

On the outskirts of Paris, a white marble arch stands with the legendary title “Lafayette Escadrille” carved upon its façade. Within this monument lie the remains of America’s first combat airmen—individuals who answered the call to fly and fight in the name of freedom, not because they had to, but because it was the right thing to do.



*The General Commandant-in-Chief, Cited to the Order of the Army, the Escadrille N. 124: An Escadrille composed of volunteer Americans who have come to fight for France in the spirit of the purest sacrifice. Under the command of Captain Thenault, it has maintained without ceasing an ardent struggle against our enemies. In exceedingly difficult combats and at the price of severe losses, which far from discouraging it, have exalted its morale, has brought down twenty-eight officially confirmed planes of the enemy. It has excited the profound admiration of the officers who have it under their command, and the French Escadrilles who, fighting by its side, have striven to vie with it in various deeds.*

*-- General Philippe Pétain, 1917*

# *Preserving the Legacy, Honoring the Airmen*

“*Since the formation of the American Escadrille, I have tried to exalt the beauty of the ideal which brought my American comrades to fight for France.*

*—Captain George Thenault, Commanding Officer of the Lafayette Escadrille*

The men of the Lafayette Escadrille came to the aid of France at the height of the First World War, when the debilitating cost of attrition warfare threatened to push Allied nations to the brink. With vast trench-bound armies locked in a bloody stalemate, commanders sought to harness the air domain as a new front to secure victory.

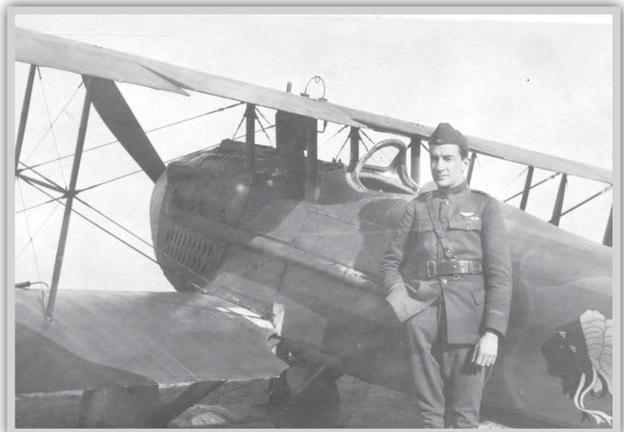
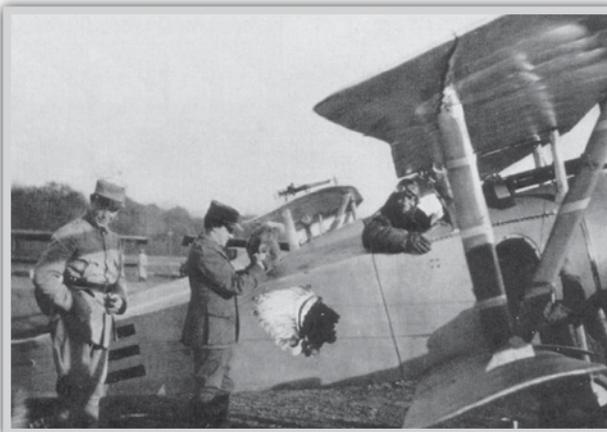


Operations in the aerial domain revolutionized warfare. For centuries, armies and navies had sought victory with fielded forces attacking head-on in a set of surface campaigns. With the advent of powered flight, military leaders gradually recognized the potential afforded by taking the fight to the sky. Airmen could inform command decisions by observing the position and composition of enemy forces. They also expanded the scale and scope of the battle arena as they attacked opposing frontline forces and struck strategic targets deep behind enemy lines.

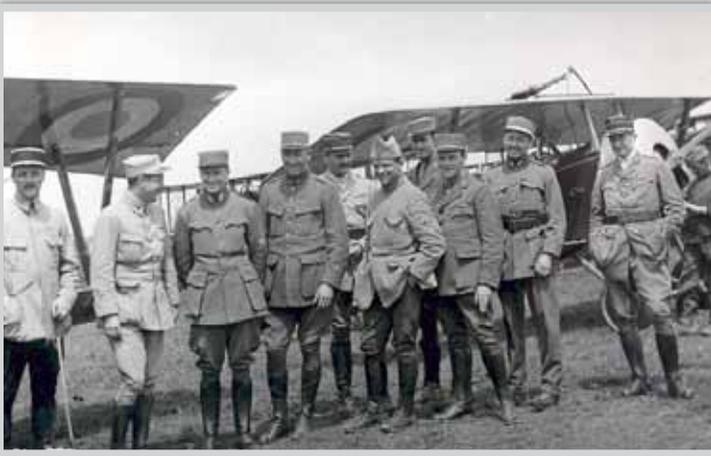
*Every flight is a romance, every record an epic. They are the knighthood of this war. Without fear and without reproach; and they recall the legendary days of chivalry, not merely the daring of their exploits, but the nobility of their spirit.*  
— Prime Minister of the United Kingdom  
**David Lloyd George**



With no single nation possessing a monopoly on the aerial domain, leaders also had to consider how to counter hostile forms of airpower. Airmen initially improvised by taking rifles and pistols along on their patrols. Aerial duels erupted above the trench lines as opposing flyers fired at one-another in an ad hoc fashion. This approach was eventually superseded as aircraft designers devised methods of installing fixed machine guns to their latest designs. A new breed of flyer emerged, one whose sole purpose was to gain control of the sky—the fighter pilot.



# Preserving the Legacy, Honoring the Airmen



*They were the precursors of the mighty awakening of the west—of that gigantic effort of America—unparalleled in history—the greatest of all crusades—where every qualified man was enrolled under the Stars and Stripes, for no selfish aim, for no world-conquest, but for the great ideals upon which civilization depends and for which the entire resources of the nation were unsparingly contributed to assure victory.*

*—Captain George Thenault, Commanding Officer of the Lafayette Escadrille*

The Lafayette Escadrille was the brainchild of three individuals: Mr. Norman Prince of Boston, Massachusetts, Mr. William Thaw of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and Dr. Edmond Gros, an American expatriate living in France. Seeking to aid the Allied cause, they lobbied officials in Paris to create an all-American squadron within the French Air Service. In need of more combat forces and ever-aware of the positive propaganda value Americans flying under the French flag could afford in garnering United States support for the Allied cause, French officials approved the concept on August 21st, 1915.



The new squadron, officially designated N.124, was formed eight months later under the command of French Air Service Captain George Thenault. While a handful of the Americans joining the unit had previously served in the French Air Service, most were novice aviators—just having mastered the most basic elements of flight. Their first combat patrols saw them strain to master their aerial craft amidst a hail of enemy gunfire. With Kiffin Rockwell scoring the unit's first victory on May 18, 1916, these amateur airmen rapidly matured into seasoned veterans.



Operating from austere bases close to the front lines, the airmen took to the sky to secure air superiority during some of the war's largest campaigns, including the Battle of Verdun, the Somme Offensive, the Nivelle Offensive, the Aisne Offensive, and the Ypres Offensive. The American flyers also escorted Allied bombers as they struck targets deep behind enemy lines. The risks associated with daily combat operations were pronounced—with some units experiencing casualty rates in excess of 400 percent. Flying amidst such odds yielded a stark understanding regarding dedication to duty and sacrifice.



*He gave the fullest measure. The old flame of chivalry burned brightly in this boy's fine and sensitive being. With his death France lost one of her most valuable pilots.*  
--James McConnell remarking upon the death of his squadron mate, Kiffin Rockwell



As tales of the Lafayette Escadrille spread around the globe, these young men stood as noble champions of the Allied cause. Hundreds of Americans traveled to France in a quest to join the famed squadron. Unable to accommodate the flood of volunteers within the original unit, French Air Service leaders formed the Lafayette Flying Corps—an effort that saw over two hundred American volunteers join a variety of French squadrons. Their contribution to the war was undeniable—with the volunteers shooting down 199 German aircraft.

*The first pass convinced me that I was in the presence of a master. This was no laughing matter. Banking my airplane, I saw him about fifty meters below me. He pulled up in order to bait me into making a loop, which would have left him in a good position to fire a volley, but I countered with a half reverse to the right.*

*—Raoul Lufbery, Leading Lafayette Escadrille Ace—KIA 1918*



# Preserving the Legacy, Honoring the Airmen

With the United States entering the War in 1917, the pioneering airmen of the Lafayette Escadrille formed the foundation on which American combat aviation was built. Donning United States Air Service uniforms, the veteran flyers continued to fly and fight, while also teaching their newly arrived counterparts about the nuances of combat aviation. This continued service proved critical, with American airpower helping win a series of battles that ultimately brought victory to the Allied cause in November of 1918.



