and gallantry are in keeping with the finest American traditions and are worthy of the highest commendation.

Walker was unimpressed with Australia ("things are a little drab"), deeply saddened by the living conditions of his men, aghast at the deplorable condition of their equipment, and angered by the lack of organization and supply. But he did find one thing to admire in the quagmire that was the 1942 FEAAF, the young pilots and their crews. These were brave young men who struggled with almost nothing, to turn back a seemingly unbeatable advance of Japanese aggression in the South Pacific. Whenever a bombing mission was mounted, half of the assigned aircraft would often be forced to turn back due to mechanical failures. When bombers got through to their destination, their bombs seldom hit the targets.

Walker was impressed with the fact that the B-17s had a good record of fighting off attacking Zeroes. This validated his fundamental doctrine that a well-flown bombing

mission couldn't be stopped. Force by fuel limitations to conducting long-range operations without fighter escorts, the heavily armed B-17s generally held their own against enemy pursuit. In an August 11 letter to his sons back in California Walker wrote in part:

> *"(I) Was up at a Pursuit Group in NW last week. The group has shot down 60 Jap planes and has lost only five in combat—a pretty good record. All the pilots are young kids—with a fine spirit. One of the pilots I met has 10 japs to his credit—a couple of others had eight apiece. We have had of course and will continue to have losses—they don't shoot rubber bullets—but our boys will lick them.*
>
> *"(I) Just had dinner with a 2d Lt who is just out of the hospital. A zero got on his tail and shot him down. He bailed out at around 500 feet. Pulled out of a dive of about 500 mph and managed to get out. These young pilots are plenty brave."*
>
> *"General George Kenney has just arrived to relieve General Brett who is going to Washington. (I) Am very happy that George is taking command and know that he will make a splendid commander and I'm proud to serve under him."*
>
> 
>
> *"Every time (General Hap Arnold) got something going wrong, he would say, 'Send George Kenney out there; he is a lucky SOB.*
>
> *He will straighten it out.' I never was supposed to have any brains. I was just lucky." (General George Churchill Kenney)*

Major General George Kenney

General Arnold's troubleshooter was pretty comfortable in the Spring of 1942, commanding the Fourth Air Force based at the Presidio in San Francisco. His crisis during the early days of the war tended to be simplistic and mundane, like the young lieutenant he had reprimanded only moments before General Arnold's call. The P-38 pilot had been stunting in the worst way. First, he'd looped the-loop around the Golden Gate Bridge. Then he'd buzzed in low over Market Street while waving to secretaries on the second floor of their office buildings. Kenney chewed out the young air officer, then dispatched him to Oakland to help a woman who had complained

that the low-flying fighter had blown her clothes off the line where she'd hung them to dry.

General Arnold's call, arriving even as the chastened lieutenant departed, suddenly complicated General Kenney's life. Hap Arnold had problems in Australia where the Far East American Air Force was a mess. It was the place where General MacArthur's Chief of Staff had literally excluded the top air commander from MacArthur, and where the supreme commander himself was demanding the air commander's immediate replacement. George Brett was out and Arnold needed someone to replace him, clean up the mess, and if at all possible, to prove to MacArthur that his air force could be a major factor in his Pacific War.

In fact, Kenney had not been General Arnold's first choice. Initially, Hap wanted to send Lieutenant General Frank Andrews, but the commander of the Caribbean Defense Command had been at odds with MacArthur for years. In so many words Andrews advised Arnold that he was appalled that the air chief would even consider that he would ever work for MacArthur. The two men's previous battles and mutual, long-standing distaste for each other aside, every officer in the Army knew that Douglas MacArthur was a demanding and difficult man to work for.

Arnold's deputy chief, General Laurence S. Kuter, then recommended Kenney for the job. Arnold was dubious. The World War I hero and outspoken air advocate had a tendency to speak his mind in blunt and sometimes caustic fashion. Arnold doubted Kenney would last long under MacArthur, but the man's qualifications matched those called for by the impossible mission at hand. Arnold called Kenney to Washington to reassign him.

