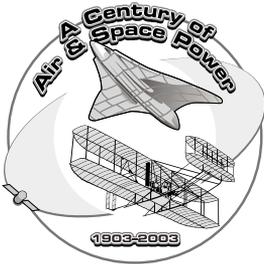


# “Hap” Arnold

CHARLES TUSTIN KAMPS



Gen Henry H. “Hap” Arnold is an icon rising above all others in the development of American airpower. Although in his 42-year career he never took part in aerial combat himself, Arnold presided over the expansion of the US Army Air Forces (USAAF) from an underequipped, second-

rate organization to the largest and most powerful air arm in the world.

Born in 1886 in Pennsylvania, Arnold graduated from West Point in 1907 as an infantry officer. He acquired the nickname “Hap” (for “happy”) from his contemporaries because he always looked like he was smiling. Arnold managed a transfer to the aeronautical division of the Signal Corps in 1911 and learned to fly at the Wright brothers’ training school in Dayton, Ohio. After a promising start in the aviation community, several accidents shook his confidence, and Arnold “bailed out”—not flying again until 1916.

World War I was frustrating for Arnold, who was stuck behind a desk in Washington, D.C., as a staff officer. After the war, he embraced Billy Mitchell’s advocacy of airpower and collected several trophies for flying accomplishments along the way. Also during the thirties, he led a flight of B-10s to Alaska and back in a demonstration of the feasibility of long-range bombing; additionally, he presided over the western zone of the government’s abortive airmail scheme.

By 1938, as a major general, Arnold was appointed chief of the Army Air Corps. With the approach of World War II, he worked tirelessly to build up a pilot-training establishment and encourage the mobilization of industry to produce needed aircraft. A week after Pearl Harbor, Arnold was promoted to lieutenant general and became part of the higher direction of the war effort when, in March of 1942, he was appointed commanding general of USAAF.

During World War II, he pushed his staff and subordinates to give every ounce of effort, often personally corresponding with and visiting agencies and commands. In March of 1943, Arnold became a full general, but the



strain began to take its toll. He soon suffered the first of six heart attacks but, characteristically, bounced back in short order.

By 1944 Arnold was already laying the groundwork for an independent air arm after the war. He formed Twentieth Air Force, subordinate directly to him, as the organization for B-29s in the air campaign against Japan. He also identified the Soviet Union as the greatest post-war threat to the United States. At the end of 1944, Arnold received his fifth star as a general of the Army (later changed to general of the Air Force).

The rigors of command had taxed Arnold heavily, and literally days after Japan surrendered, he announced his impending retirement, which took effect on 30 June 1946. Arnold died in 1950 at the age of 63, having lived to see the creation of the United States Air Force, equipped with jets and atom bombs, less than 10 years after he had taken command of a struggling, underfunded branch of the Army.

## To Learn More . . .

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