*I muttered a prayer, yanked back on the stick and hoped. The poor old SPAD groaned, the wires shrieked and every spar bent like an archer's bow. The agony nearly finished me for a few seconds, but everything hung together somehow. I leveled off and looked back. That damned Hun was still after me, but he didn't dare yank out as I had done. He had to ease out gradually and was several hundred meters below me before he could consider taking me on again. By that time I had my courage back, and boldly turned to fire a few bursts in his general direction.*

*--Edwin Parsons, Lafayette Escadrille Ace*

Despite the celebratory status afforded to the men of the Lafayette Escadrille, flying in combat for over two years proved exceedingly costly. Nearly one third of the 38 aviators who served in the original squadron gave their lives to the Allied cause during the war.

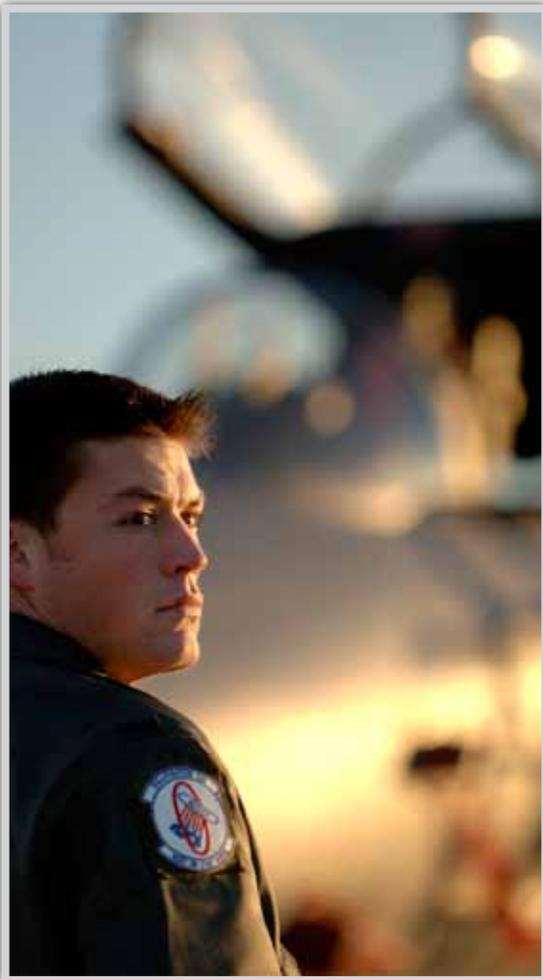


KIFFEN ROCKWELL, EX-'12  
KILLED IN AIR BATTLE

On Sept. 23 Kiffen Rockwell, formerly a cadet at the Virginia Military Institute, class of 1912, and sergeant of the American Escadrille in France, was shot and killed while thousands of feet in the air.

*If I die, wrap me in the French flag, but place the two colors upon my grave to show that I died for two countries.*

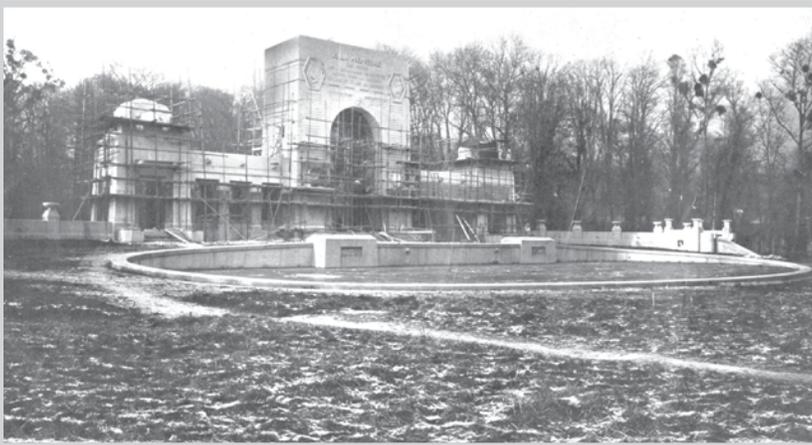
*--Edmond Charles Clinton Genet, Lafayette Escadrille Pilot—KIA 1916*



The men of Lafayette Escadrille now belong to the annals of history. Young, vibrant airmen who risked their lives in the name of freedom now stand as stoic figures in a handful of black and white pictures. However, far from being forgotten, the men of the Lafayette Escadrille charted a course our airmen proudly follow today. Direct lineage squadrons still take to the sky—including the US Air Force’s F-22-equipped 94th Fighter Squadron. While advancements in technology and tactics may differentiate these modern flyers from their forefathers, they remain united as airmen in their drive for excellence and dedication to duty.