Kenney did not have General Andrew's reluctance towards working for MacArthur; his major complaint was the nature of his mission. Under the ABC-1 War Plan hammered out with Churchill the previous year, the Pacific campaign was secondary to defeating Hitler in Germany. Kenney was not happy with an assignment that called on him to wage a strictly defensive war. His objections aside, Kenney dutifully accepted the assignment and laid out a few requirements of his own. He wanted 3,000 para frag bombs shipped to Australia for his arsenal. He also wanted fifty P-38s and pilots of the Fourth Air Force transferred to his new command in Australia. Among those pilots, he wanted to include the young officer he had just finished chewing out when Arnold called him to Washington, a daring young pilot by the name of Lieutenant Richard Ira Bong.

General Kenney arrived in Australia at the end of July and was summoned almost immediately to MacArthur's office. The Allied Commander waved his new air chief to a black sofa and then began speaking while he paced the floor. "For the next half hour,

I really heard about the shortcoming of the Air Force in general and the Allied Air Forces in the Southwest Pacific in particular," he later wrote in his autobiography. "They couldn't bomb, their staff work was poor, and their commanders knew nothing about leadership."

Throughout the tirade Kenney kept his cool, returning MacArthur's gaze with his own. He later remembered MacArthur seemed to be "appraising" him as he talked, sizing him up. General George Kenney was up to the challenge and thus advised MacArthur after the long lecture. "If for any reason, I found that I couldn't work for him, I would tell him so and do everything in my power to get relieved," Kenney remembered telling his new boss.

When Kenney had finished his own brief comments MacArthur walked to him, put his arm around his shoulders, and said, "George, I think we're going to get along."

For Kenney's predecessor General Brett, it had been less a matter of getting along with MacArthur, than one of even getting through to him. Even before he had fallen out of favor with his boss, Brett had found it difficult to communicate with or to him. MacArthur's Chief of Staff General Sutherland was overly efficient in screening the commander's appointments, calls, and visitors. Sutherland had MacArthur's confidence, he had an ego, and he had rank. In the interim after MacArthur fired Brett, Sutherland locked the air chief out of the American high command in Australia and began scheduling the bombing missions.

A few days after arriving in Australia, General Kenney became aware that General Sutherland was already usurping his own authority as the new air chief, and was continuing to order bombing missions. The showdown that General Arnold had feared when he assigned Kenney to the FEAAF came in Kenney's first week on the job. His reaction vividly illustrates the kind of man and indomitable leader Kenney was. Ultimately, over the next year, General George C. Kenney would contribute more to MacArthur's success in the Pacific than perhaps any other single individual.

On the date of the first showdown, an obviously irate General Kenney strode directly into Sutherland's office, perched on his desk, and grabbed a pencil and a piece of paper. Drawing a small dot in the center of the paper, Kenney looked General Sutherland in the eyes and stated: "That is what you know about airpower. The rest of the sheet is what I know about it."

Sutherland was caught off-guard and blustered. Kenney met his reaction firmly and stated flatly, "Let's go…see General MacArthur. I want to find out who is supposed to run this air force.

The question of who was in charge of the air war in the Pacific was settled at that

moment. Sutherland backed down and the road was paved for air officers to begin planning their own missions and controlling their own destiny in the Pacific for the years to come. General Arnold would later say of Kenney, “No air commander ever did so much with so little.”

MacArthur was even more glowing in his later assessment, stating, “Of all the commanders of our major air forces engaged in World War II, none surpassed General Kenney in those three great essentials of successful combat leadership: aggressive vision, mastery over air strategy and tactics, and the ability to exact the maximum in fighting qualities from both men and equipment.”

The leadership and tactical genius of George Kenney endeared him to MacArthur because the highly resourceful airman ultimately validated his commander’s oft-risky strategies and contributed materially to their success. It is no infringement upon Kenney’s abilities to note as well, that his own early success in building a viable air force out of the debris of the FEAAF was largely the result of the vision, hard work, and leadership of Generals Walker and Whitehead.

General Kenney established his headquarters at Brisbane, Australia, where MacArthur was headquartered. From there Kenney could issue orders for bombing missions in the combat theaters. To carry out those missions, General Walker was named commander of all Allied air assets in the region. In September, with the reorganization of the FEAAF as the new 5th Air Force, General Walker was named commander of the 5th Bomber Command. In both roles, he was based out of Townsville, north of Brisbane.

General Whitehead was dispatched north across the 600-mile expanse of the Coral Sea to operate as the forward echelon commander. His command operated out of Port Moresby. The tenuously held Allied city and port were the forward staging areas for the bombing missions General Walker launched out of Townsville.

