

COMBAT CREW ROTATION
World War II and Korean War

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result of discussions by Eaker, Doolittle, and Maj. Gen. Carl Spaatz, Air Officer, European Theater of Operations, United States Army. After considering both AAF and British experience in Europe and North Africa, the three generals had agreed on 25-30 sorties and 150-200 hours as a reasonable basis for rotation. ²⁴

Brig. Gen. Nathan F. Twining, who commanded Thirteenth Air Force after its activation in the South Pacific in January 1943, developed a system much different from that adopted by Doolittle and Eaker. In an effort to provide a program which would be "equitable to all," Twining set up an eligibility list that was kept current by reports submitted weekly by squadron surgeons. A man's position on this rotation list was based upon a score determined by a formula that took into account the number of months (A), hours of flying time (T), and number of missions (M) the man had in the South Pacific Theater of Operations. The formula for

bomber pilots was: $\frac{T}{100} + \frac{M}{10} + \frac{A}{3} = \text{Score}$. That for fighter pilots was:

$\frac{T}{100} + \frac{M}{30} + \frac{A}{3} = \text{Score}$. With this formula, a fighter pilot who had flown 200 hours on 30 missions during a period of 9 months in the theater would have a score of 6--the magic number that made him eligible for return to the United States. ²⁵

Both AAF headquarters and the War Department apparently recognized that a uniform policy of rotation at the end of one year of combat duty was unrealistic under conditions prevailing during 1942 and early 1943. At least there is no evidence that they attempted to enforce the one-year rule which had been laid down on 1 July 1942. Instead they condoned the establishment of local policies and procedures that varied greatly among the theaters of operations.

Commanders' Choice (May 1943-February 1944)

In January 1943 the whole matter of relief and replacement of combat crews was under study in Washington, and by April 1943 the War Department was ready to legalize the existing situation by formally giving each theater commander a free hand in determining policies for rest and rehabilitation of war-weary crews. ²⁶ In delegating the policy-making authority to theater commanders on 29 May 1943, * the War

*The theater commander passed the authority on to the senior AAF officer in the theater, who, in most cases, redelegate it to commanders of numbered air forces.

Department also changed procedures relating to replacements. The number to be sent to each theater to take care of both attrition and rotation was to be a percentage of aircrew strength authorized for the theater, with the percentage varying "in accordance with the theater mission and the situation." The Department was to inform each theater commander what percentage had been established for his organization, and notify him each month how many and what types of crews would be shipped to him the following month.²⁷

During the remainder of 1943 there were many changes in rotation policies and programs of overseas organizations. Many of these changes resulted from shortages of replacements or from the new procedures for handling replacements for rotation. Twining, for example, made a number of alterations in the rotation policy of Thirteenth Air Force. First, sorties (S) were substituted for missions (M) in formulas for computing scores for rotation, with the rules for crediting sorties being more liberal than those previously used for figuring missions. Second, the criteria for computing flying hours (T) and months of service (A), which formerly had taken into account only hours and months in the South Pacific Theater, were changed to add hours and months in other theaters, figured at one half of their actual value, for crewmen who arrived direct from another combat theater without intervening leave in the United States. Third, the eligibility list was divided into sections for fighter pilots, B-24 pilots, bombardiers, radio operators, and other crew positions, so that each man's score would be considered in relation to the scores of other men of the same class. Fourth, and most important, the function of the scores derived from the formulas was changed. Whereas a score of 6 had previously made a man eligible for return to the United States, the score now served only to admit him to the appropriate section of the list of men qualified for rotation. The relative positions of the various men in each section of the list determined the order in which these men were returned to the States as replacements arrived. To illustrate how this worked, the directive said that "the first aerial gunner 'rotation replacement' available will relieve the aerial gunner holding the number one position in the aerial gunner section of the Eligibility File."²⁸

Kenney, commanding Fifth Air Force in the Southwest Pacific, apparently did not think it worthwhile to establish a formal program for rotation because his units, like others engaged in the war against Japan, had such a low priority for personnel. He wanted to send back to the United States "all combat crews who reached three hundred combat hours," but he was receiving so few replacements that he could not do this "without crippling his squadrons." As he told Arnold, "I will have to wait until

Jan - Sept 1944

a heavy bomber would not be required to participate in more than 35 sorties, and a fighter pilot would not be required to fly more than 300 hours in combat, without a determination as to the man's condition.⁴³

Eaker, who had become commander of Mediterranean Allied Air Forces, called a conference to discuss Arnold's directive with Brig. Gen. Lauris Norstad, his director of operations, and with the chiefs of his AAF commands--Maj. Gen. John K. Cannon of Twelfth Air Force, and Twining, who had become commander of Fifteenth Air Force in Italy. After studying the problem, Eaker directed that Cannon and Twining "immediately issue orders cancelling the mission basis as the keynote to the relief policy." In telling Arnold about the action that had been taken, Eaker let the Commanding General of Army Air Forces know that he did not approve cancellation of fixed tours of combat duty:

. . . The thing that makes it most difficult to maintain morale is to have no policy, leaving clearly in the mind of the combat crewman the belief that he must go on until he cracks up and becomes a jibbering idiot or an admitted coward, or until he is killed. We are all of one mind that the effectiveness of tactical units cannot be maintained under this condition.

With the cancellation of set combat tours, Eaker thought it necessary to find some other way to give his men some relief from combat before they reached the "cracking point." As he told Arnold, "If a combat crew is worn out, they will not spring back; they are through for the war." The men needed longer periods of rest than they could be given in rest camps in the theater. Eaker suggested, therefore, that crews be sent back to the United States for 30 to 60 days for recuperation.⁴⁴

Spatz, who had moved to England to command United States Strategic Air Force in Europe, concurred with Eaker's suggestion for giving combat crews leave in the United States. Although there was some doubt in Washington about the feasibility of this plan, both AAF headquarters and the War Department quickly gave their approval, clearing the way for Eaker and Spatz to issue the following policy for the air forces in Europe:⁴⁵

When, in the opinion of an Air Force commander, a combat crew (or member thereof), as a result of prolonged combat duty, is so reduced in operational efficiency as to affect the efficiency of the unit, that crew (or individual thereof) will be relieved from operations either for: