



The BAFDC crest, was designed by the College of Heraldry (the British heraldic authority — also known as the College of Arms), and features the American eagle and British lion

The British American Forces Dining Club

By Col Larry G Carter, USAF, Retired

"In war it is not always possible to have everything go exactly as one likes. In working with Allies it sometimes happens that they develop opinions of their own."

(The Hinge of Fate by Sir Winston Churchill)

Sitting in the reviewing stands that overlook the main parade yard inside the ancient walls of the Tower of London, HRH Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, leaned over and explained the maneuvers of a British military marching band to Brig Gen Kurt B. Anderson.¹ Commander of the United States Air Force's 48th Fighter Wing, based at Royal Air Force (RAF) Lakenheath, General Anderson was the senior American officer in attendance that day. Prince Philip's act underscored the very special relationship between

the United States and Britain — the product of a long history between the two countries, conscious decisions, and much nurturing. That day the Duke of Edinburgh, the queen's consort, hosted one of those nurturing institutions — a meeting of the British American Forces Dining Club (BAFDC).

The club began on 1 March 1943, during the dark days of World War II, under the patronage of Gen Dwight D Eisenhower and William Richard Morris, first Viscount Nuffield — an English philanthropist and automobile manufacturer who produced aircraft during the war. General Eisenhower, who had replaced Adm Harold Stark as overall commander of US forces in the European theater in June 1942, assumed responsibility for the



B-17 of the US Eighth Air Force

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daytime US strategic bombing campaign against Germany just as it began. In close cooperation with the British staff, he also directed initial planning

for the land invasion of occupied Western Europe.² Hailing from "two countries divided by a common language,"³ officers of the combined staff who

planned Operation Overlord found that their different cultures, experiences, and military traditions adversely affected their knowledge of each other's staffing processes and procedures, thus straining relationships and creating distrust. Seeking to reverse those misgivings and this growing animosity, in the latter part of 1942 several senior British and American officers æ some of whom became original members of the BAFDC æ had drinks together, and "after about the fourth round they began to feel much more sympathetic to each other's point of view æ and regular dinners were suggested".⁴



Prime Minister Churchill and General Eisenhower

(Courtesy of the National Archives)

At the time of that first BAFDC dinner in 1943, General Eisenhower and his staff were in Algiers. His combined forces found themselves at an operational turning point in North Africa, and planning proceeded apace for follow-on operations in Sicily and Italy. In November 1942,

the Allies had executed Operation TORCH, the invasion of North Africa, with Eisenhower as the combined-forces commander. Until the Casablanca conference in January 1943, the general had remained commander of all US forces in Europe and in that capacity continued to encourage activities to help build trust and confidence in the combined forces. At that conference, Gen George C Marshall, US Army chief of staff, announced the establishment of a separate European theater of operations in the United Kingdom led by Gen Frank Andrews who attended the first BAFDC dinner as commander of US forces in Europe.⁵ (Marshall's directive ran contrary to the positions of Eisenhower and American generals Henry H Arnold and Carl A Spaatz, who saw the bombing efforts of Eighth Air Force in England and the operations of US forces in North Africa as part of one theater that should remain under a single command.)

Viscount Nuffield was the guest of honor at that initial BAFDC dinner attended by 12 senior British and American officers, including UK representatives Adm Sir Dudley Pound, Field Marshal Sir Alan Francis Brooke, and Air Chief Marshal Sir Charles 'Peter' Portal, as well as Admiral Stark and General Andrews of the United States. The senior British naval officer, Sir Dudley Pound had served as Admiral of the Fleet and First Sea Lord since 1939 and would continue to do so until his death in October 1943. Field Marshal Brooke, chief of the Imperial General Staff (the head of the British Army), was the foremost military advisor to Prime Minister Winston Churchill. Dominating British military leadership by virtue of his intellect and personality, he reportedly was the only senior British officer able to challenge Churchill's sometimes volatile and impetuous military judgments.⁶ The leaders of the Casablanca conference had selected Air Chief Marshal Portal, the senior British Airman, to coordinate the combined bomber offensive against Germany. A strong supporter of daylight precision bombing, he had helped American Airmen convince a skeptical Prime Minister Churchill of its value. Winning Churchill's confidence and establishing friendships with senior Allied leaders allowed Air Chief Marshal Portal to contribute significantly to the war effort. He became Marshal



of the RAF in January 1944. Admiral Stark had served as the eighth chief of naval operations prior to assuming command of US forces in the European theater in April 1942. Replaced by General Eisenhower in June of that year, he became commander of US naval forces in Europe, directing the Navy's build-up and participation in the Normandy invasion. Talented diplomatically, Admiral Stark built and maintained close relationships with all leaders — British civilian and naval as well as those of other Allied powers — a critical trait in coalition leadership, particularly at that time.⁷ The first Airman to head a War Department general-staff division, General Andrews had served as head of Army G-3 (operations) under General Marshall. His decisions and close professional relationship with the chief of staff resulted in virtual autonomy for the Army Air Forces. As theater commander of US forces in the Middle East in 1942, he established Ninth Air Force — the first US tactical air force to taste combat. At the Casablanca conference, General Andrews received overall command of US forces in the European theater of operations, becoming responsible for directing the American strategic bombing campaign against Germany and planning the land invasion of occupied Western Europe. Two months after the initial BAFDC dinner, General Andrews died in a B-24 crash in Iceland — a loss of immense proportions. General Marshall had considered Andrews