When Kenny left Washington, D.C., for Australia he had told General Arnold, “I am going to get rid of a lot of Air Corps deadwood.” Upon his arrival, he did just that, not only in terms of personnel but also in terms of procedures. On August 9 General George C. Marshall established the 5th Air Force, delegating command to Kenney.

Kenney determined to build that command as a fighting Air Force, not a paper-work jungle and administrative boondoggle. Once, upon learning that it was not uncommon for needed supplies to be delayed because of improperly filled out paperwork, he simplified the procedures immediately with the biting comment: “You don’t win wars with file cabinets.”

While Kenny was getting rid of the “deadwood” and organizing his 5th Air Force (though authorized on August 9 it was not formalized until September 3), General Whitehead and Ken Walker were refining operations and building infrastructure. Kenney had indicated that he intended to take an active role in the combat mission of his Air Force, issuing orders from Brisbane to Walker at Townsville. In that first month, however, the need for organizational and administrative changes kept him occupied and left Walker with the freedom to plan and organize the missions himself.

The month of August 1942 was an important one for Ken Walker. It was a trial period for his own concepts of strategic bombardment, along with constant re-evaluation and revision based upon changing conditions and tactical necessity. Of the effort, during that period General Kenney noted, “(We are) inventing new ways to win a war on a shoestring. We are doing things nearly every day that were never in the books. It really is remarkable what you can do with an airplane if you really try; anytime I can’t think of something screwy enough, I have a flock of people out here to help me.”

On August 7, U.S. Marines landed at Guadalcanal and Tulagi in the Solomon Islands, expanding the air force area of operations eastward to support the men on the ground. Even as desperate as the situation was on Guadalcanal, however, perhaps the most tenuous Allied position was at Port Moresby on the Papuan Peninsula of New Guinea. This was the seaport city where General Whitehead was trying to establish airfields and logistical support for the raids launched by Walker out of Townsville.

The Desperate Weeks

The Papuan Peninsula juts out into the Coral Sea from the east side of New Guinea, with Port Moresby on its southern coast. Only 600 miles from Australia, in 1942 Port Moresby was the only Allied stronghold in the region. It was the last line of defense between Tokyo and Australia. Invading and taking Port Moresby (Operation MO) had been the primary objective of the Japanese incursion that led to the Battle of the Coral Sea on May 7 & 8, 1942. Despite the failure of that invasion, the Japanese refused to concede the important port to the Allies. In July, the Japs landed thousands of seasoned jungle fighters along the northern coast of the peninsula, fortifying positions at Lae, Salamaua, Gona, Buna, and points in between.

While General Whitehead busied himself with turning Port Moresby into a forward staging area for the missions Walker was dispatching out of Townsville, the Japanese were doing their best to gain control of the important seaport. On August 13 more than 11,000 Japanese troops began the arduous march over the Owen Stanley Range, quickly routing the valiant but grossly outnumbered Australian defenders. American bombing missions were mounted repeatedly against Buna, Lae, Rabaul, and other Japanese targets, but they seemed futile to stemming the steady influx of soldiers and supplies.

Meanwhile, on August 25, the Japanese landed more than 1,200 troops at Milne Bay on the far east side of the peninsula. They followed up by reinforcing them with an additional 1,200 jungle fighters the following day. Ten days of fierce battle raged before the enemy force was forced to retreat. When the 1,300 Japanese survivors of the failed Milne Bay invasion pulled out on September 5, it signaled the first ground defeat of the Japanese forces in the Pacific. It was a badly needed piece of good news that at last contradicted the common perception of Japanese invincibility.

When Japanese ships pulled out of Milne Bay to evacuate survivors of the failed assault, enemy forces moving on Port Moresby from the north had advanced down the southern slopes of the Owen Stanley Range and were less than 30 miles from the port city. It was a somber, uncertain time. With their backs to the wall, resistance by the Australian soldiers stiffened and the tide of battle began to turn. In Australia General MacArthur was eager to commit his first American ground forces to the battle

but was hampered by the 600-mile expanse of the Japanese infested ocean. General Kenney suggested using the Air Force to quickly transport troops and equipment to reinforce Port Moresby. Fifty years after World War II the concept seems a logical solution, but in 1942 it was a novel, untried approach. In mid-September Fifth, Air Force C-47s began the transport of half of two full combat teams of the 32nd Infantry Division to New Guinea. They were joined at the end of the month by the remainder of their troops and personnel who came by ship.

