

Gen. Carl Andrew Spatz

September 26, 1947–April 29, 1948



Portrait by Thomas Edgar Stephens



CARL ANDREW SPAATZ was born on June 28, 1891, in Boyertown, Pennsylvania. While attending local schools he worked as a linotype operator for his father's newspaper, *The Berks County Democrat*. He graduated from Boyertown High School at age fifteen and in 1906 entered nearby Perkiomen Preparatory School, where his academic career was undistinguished. When his father was injured in a fire two years later, Carl returned home to run the family newspaper while his father recovered. In 1910 Spaatz entered West Point as a member of the last class that would report in March. He graduated in the lower half of his class in June 1914 and was commissioned a second lieutenant of infantry. He wanted to enter flying school but first had to serve a year-long tour as an infantry officer at Schofield Barracks, Hawaii. In October 1915 he left for a seven-month stint at the Aviation School at San Diego, California.

In June 1916 Spaatz was assigned to Columbus, New Mexico, and served with the 1st Aero Squadron under Gen. John J. Pershing in the Punitive Expedition into Mexico. There he met several men who would become lifelong friends, including Millard Harmon. In May 1917 he joined the 3d Aero Squadron in San Antonio, Texas, and was promoted to captain. Also in 1917 he married Ruth Harrison, the daughter of a cavalry colonel. Spaatz next went to France with the American Expeditionary Forces as commander of the 31st Aero Squadron. Late that year he became a member of the American Aviation School at Issoudun and stayed there until August 30, 1918, when he attained the temporary rank of major. In September 1918 he joined the 2d Pursuit Group with the 13th Squadron and was promoted to flight leader. On that assignment he was credited officially with downing three German Fokker aircraft and was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross. In the following year he was stationed in both California and Texas and became department air service officer for the Western Department in July 1919. On July 1, 1920, he was promoted to the rank of permanent major, after having reverted to his former rank of captain following the war.

As a major, Carl Spaatz commanded Kelly Field, Texas, from October 1920 to February 1921 and then served as air officer of the VIII Corps Area until November 1921. He was commanding officer of the 1st Pursuit Group, first at Ellington Field, Texas, and later at Selfridge Field, Michigan, until September 24, 1924. After graduating in June 1925 from the Air Corps

Tactical School at Langley Field, Virginia, he served in the Office of the Chief of the Air Corps at Washington, D.C.

Spaatz commanded the Army plane *Question Mark* in its refueling endurance flight in California over the Los Angeles vicinity from January 1 to 7, 1929, keeping the aircraft aloft a record total of nearly 151 hours, and was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for his efforts. Spaatz commanded the 7th Bombardment Group at Rockwell Field from May 1, 1929, to October 29, 1931, and the 1st Bombardment Wing at March Field, California, until June 10, 1933. Then he served in the Office of the Chief of the Air Corps and became chief of the Training and Operations Division. In August 1935 Spaatz enrolled in the Command and General Staff School at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, and while there was promoted to lieutenant colonel. He graduated in June 1936 and served at Langley Field until he returned to the Office of the Chief of the Air Corps in January 1939.

In November 1939 Spaatz received a temporary promotion to colonel, and during the Battle of Britain in the spring and summer of 1940 he spent several weeks in England as a special military observer. In August 1940 he was assigned again to the Office of the Chief of the Air Corps and two months later was appointed assistant to the Chief of the Air Corps with the temporary rank of brigadier general. He became chief of the Plans Division of the Air Corps in November 1940, and the following July he was named chief of the Air Staff at Army Air Forces (AAF) Headquarters.

Several weeks after the attack on Pearl Harbor, Spaatz was assigned as chief of the AAF Combat Command at Washington and was promoted to the temporary rank of major general. In May 1942 he became commander of the Eighth Air Force, transferring to the European theater of operations in July 1942 to prepare for the U.S. bombing campaign against Germany. On July 7 he was given additional duty as commanding general of the U.S. Army Air Forces in the European theater. On December 1, 1942, Spaatz became commanding general of the Twelfth Air Force in North Africa, and the following February he assumed command of the Northwest African Air Force, which he organized. The following March he attained the temporary rank of lieutenant general.

After Rommel's Afrika Korps had been driven from North Africa and Italy had been invaded, Spaatz became deputy commander of the Mediterranean Allied Air Forces, including the Twelfth Air Force in Africa and the Fifteenth Air Force and the Royal Air Force in Italy. He returned to England in January 1944 to command the U.S. Strategic Air Forces in Europe, which he headed throughout the preinvasion period and ensuing campaign against Germany. He won the Distinguished Service Medal for his Africa service and in 1944 was awarded the Collier Trophy, given annually to the American making the most outstanding contribution to aviation. Briefly stated, Spaatz commanded the largest armada of aircraft and airmen ever assembled under the control of a single commander. He was one of the chief strategists who resolved the intricate maze of logistics into an effective strategic bombing campaign for the defeat of Germany, Italy, and Japan. General Eisenhower called him "the best air commander I know."

In March 1945 Spaatz received a temporary promotion to four-star rank and in June was assigned to Air Force headquarters in Washington, D.C. The following month he assumed command of the U.S. Strategic Air Forces in the Pacific, with headquarters on Guam. There he supervised the final strategic bombing of Japan by the B-29, including the two atomic bomb missions. He was present at all three signings of unconditional surrender by the enemy: at Rheims, at Berlin, and aboard the battleship USS *Missouri* in Tokyo Bay.

In October 1945 Spaatz returned to AAF headquarters, and the following February he was nominated to become commander of the Army Air Forces. In September 1947 President Truman appointed him as the first chief of staff of the new United States Air Force, a position he held until April 29, 1948.

Assessing the implications of atomic weaponry was only one of the major problems thrust upon the AAF in late 1945 and early 1946. Demobilization was also an issue. To be sure, Spaatz had to oversee the dismantling of the world's most powerful air force and reduce it from 2,300,000 men to 400,000 and from ninety thousand aircraft to less than ten thousand. Besides the quest for autonomy, other goals that Spaatz pursued in concert with the first secretary of the Air Force, Stuart Symington, were the seventy-group Air Force and the reorganization of the service along functional lines. Like Gen. Henry Arnold, Spaatz sought to press forward on scientific research and development and to build a viable aircraft industry.

Serving for only seven months as the Air Force's first chief of staff, he retired with the rank of general on June 30, 1948. In retirement, Spaatz wrote widely on air power subjects and was a contributing editor to *Newsweek* magazine. He also served on the Committee of Senior Advisors to the Chief of Staff, USAF, from 1952 until his death in 1974. He was chairman of the National Executive Board of the Civil Air Patrol starting in 1948 and a member of the American Battle Monuments Commission beginning in 1953. He was a member of the board of directors and third vice president of the Retired Officers Association; a member of the board of directors of the First National Bank of Arlington, Virginia; and a past president and member of the board of directors and the executive committee of the Air Force Association. In addition, he was a past president and member of the board of trustees of the Air Force Historical Foundation. Other boards and committees on which Spaatz served included the Harmon International Trophy Committee, Committee for the Collier Trophy Award, the Hoover Committee on the Reorganization of the Executive Branch of the U.S. Government, and as chairman on the USAF Academy Site Selection Board.

General Spaatz died of congestive heart failure on July 14, 1974, at the age of eighty-three and was interred at the USAF Academy. His longtime friend and associate Lt. Gen. Ira C. Eaker commented at the time that Spaatz always exhibited absolute integrity and possessed wisdom and tremendous common sense.