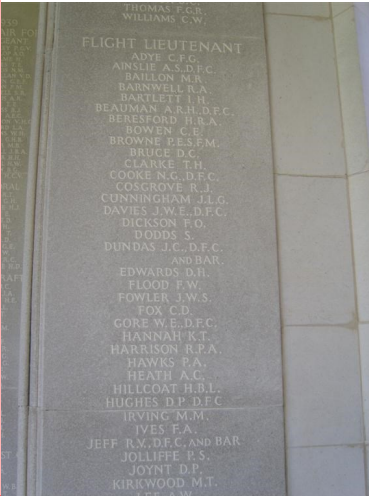




Newsletter Issue 60, July 2023

Our Pilot Issue: Firsts and Lasts

Jimmy Davies was the **first American pilot to die in combat in WWII**. Born in New Jersey in 1913, he moved with his family to Wales in the '30s. He joined the Royal Air Force in 1936 when it was illegal to do so. The American Neutrality Acts, passed between the wars, made it a criminal of-



fense to join the Armed Forces of a belligerent country, including Britian, punishable by a \$20,000 fine, 10 years in prison, and loss of citizenship. (It is difficult to track the potentially hundreds of Americans that did this as they often used forged paperwork.) He flew the Hawker Hurricane and by June 1940 had shot down six German fighters (and two shared) to make him an ace. Although never getting credited as such, he was likely the first American ace of the war. He was shot down on 27 June 1940 while on an escort mission over France. Today he is honored on the British Air Force Memorial at Runnymede for missing airmen.

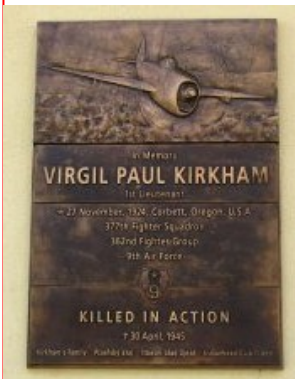
The first American pilot killed flying for the US was Billy Fiske. He was an Olympic Gold Medal winning bobsledder and we featured him in newsletter #48 which you can read again on our website.

The first American ace flying for the US was LT Buzz Wagner who shot down five of his eight kills in December 1941 while engaging the Japanese in the Pacific. He does not appear in our database as he was killed in a training accident flying from Eglin to Maxwell AF Bases in the US in 1942.

Last in WWII

Virgil Paul Kirkham has the unlucky distinction of being the **last American pilot killed in Europe in WWII**. Born on November 27, 1924 in Ohio, he attended a year of college before he joined the Regular Army in Lincoln, Nebraska on 2 March 1943 and served in the 377th Fighter Squadron, 362nd Fighter Group as a First Lieutenant. He was piloting the P-47D-30 #44-89700 "Lady Jo-Ann II" on his 82nd (!) mission when

his plane was shot down near Ujzed, Czech Republic on 30 April 1945. He is now buried in the Lorraine American Cemetery, Saint-Avold, France. He has a memorial located at the crash site and in the town. He is also honored on the 362nd Fighter Group memorial in the UK.



First in WWI

Victor Chapman was the **first American pilot to die in WWI**. Born in New York City, he spent some of his youth in France so became a dual citizen. A graduate of Harvard, he joined the French Foreign Legion on 30 August 1914 and saw combat with their 3rd March Regiment. He transferred to the Aviation Service and flew many missions as a pilot for the French 1st Aviation Group before becoming one of the founding members of the Lafayette Escadrille. A very aggressive and fearless fighter pilot, he was wounded on several missions before being shot down 6kms behind enemy lines. His funeral was held in the American Cathedral of Paris although his body hadn't been recovered. After the war some remains were recovered, but definitive identification was not made. Those remains are buried in the Meuse Argonne American Cemetery and his coffin in the Lafayette Escadrille Memorial is empty. The name Victor CHAPNAW appears on the American Volunteers Monument in Paris but since the name CHAPNAW doesn't appear in any Lafayette Escadrille records we suspect that this is a misspelling of Chapman's name.



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