The success of the airmobile infantry concept endeared Kenney to General MacArthur and gave the Supreme Commander a new appreciation for his airmen. Where General Brett had seldom seen MacArthur and was totally excluded from his inner circle from April to July, General Kenney and his air combat leadership became an integral part of strategy and planning. When Hap Arnold visited Australia at the end of September, MacArthur told him General Kenney was “a real leader and has the finest bunch of pilots I have ever seen.”


(L-R) Unidentified, Generals MacArthur, Blamey, Kenney, Unidentified, Ken Walker

MacArthur was equally full of praise for Generals Walker and Whitehead.

When Port Moresby was at last secured in mid-September the Allies went on the offensive. Japanese troops and material poured daily into the large harbor at Rabaul, from which the enemy made nightly runs to resupply their forces at New Guinea and in the Solomon Islands. As a result, Kenneth Walker’s 5th Bombardment Group had no shortage of targets. Missions were mounted against airfields at Lae and Buna, enemy positions along the northern coast of New Guinea, shipping ports and airfields at Rabaul, troops transports, and resupply ships throughout the Bismarck and Solomon Seas.

On September 21, The Seattle Daily News reported on General Walker’s leadership and efforts in the air missions in the battle for New Guinea:

General Roams Over Plane
While His Boys Raid Japs

By Associated Press.
GENERAL MacARTHUR'S HEADQUARTERS, Australia

A young American general aims at flying with his boys against the Japanese at least once a week and shows he means business by going on 11 raids in less than two months. He is Brig. Gen. K. N. Walker, 43 years old, of Washington, D.C., whose wife and two sons aged 14 and 9, live in the United States Capitol.

Boys All Like Him

"The boys in the south of Australia think the world of him," said the general's aid and pilot Capt. Fred P. Dollenberg of Philadelphia. "They figure things aren't so bad if a general's willing to go along and get shot at."

Carrying a bottle of oxygen, General Walker moves about a plane as it flies on its mission at a high altitude, Captain Dollenberg said.

"He climbs through the bomb bay and watches the rear gunner or the side gunners blast at Zeroes and when we are over the target he watches the bombardier as he gets set to drop his bombs," he went on. "Wandering all over a plane like that isn't healthy but the general figures he can't tell the boys how to go out and get shot at unless he's willing to get shot at too."

General Walker, one of the youngest generals in the United States Army Air Forces, was in the War Plans Division in Washington before coming to Australia about three months ago.

The latest raid in which he took part was one against Rabaul, New Britain, deep in Japanese-occupied territory, last Friday night. Fires were started which were visible 50 miles away.

The general rode in a Flying Fortress on that trip. On September 12 he was over Buna, New Guinea in what was probably the heaviest raid of the Southwest Pacific area. On that occasion, Flying Fortresses, medium and attack bombers, and fighters destroyed at least 27 Japanese planes and probably more on the ground.

One Mission A Week

"The general doesn't talk much about the raids," Dollenberg said, "But he figures he can't direct flights from the ground and tell the boys what they are doing wrong. "So he goes along and directs a flight from the air. If a plane gets out of formation he shouts his orders over the radio to get the hell back in line.

"The general figures on going on at least one mission a week. In less than two months he has been up with almost every squadron."

The high praise of General MacArthur and the glowing reports in the Times aside, the bombing campaign had actually not been going well. RAAF fighter pilots had played a pivotal role in turning back the enemy invasion at Milne Bay but Japanese Zeroes still had aerial superiority over the Owen Stanley Range. Meanwhile the infusion of new soldiers and war material flowed into Rabaul unabated. High altitude bombing of the airfields at Rabaul and the ships in its harbor had resulted in little damage and few if any, enemy ships sunk. General Walker was trying to refine his tactics, which

had always been based upon large armadas of bombers attacking from the formation at high altitudes. Because of the shortage of aircraft and replacement parts for damaged planes, most bombing raids could mount only a half-dozen Flying Fortresses for any single mission.

Kenney began to doubt the wisdom of high-altitude daylight attacks and started urging low-level, night bombing missions. Walker initially resisted, resulting in some tension between the two commanders.

To add to that tension, early in October Kenney ordered Walker and Whitehead to quit flying on the bombing missions. While the intelligence information and understanding of operations the two generals had gained from previous missions had been lauded, Kenney felt his two top field officers were too important to risk on further missions.

With his 5th Air Force operating well at the administrative level, General Kenney also began to take a more active role in the day-to-day missions with increased concern for their lack of major impact. On October 4 six B-17s bombed anti-aircraft batteries at Buna. Simultaneously, six B-25s attacked a Japanese convoy without hitting anything, and eleven B-17s made a bombing raid on Rabaul. Kenney recorded, “Reports show formation did not hold. (I) Wrote Walker and told him to stop piecemeal attacks.”

General Kenney began to push harder for low-level night bombing missions, and the use of skip bombs and instant fuses. The concepts were alien to all that Walker had ever espoused and, he felt, were needlessly dangerous to the safety of his men. He resisted when he could, grudgingly acquiesced when he could not resist.

It would be unfair to either man to define the disagreements that marked the two men’s relationship throughout November and December as a rift. Kenney wanted results; Walker’s resistance to Kenney’s ideas may have been seated more in concern for the safety of his men. Ultimately, most of Kenney’s methods proved accurate, especially in the case of skip-bombing which greatly improved the efficiency of the bombers against Japanese ships. According to one unverified story from the period, at one point when Kenney pulled rank, Ken Walker abruptly saluted him and spit out, “Okay, but (expletive) you, George.”

Walker’s boss was man enough, and had enough respect for Walker’s knowledge and ability, to brush off the incident. “Ken is O.K.,” he wrote. “(He is) stubborn, oversensitive, and a prima donna but works like a dog.”
In November General MacArthur moved his headquarters to Port Moresby though it was still subject to regular attacks from Japanese airplanes based at Lae, Buna, and

elsewhere in the region. Taking complete control of New Guinea was key to his island-hopping strategy to fight his way back to the Philippines. General Kenney convinced MacArthur that aerial superiority of the region was the key to success, stating in his typically blunt fashion that there was no sense, “Playing across the street” until the Allies chased the Japanese troops “off our front lawn.”

On November 30 MacArthur summoned his most aggressive American commander, General Robert Eichelberger, to his Port Moresby headquarters. He tasked him with leading Allied forces to capture Buna. “Bob,” he admonished as he issued the orders, “take Buna or don’t come back alive.”

That critical mission would take more than a month, but Buna fell on January 9, 1943. Organized Japanese resistance in New Guinea ended on January 23. The Allied victory was possible in large part due to the 5th Air Force, which flew 611 combat missions during the seven-week period.

5th Air Force Missions Nov. 1, 1942 to Jan. 23, 1943					
	Aerial Recon & Observation	**Armed Recon, Escort & Patrols**	**Attacks on Enemy Aircraft**	**Bombing & Strafing Missions**	
Heavy Bombers		116	1	47	164
Medium Bombers		45		88	133
Light Bombers		28		74	102
Fighter Aircraft	35	38	3	63	139
Miscellaneous		73			73

Reprimand or Medal?

To fully understand Rabaul’s importance to the Japanese effort in the South Pacific, one might think of it as the Empire’s own

“Pearl Harbor”. Just as the port on Oahu provided American forces a headquarters and staging point for operations throughout the Pacific, Rabaul was the hub for the Japanese offensive in the Pacific. Located at the northern tip of New Britain Island, the excellent port was 2,800 miles from Tokyo via a shipping lane through waters the Japanese navy dominated. The flow of troops and supplies from Japan could continue nearly unhindered, but for a few American submarines that managed to sneak into the area from time to time.

The harbor itself was deep and sheltered, and the docks and wharves at Rabaul were well-suited for a major distribution point. From Rabaul, the influx of necessary men and material was dispersed quickly and easily throughout the theater of combat. In the darkness of night, massive Japanese convoys transported thousands of troops, material, and ammunition into the Solomon Islands where U.S. Marines were struggling to control Guadalcanal. Those nightly convoys became known as The Tokyo Express. Similarly, it was also a quick trip from Rabaul to reinforce Japanese positions on the Papuan Peninsula, where the Allies were at last beating back the invading forces on the northern coastline.

Throughout the winter of 1942, the 5th Air Force flew repeated bombing missions against Rabaul in effort to stem this flow of Japanese shipping. Such missions over the important port were both harrowing and often fatal. Staging out of Port Moresby, the bombers had to first traverse the Owen Stanely Range which was well protected by Japanese Zeroes from airbases at Lae and Buna. Then they had to cross hundreds of miles of enemy-infested waters, cross New Britain Island, and then somehow arrive safely over Rabaul to drop their bombs. It was no small feat and was made nearly impossible by the port’s heavy defenses. Activity around Rabaul peaked at the end of December with the presence of 21 Japanese warships and 300,000 tons of merchant shipping.