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one of the nation's few great captains and later selected General Eisenhower as his successor. In January 1944, Roosevelt and Churchill added to Eisenhower's responsibilities by making him the supreme commander of the Allied Expeditionary Force for the invasion of France.⁸

When Eisenhower returned to England, he continued to support activities that helped build and maintain crucial trust and cooperation among Allies. As did most members of the BAFDC, the general demonstrated outstanding coalition leadership that turned the Allies into an effective fighting force and managed its large-scale operations. Gen Omar N Bradley noted that "[Eisenhower] could work with British and Americans and keep them both fairly happy. If Ike had not had that faculty we might have been fighting each other more than we were. When you get two Allies working as closely as we were with the British, where you were brought up under different systems, there were potential cliques, but Ike kept that to a minimum. That is one of his greatest contributions."⁹ His leadership included investing time and energy in activities such as the BAFDC that broke down barriers and increased trust and cooperation.

During the 50th anniversary of the D-day invasion, Prince Philip noted that "the success of that massive combined multinational operation was due in no small measure to the personal friendships and understanding that developed between the members of the club at a crucial period in the planning of Operation Overlord. It says much for the spirit of the club that, in spite of many dramatic changes in the world since those days, a succession of members has continued to appreciate its value and kept it flourishing for over 50 years."¹⁰ The BAFDC met regularly at the Nuffield Club until it closed in 1975. After dining at various venues, it began a long-term relationship with the Honourable



Operation Overlord commanders at a meeting in January 1944. Left to right: Lt Gen Omar Bradley, Adm Sir Bertram Ramsay, Air Marshal Sir Arthur Tedder, Gen Dwight D Eisenhower, Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery, Air Marshal Trafford Leigh-Mallory, and Lt Gen Walter Bedell Smith

(Courtesy of the Eisenhower Presidential Library)

Artillery Company (the oldest regiment in the British Army, led by Her Majesty the Queen as its captain general) and its ceremonial sub-unit, the Honourable Company of Pikemen and Musketeers, both of which organizations continue to host the BAFDC dinners. In May 2000, the BAFDC formed a chapter in Washington, DC, to further professional relationships between British and American personnel serving on the western side of the Atlantic.

Having established their value in the wars of the past century, coalitions should become even more important in current and future conflicts. Coalitions are useful not only militarily in fielding superior military power, but also diplomatically in demonstrating the legitimacy of their purpose. The importance of efforts such as the BAFDC to building trust and cooperation between forces that make up those coalitions is well recognized. The observation that Prince Philip made about the club 10 years ago remains appropriate and relevant to similar efforts: “The original purpose of the club may have faded over the years, but there can be no doubt about its continuing significance in this

disturbed world. I very much hope that it will go on making friendships and creating understanding for many years to come.”¹¹

Notes

- 1 Born 10 June 1921, His Royal Highness Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh (Philip Battenberg adopted the family name of Mountbatten when he became a naturalized British subject in 1947), is the consort of Queen Elizabeth II of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.
- 2 The Birth of the BAFDC: Our History and Heritage, British Defence Staff (Washington), <http://www.bds.org/bafdc>; and Edgar F Puryear Jr, *Nineteen Stars* (Orange, VA: Green Publishers, 1971), 167.
- 3 Attributed to George Bernard Shaw.
- 4 Birth of the BAFDC.
- 5 DeWitt S Copp, Frank M Andrews: Marshall’s Airman (Washington, DC: Air Force History and Museums Program, 2003), 25.
- 6 Lt Col Michael Lee Lanning, *The Military 100: A Ranking of the Most Influential Military Leaders of All Time* (Secaucus, NJ: Carol Publishing Group, 1996); and Alan Brooke, *NationMaster.com*, <http://www.nationmaster.com/encyclopedia/Alan-Brooke>.
- 7 Admiral Harold R. Stark, USN (1880–1972) — 8th Chief of Naval Operations, 1 August 1939–26 March 1942, Department of the Navy, Naval Historical Center, <http://www.history.navy.mil/photos/pers-us/uspers-s/h-stark.htm>.
- 8 Dr. Henry O Malone, *Paving the Way: Remembering Frank Andrews*, *dcmilitary.com*, http://www.dcmilitary.com/airforce/andrews/2_09/local_news/14609-1.html; and Puryear, *Nineteen Stars*, 171.
- 9 Puryear, *Nineteen Stars*, 170.
- 10 HRH Prince Philip, *Early Years Recalled*, British Defence Staff (Washington), <http://www.bds.org/bafdc>.
- 11 *Ibid.*

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