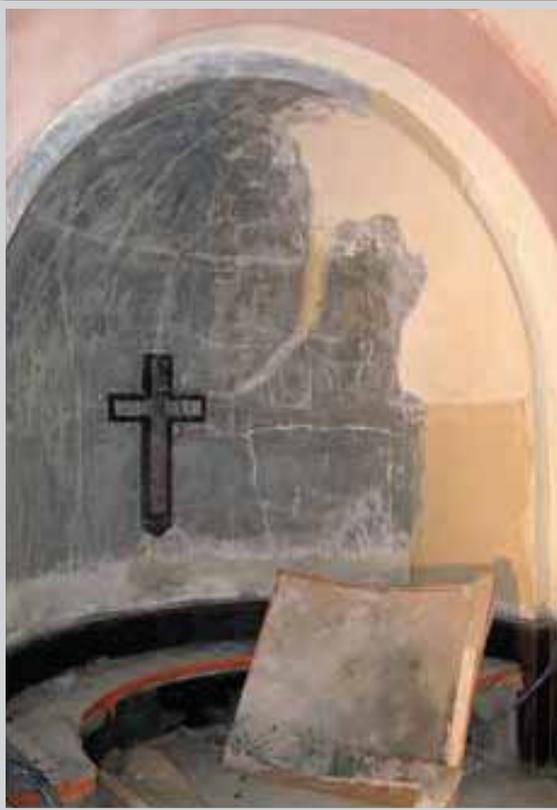
# *Preserving the Legacy, Honoring the Airmen*



The legacy of the Lafayette Escadrille also continues in a far more tangible fashion. In 1928, veteran aviators of the First World War gathered to dedicate a monument to the American volunteers who came to the aid of France in 1916 and 1918. Impressive in its beauty and stature, the structure stands forth as a proud tribute to the selfless service and sacrifice of the young aviators.

The monument also serves as the final resting place for the veteran American flyers. Members of the original Lafayette Escadrille and those of the Lafayette Corps lie in repose beneath the soaring marble arch in a dedicated crypt, surrounded by stained glass windows depicting the aerial campaigns in which they proudly served.





While impressive from a distance, a closer examination of the monument shows clear signs of wear and neglect. Water incursion has damaged much of the crypt, with the upper structure standing at risk given problems with the foundation. Repairs over the years have attempted to address aspects of these issues, but the time has now come for a full scale restoration.

*“Restoring the Lafayette Escadrille Memorial extends past national pride and heritage—we have a sacred obligation to take care of the Airmen.”*  
 --T. Michael Moseley, 18th Chief of Staff, United States Air Force



In 2010, the American Battle Monuments Commission contracted with CH2M Hill, Inc. to perform a comprehensive engineering study to determine the scale and scope of work required to fully restore the Lafayette Escadrille Memorial.

The resulting report called for a \$14M restoration effort:

o A/E Services and Design	\$2.4M
o Site Restoration	\$5.8M
o Monument Repair	\$4.7M
o Contingency	\$1.1M
o Total	\$14.0M

2014 marks the beginning of a joint Franco-American partnership to turn this plan into reality. Working diligently to execute the project in conjunction with the WWI Centennial, the restoration will address the underlying structural problems threatening the structure, while also restoring its external appearance. Given the present state of affairs, successfully executing this project stands as an imperative.



# *Preserving the Legacy, Honoring the Airmen*

The Lafayette Escadrille Memorial is the final resting place for brave airmen who gave their lives in one of the most pivotal wars of the twentieth century. They volunteered to serve and made the ultimate sacrifice in the name of freedom and liberty.

Immediate action must be taken to reverse decades' worth of decline and provide America's pioneering combat Airmen the fitting tribute they deserve. This project is not just about restoring a physical structure, it centers upon the caring for the men who answered the call to serve. Your financial contribution is essential in achieving this goal.



**Contributors are asked to send their tax-deductable donations via check to the Lafayette Escadrille Memorial Maintenance Fund:**

*I am paying my part of our debt to Lafayette and Rochambeau.  
—Kiffin Rockwell, Lafayette Escadrille Pilot—KIA 1916*

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**Lieutenant General David Deptula, USAF (ret)**—Dean, Mitchell Institute for Aerospace Studies

**Major General Rick Devereaux, USAF (ret)**

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**Colonel Thomas Moe, USAF (ret)**—Commissioner, WWI Centennial

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