Rabaul was protected by four major Japanese airfields to the south (Keravat, Vunakanau, Tobera, and Rapopo) as well as the Lakunai Airfield located near the docks. In December 1942, the Japanese Eighth Area Army Headquarters moved to Rabaul. On the first day of 1943 Colonel Nagaaki Kawai assumed command of the anti-aircraft defenses on the Gazelle Peninsula with a force equivalent to seven battalions, supplemented by five field machine cannon companies.

Despite these formidable defenses, American pilots flew nearly daily bombing missions against Rabaul throughout December and until January 2. On January 3 General Kenney learned through decoded Japanese communications that a major convoy was being mounted at Rabaul to reinforce Lae. The convoy was scheduled to depart the harbor on January 6. To conserve the strength of his exhausted pilots and his combat-depleted bombers, Kenney ordered no missions against Rabaul on January 4 and 5 while noting in his reports: “Told Walker to intensify reccos (reconnaissance) on both N and S of New Britain…and to put on a full-scale B-17 attack on Rabaul Harbor at dawn on the 5th to see if we can break it up at the source.”

Ken Walker welcomed this new mission as perhaps providing the first real opportunity to test his ideas of large formation, daylight bombing raids. In prior months, the missions of his command had usually been single-plane reconnaissance flights or small (six or fewer aircraft) night bombing raids. The proposed January 5 mission was to include more than a dozen aircraft from Port Moresby, including six B-17s and six B-24s. These were to be joined by a flight of B-24s out of Iron Range on Australia’s Cape York. The two groups were to rendezvous in the air over Cape Hood and proceed to Rabaul. Then General Kenney threw in a new wrinkle. Since there would be no fighter escort, he wanted the attack to commence with the dawn.

Walker protested, and not just because this would deny him the chance to conduct the massive daylight mission that was the basis of his strategic doctrine. With the mission scheduled to include bombers from two separate elements, a dawn mission would require the aircraft to take off in the early morning and rendezvous in the air during hours of pre-dawn darkness. Such a rendezvous was difficult enough during daylight hours, nearly impossible at night.

Walker presented arguments for a noon strike, noting that in the darkness the B-24s from Iron Range might not be able to find and join a dozen bombers from Port Moresby. Kenney refused to alter his plan, advising Walker that he would rather have the two flights miss their rendezvous and bomb Rabaul separately at dawn than to have them successfully meet under the lightened skies then attack the port in broad daylight.

In his report, he noted, “Nip fighters are never up at dawn, but at noon they will not only give our bombers hell but will ruin our bombing accuracy.”

Ken Walker had always believed that enemy fighters were not a matter for consideration in planning the kind of mission scheduled for January 5. His manta had always been: “The well-organized, well-planned, and well-flown air force (bombing) attack will constitute an offensive that cannot be stopped.” Already his B-17s had proven they were capable of holding their own against enemy Zeroes, and with more than a dozen bombers scheduled for the Rabaul mission Walker was certain that a carefully controlled formation would fend off any opposition.

When the mission has launched the fact that the B-17s didn’t depart from Jackson Field near Port Moresby until 8:00 a.m. was obviously contrary to General Kenney’s orders. In Walker’s defense, this may not have been a calculated act of defiance. The weather on the morning of September 5 was poor and rain delayed takeoff for the B-24s at Iron Range. General Walker may have postponed his own departure in hopes it would clear up enough for them to take off. On Cape York, the rain continued and those B-24s never were never able to launch. The weather did improve enough on the Papuan Peninsula for the six B-17s to eventually take off and join the six B-24s from Port Moresby.

This plausible excuse aside, General Walker’s decision to take off at 8:00 a.m. for a noon raid over Rabaul may have indeed been a defiant act motivated by his desire to finally test his bombing concepts. Such was also in character for General Kenneth Walker. What is without question is that General Walker further defied Kenney’s orders by electing to join the mission himself.

