

Taking a look at the names behind Tinker's gates

Crystal Toenjes - Staff Writer

Every day thousands of people pass through the Turnbull, Hruskocy, Eaker, Gott and other gates to get to work without fully realizing the significance each of those names has in the history of Oklahoma or Tinker Air Force Base.

For many years, Tinker's gates were referred to by a number, but that changed on May 9, 1997, when base officials gave each gate a name in honor of person or an aircraft with historic ties to Oklahoma or the base.

The process for naming gates after a person is governed by Air Force Instruction 36-3108, Memorialization Program and Ceremonies.

“In the beginning of the process, an individual, a group of individuals or a wing-level commander or vice commander will suggest prospective names to memorialize a gate,” explained Chris Wright, of the base History Office. “The person memorialized has to be a deceased Air Force military or civilian member.”

The base must contact the next-of-kin of the deceased to notify them of their intentions, and then, a package must be submitted to the base's Director of Personnel.

The package must include a letter signed by the wing commander or vice commander stating the background of the person nominated was thoroughly researched and that no derogatory information was found that would disqualify their selection for this honor. The letter must also include a biography detailing their achievements and contribution to the Air Force mission.

Tinker Gate, located at the north end of base on Air Depot Boulevard, like the base is named for Maj. Gen. Clarence L. Tinker. Gen. Tinker, a Pawhuska, Okla., native, gave his life in the Pacific during World War II.

Eaker Gate, located just off Interstate 40 and entering the base on F Avenue, was named for native Oklahoman, Gen. Ira C. Eaker.

Gen. Eaker, an aviation pioneer and a contemporary of Gen. Henry “Hap” Arnold, was the first commander of American air forces in Europe, the 8th Air Force. He retired a month before the Air Force was made an independent service, and was given the rank of General of the Air Force.

Turnbull Gate was named for Col. William Turnbull, in honor of his service as the first Tinker Air Logistics Center Commander in 1942. This gate is located at the intersection of Perimeter Road and A Avenue.

Hruskocy Gate (pronounced ruh-sko-see) is located on Industrial Boulevard on the northeast corner of the base. It was named for Brig. Gen. Thomas C. Hruskocy in honor of his outstanding leadership and



During a 1997 ceremony naming Tinker's numbered gates, Thomas Hruskocy III views a mural depicting the people and planes for which the gates were named. Gate 7 was named for his father, the late Brig. Gen. Thomas C. Hruskocy. (Photo by Margo Wright)

exceptional performance displayed as the OC-ALC chief of Maintenance Resource Management and Material Management Resource divisions at Tinker from 1985-88.

In 1988, he became director of Material Management, responsible for system support of B1/B52/C-KC-135/KC10/E4/E3 and aircraft of the Presidential fleet.

Hope Gate was named for Col. John W. Hope in honor of his leadership and performance while serving as the first commander of the Ground Electronics-Engineering Installation Agency.

GEEIA was established by the USAF as the agency to consolidate all ground communications electronics facilities and was the forerunner to the present-day 38th Engineering Installation Wing.

The gate is located on S.E. 59th Street at the entrance to the 38th EIG complex.

Gott Gate, located on the south end of Air Depot Boulevard, was named for 1st Lt. Donald J. Gott, a native of Arnett, Okla.

Lt. Gott was honored for valor and exceptional performance as a B-17 pilot in World War II as a member of the 729th Bomb Squadron. He was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for saving the lives of most of his B-17 crewmembers during a mission.

With three engines on fire, Lt. Gott managed to drop his bomb load on target. Although he was severely wounded in the attack, he guided his bomber to friendly lines and ordered his crew to evacuate.

After his crew had evacuated the aircraft, the bomber exploded, killing Lt. Gott and his co-pilot as they attempted an emergency landing.

Vance Gate, named for Lt. Col. Leon R. Vance, Jr. in honor of his valor and exceptional performance while flying with the 489th Bombardment Group in World War II, is located along Sooner Road on the west side of base.

A native of Enid, Okla., he received the Congressional Medal of Honor for saving the lives of his crew when a 500-pound bomb became hung up in his bomb bay on a mission over Europe.

Col. Vance ordered his crew to evacuate, and was forced to crash-land his aircraft in the English Channel. Although he was thrown clear of the wreckage, he stayed in the area in order to locate his crewman while waiting rescue which came approximately one hour later.

In May 1997, Col Robert L. Smolen, 72nd Air Base Wing commander, decided to name the gates along Douglas Boulevard after aircraft that had been maintained at Tinker, Wright said.

These entrances include the Lancer Gate, named for the B-1B Lancer, the Liberator Gate, named for the B-24 Liberator, and the Marauder Gate B-26 Marauder.

Mr. Wright said the instruction does not directly address the steps needed to name gates after aircraft, and that these names were probably assigned at the discretion of the commander.

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