

Hap Arnold (left in this World War II photo) suggested establishing AFA. Jimmy Doolittle (right) became its first president.



Air Corps photo

AFA's 70th Birthday

70 years of supporting the Air Force family.

On Feb. 4, 2016, the Air Force Association celebrates its 70th birthday. We look back on these seven important decades to highlight AFA's heritage, founding, and how we have supported the Air Force throughout the years.

Following the end of World War II, Gen. of the Army Henry H. "Hap" Arnold searched for a way to keep Army Air Forces veterans together and to advocate for a strong, independent Air Force. This task planted the seed for the creation of AFA.

1940s

Arnold's first task was to establish a grassroots network of volunteers to spread the word about AFA. Lt. Gen. Jimmy Doolittle was selected as AFA's first president, and the association was incorporated in Washington, D.C., on Feb. 4, 1946. In July 1946, AFA published its first issue of *Air Force Magazine*, which had previously been an official Army Air Forces publication. AFA was created with the objective of establishing the Air Force as a separate service branch from the Army. AFA achieved this goal on Sept. 18, 1947, when the National Security Act of 1947 officially established the independent Air Force.

1950s

AFA continued its commitment to the Air Force by working to highlight the accomplishments of the enlisted force. At AFA's 10th National Convention in 1956, the Outstanding Airmen of the Year (OAY) Program was established to showcase the dedication and contributions of the enlisted force. The program has evolved, and in its current format OAY are honored at a formal dinner at AFA's Air & Space Conference and at other events during the year. To date there have been 820 Outstanding Airmen of the Year.

1960s

AFA continuously searches for new ways to support airmen. One of its proudest achievements has been its work to help create the Community College of the Air Force in partnership with the US Office of Education (now the Department of Education). In 1967, AFA's Aerospace Education Foundation undertook an initial pilot program called "Project Utah" to demonstrate the feasibility of using Air Force technical training courses for college credit. This paved the way for securing accreditation for the Community College of the Air Force.

1970s

The welfare of airmen has always been paramount to the association. AFA took the plight of American prisoners of war and those missing in action in North Vietnam directly to the American public through articles in *Air Force Magazine*, one printed in conjunction with *Reader's Digest*. This put the issue before Congress. *Air Force Magazine* also published an "MIA/POW Action Report" each month, from June 1970 to September 1974. AFA simultaneously began a grassroots letter writing campaign aimed at bringing attention to the plight of the MIA and POWs. Beginning in early 1973, the POWs returned home.

1980s

In January 1985, AFA held its first Tactical Air Warfare Symposium in Orlando, Fla. Later in the decade, to honor the veterans from World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War, the association hosted the "Gathering of Eagles" in Las Vegas in 1986. This five-day program focused on the Air Force's heritage and the capabilities of airpower.

1990s

The association learned that families seeking military honors for veterans' funerals were finding it difficult to secure this final salute. AFA took the issue to Capitol Hill, and 587 delegates from the Air Force Association personally delivered messages to Congress on the necessity for deceased airmen to receive burial honors. The congressional-education effort led to the issue being included in the Defense Authorization Act of 1999. The act stated that an honor guard detail of no less than three people will honor a veteran's passing.

2000s

One of AFA's most visible and beautiful accomplishments has been the creation of the Air Force Memorial. Before the construction of what is now a landmark in the National Capital Region, the Air Force was the only service branch without a memorial in the Washington, D.C., area. The association's role in creating the memorial was immense, as a group of AFA volunteers raised nearly \$50 million to build it. The Air Force Memorial was completed in 2006 and was dedicated by President George W. Bush. The Air Force Association continues to support the memorial by managing its day-to-day operations.

2010s

AFA remains committed to the well-being and support of wounded, ill, and injured airmen. In 2011, under a formal memorandum of understanding with the Air Force, AFA established the Wounded Airman Program to provide much needed support to wounded airmen. The association is especially proud that 100 percent of funds donated to AFA's Wounded Airman Program are used in direct support of wounded airmen.

For 70 years the Air Force Association has served as the Force Behind the Force. As we celebrate this birthday, we thank the dedicated members who have contributed to AFA's mission and participated in all that it has accomplished. ★

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