

HISTORY TOPIC of the WEEK

Travis AFB? Named in honor of General Robert Falligant Travis

Maybe you know the base was named after a General that lost his life during a tragic crash here at the base some years ago and maybe you don't. Either way, I'm writing to tell you a little bit about this man not because of the crash but because of his contributions before his life was cut short.

Gen. Robert F. Travis was the son of a Maj Gen Robert J. Travis of the National Guard, born in Savannah GA 26 December 1904. He later married Frances Jane Johnson who gave birth to a daughter and three sons. He was a fan of pets and it was not uncommon to see Gen Travis riding his bike around base with his dog "Dan" in tow.

He attended the US military Academy, served in WW II and the Korean War from 1928 until his death in 1950. His military career began in field infantry, expanded when he entered the Air Corps flying school at Brooks Airfield in Texas and continued to further develop skills in engineering. One of his early assignments was to Mitchel Field NY where various observation, fighter and bomber units were stationed between wars. Gen Travis was assigned to the 1st Observation Squadron. These Squadrons were responsible for aerial reconnaissance-aerial visual and photographic recon. This was the principle source of intelligence but the planes used didn't look anything like the U2 we are familiar with today.

By 1939 Gen. Travis was a Capt. Commanding Bomber Squadrons at Hickam, then Bomber Groups and later Wings while he floated between Florida, Idaho, Iowa, Texas, England, Nebraska, and South Dakota, on his various assignments and responsibilities during WW II. He garnered a brilliant wartime bombing record and rapidly grew in prestige and command choice. By 1947 he became the Chief of Staff of the Seventh Air Force at Hickam, later assuming command of the seventh Air Division. The unexpected last stop in his career was Fairfield-Suisun AFB, CA where Strategic Air Command assigned him two Wings-5th Bombardment Wing and 9th Bombardment Wing. According to one officer, General Travis was a distinctive leader that didn't like coming in second. He was identified with the abilities to push men to do their best and expected excellence from his charges while never asking them to do something he wouldn't do himself. He was a leader, he lead by example, by form and function, heading into hazardous missions when necessary while exhibiting great courage, coolness and determination.

As the Korean War began to spin up into existence the mission sets were changing and preparations were underway as the Bomber forces began to ready. Gen Travis was a passenger on a deployment mission headed for Guam 5 Aug 1950, he was in the cockpit of the second B-29 scheduled to leave that evening. The B-29 crashed at the then Fairfield Army Air Base shortly after take-off.

Gen Travis had a sterling combat career flying 35 missions over enemy-occupied territory during WW II earned a Distinguished Flying Cross, Air Medal, French Croix de Guerre and Legion d'honneur, not to mention his Brigadier General star to name a few. He was a man of high esteem and popularity, his untimely death sparked a prompt response by base and community leaders. The military and community population lobbied to honor Gen Travis by renaming the base and on 20 October 1950 Fairfield Suisun Army Air Base officially became known as Travis AFB.

For more on the historic B-29 Crash that took the life of Gen. Travis 7 years ago stop in for a Lunch and Learn at the Travis AFB Museum on 6 Aug 2021, 12pm (30 minutes tops.) Bring your lunch for a time to learn.

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Photos in located in the 60 AMW Archives:

