

Commander's Call Topics



October 2, 2014

**“The No. 1 issue
in the Hispanic American community is
'How do I leave my children better off than myself'?”**

*Marco Rubio
(b. 1971)
U.S. Senator (R-Fla)*

October is
[National Cyber Security
Awareness Month.](#)

What are you doing to [promote
online safety?](#)

Hispanic Airmen Impact Predates Air Force

Hispanic Airmen serving in the Air Force can trace their tradition of service back to the early days of World War II, when, like many Americans, Hispanics volunteered or were drafted into the global war. Those Hispanics, who were either qualified pilots or had received private flying lessons, were assigned to the newly formed Army Air Forces and served as active combatants in both the Europe and Pacific theaters of war.

In 1944, Puerto Rican aviators went to the Tuskegee Army Air Field in Alabama to train the famed 99th Fighter Squadron of the Tuskegee Airmen, the first African-American aviators in the U.S. armed forces. By the end of the war, the Tuskegee Airmen were credited with 109 Luftwaffe aircraft shot down and the destruction of numerous fuel dumps, trucks and trains.

The first Hispanic pilot was 2nd Lt. César Luis Gonzalez, a Puerto Rican native and one of the initial participants in the invasion of Sicily in July of 1943. As a co-pilot of a C-47, Gonzalez flew night missions over Sicily until he died in a training crash off the runway on Nov. 22, 1943.

The first Hispanic to earn the title of ace was Lt. Richard Gomez Candelaria, a P-51 Mustang pilot, with most of his kills taking place in a single day. On April 7, 1945, he found himself as the lone escort assigned to protect a formation of B-24 Liberators and, in the process of defending it, he single-handedly shot down four German fighters. Six days later he was shot down by ground fire and spent the rest of the war as a prisoner of war.

The most influential Hispanic Airman during World War II was Elwood R. “Pete” Quesada. As a brigadier general, he was assigned to intelligence in the newly formed office of the chief of Air Corps. He became commanding general of the 9th Fighter Command, establishing an advanced beachhead on D-Day plus one. An early proponent of the inherent flexibilities of airpower, he was responsible for directing his planes in aerial cover and air support for the Allied invasion of Europe.

By the start of the Korean War more than 20,000 Hispanics were serving in the armed forces, with that number ballooning to more than 148,000 over the next three years. Capt. Manuel John “Pete” Fernandez would go on to become the third-leading ace of the war with more than 14 kills during his nine months in Korea.

Carmelita Vigil Schimmenti joined the Air Force in 1958, and held clinical, teaching and administrative positions before becoming the first female Hispanic to attain the rank of brigadier general. Obtaining a bachelor's degree in 1966 and a master's degree in 1974, she would go on to head the Air Force Nurse Corps.

Vietnam would produce a number of prominent Hispanic Airmen, and many would attain senior leadership positions. Maj. Gen. Salvador E. Felices flew 39 combat missions over North Vietnam, and later was named assistant deputy chief of staff for the Strategic Air Command. Brig. Gen. Antonio Maldonado was the youngest pilot of a B-52 nuclear bomber, and Brig. Gen. Jose M. Portela, as a young 22-year-old lieutenant, became the youngest C-141 Starlifter commander in Air Force history. And, in 1980, then-Lt. Olga E. Custodio made history when she became the first Hispanic female U.S. military pilot.

Today, with most firsts broken long ago, Hispanic Airmen can be found making important contributions throughout the Air Force. Whether from Puerto Rico, Cuba, Mexico, Central and South America, or born and bred in the United States, Hispanics are an integral part of the U.S. Air Force.

► RESOURCES

Website access to the following resources can be gained by clicking on the name.

[AF.mil](http://www.af.mil)

[Airman Magazine](#)

[Military OneSource/HomeFront](#)

[Air Force Personnel Center](#)

[Air Reserve Personnel Center](#)

[Department of Defense News](#)

[Department of Veteran Affairs](#)

[TRICARE](#)

[U.S. Government Website](#)

[Air Force Association Scholarships](#)

[Air Force Safety Center](#)

[Civil Service Employment Opportunities](#)

[NAF Employment Opportunities](#)

[Air Force Bands/Outreach](#)

► THIS WEEK IN AIR FORCE HISTORY

Oct. 2, 2007 - At Elmendorf AFB, Alaska, Air Force Reserve officials activated the first F-22 Raptor unit, the 477th Fighter Group. The day also honored the 477th Fighter Group's and the 302nd Fighter Squadron's fabled heritage and their connection to the Tuskegee Airmen.

Oct. 3, 1993 through Oct. 4 - Pararescueman Tech. Sgt. Timothy A. Wilkinson ran through enemy fire repeatedly, despite his own injuries, to save five wounded Army Rangers after enemy forces shot down their MH-60 Black Hawk helicopter at Mogadishu, Somalia. For that heroism, Wilkerson received the Air Force Cross.

Oct. 4, 1949 - C-82s dropped an entire field artillery battery by parachute at Fort Bragg, N.C.

Oct. 5, 1905 - At Dayton, Ohio, Orville Wright flew the Wright III, the first practical airplane, to a world distance and duration record of 24.2 miles in 38 minutes, three seconds.

Oct. 6, 1975 - During Project Coin, C-130s delivered 7,597 tons of critical supplies and over two million gallons of petroleum products to Alaska at Point Barrow, Lonely, Oliktok and Barter Island lasting through Dec. 2. Contract aircraft flew another 453.8 tons of oversize steel pipe from Elmendorf AFB to Lonely and 2,981.5 tons of supplies from Lonely to Point Barrow.

Oct. 7, 1996 - At Whitman AFB, Mo., two 509th Bomb Wing pilots, Capt. Tony Moretti and Maj. Chris Inman flew a 34-hour-long endurance flight in the B-2 Spirit simulator.

Oct. 8, 1993 - Operation Provide Promise, the airlift of humanitarian relief supplies to Bosnia, surpasses in duration (but not in tonnage or missions) the Berlin Airlift, becoming the longest sustained relief operation in U.S. Air Force history.

Recent promotion? Change of command? Increased number of flight hours?

There are many reasons to update a biography!

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► CURRENT ISSUES

[AF ensures command visibility on substantiated sex-related offenses](#)

A new policy requiring the inclusion in personnel service records and command review of information on sex-related offenses promotes transparency and an actively engaged leadership, both of which are key in eliminating sex-related offenses.

► PERSONNEL ISSUES

[AF integrates TAP into new Military Lifecycle Model](#)

Planning for success in life and career beyond one's military years is the focus of the redesigned Transition Assistance Program, a major component of the Military Lifecycle Model.

[Oct. 1 – Pulse on AF force management](#)

Details about changes to the reduction in force board eligibility and ongoing civilian force management programs are updated as of the beginning of October.

For more information on Air Force heritage, visit <http://www.airforcehistory.af.mil>

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