Mission records reveal that this was not the first time since General Kenney grounded his top bomber commander early in October that Walker had defied him to fly with his men. After joining a mid-December reconnaissance mission Kenney had reminded BOTH Walker and Whitehead that they were far too important to the mission of the 5th Air Force to be risked on aerial missions. He insisted that Walker was simply excess baggage in a B-17, but was the best bombardment commander he had.

On January 5, the bomber carrying that excess baggage was the lead B-17 named “San Antonio Rose” and bearing the tail numbers 41-24453. It was piloted by Lieutenant Colonel Jack Bleasdale, executive officer for the 43rd Bombardment Group.

At noon Colonel Bleasdale was over Rabaul and making his bombing run on a harbor filled with enemy ships. Behind him, five more B-17s were opening their bomb bay doors and picking their own targets. The enemy was caught totally unaware, but Jap gunners responded quickly to fill the heaven with a curtain of bursting anti-aircraft

fire. Inside the San Antonio Rose, General Walker was probably taking pictures of the action for later analysis. Before the mission, he had mentioned to one of the other crews that he had just purchased a new camera and would be taking it on the mission.

By the time the B-24s were on target, the ships below were billowing smoke and flames while the B-17s were trying to pull out and head for home. When the second wave made its run over the target, Japanese Zeroes were, at last, entering the fray from the nearby airfields. Navigator William Whitaker from one of the B-24s noticed the lead B-17 had fallen out of formation and was circling below with several Zeroes on its tail. He assumed it was General Walker's bomber.

Fred Wesche was in the B-17 following the San Antonio Rose before it fell out of formation and he recalled, "No sooner had we dropped our bombs than my tail gunner said, 'Hey, there's somebody in trouble behind us.' So, we made a turn and looked back, and there was an airplane, one of our airplanes, going down, smoking and on fire, not necessarily fire, but smoke anyway, and headed down obviously for a cloud bank with a whole cloud of fighters on top of him. There must have been 15 or 20 fighters. Of course, they gang up on a cripple, you know, polish that one-off with no trouble, but he disappeared into a cloud bank and we never saw him again. It turns out it was the general. General Walker was on board."

January 5, 1943, the daylight bombing raid on Rabaul was highly successful. As many as ten Japanese ships were damaged and the 5,833-ton Keifuku Maru was sunk. All six B-24s were shot up but managed to return home. The six B-17s suffered similar damage. Only four of them returned home.

General Kenney noted in his diary, "Walker off late. Disobeyed orders by going along as well as not starting his mission when I told him." Then the air chief launched an immediate and wide-ranging search for any sign of the downed bomber and his general.

Kenney was reporting to General MacArthur when news reached him that search planes had spotted an American airplane down in a coral reef in the Trobriands. With a sigh of relief General Kenney told MacArthur, "When Walker gets back her, I'm going to officially reprimand him and send him to Australia on leave for a couple of weeks." A less optimistic Douglas MacArthur responded:

> *"If he doesn't come back… I'm putting him in for the Medal of Honor!"*

On March 25, 1943, 16-year-old Kenneth Walker, Jr., was invited to the White House to receive his father's Medal of Honor from President Roosevelt. Though General Walker had been missing for nearly three months he was still listed as Missing in Action, thus the Medal was not presented posthumously.

Douglas MacArthur had kept his word. The airplane sighted in the search for Walker had proven to be the second B-17 that went down on the January 5 mission to Rabaul. On the day following the raid her crew, minus two men who were killed in the crash, were rescued by a Catalina flying boat.

While the search continued for Kenneth Walker, his 10-year-old son Douglas subsequently accepted the Legion of Merit awarded his father for his important work on AWPD-1, the aerial warfare plan that ultimately bombed Hitler into defeat.

Post-war efforts at the recovery of American remains and accounting for those missing in action failed to turn up anything conclusive. There were some indications that Walker and the crew of the San Antonio Rose might have been captured. There are other reasons to believe that even the Japanese knew nothing of his fate. Indeed, B-17 #41-24453 may have been swallowed up the dense jungle of the South Pacific or found its final resting place on the floor of the ocean.

The only certain information that remains of General Walker's fate is that he died an American hero. He was a man of a flawed character in many ways—for he was indeed human as are all of our real heroes. Perhaps it might even be said that those same character flaws that prompted him to say in the spring of 1942, "I've made a terrible mess of things", were in fact the same qualities and strengths that motivated him to do what was necessary to become an Air Force legend during some of our nation's darkest and most critical months of World War II.

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