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**FILE TITLE: Position Paper: Proposal to Reinstate the Original AF Flight Engineer Wings**

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**Reviewed by:**

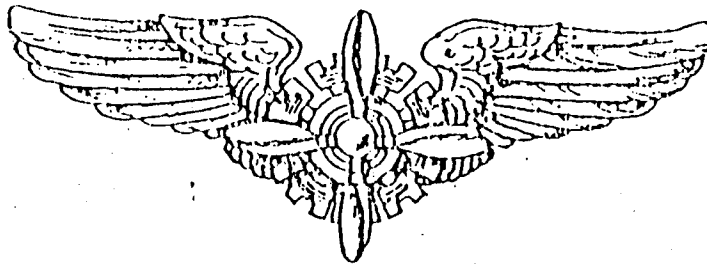
**AFEHRI Representative** G.R. Akin date 3<sup>rd</sup> DEC 97

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⊕ Flight engineer.

PROPOSAL TO  
REINSTATE THE ORIGINAL  
AIR FORCE FLIGHT ENGINEER WINGS



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## FORWARD

There comes a time when the wrong must be righted. In the 45 years since the end of World War II, we have tried to pay proper respect to those who fought and died for their country. This was done to preserve the honors of our fighting men won on the field of battle. This proposal is an attempt to return part of our heritage to the modern day Air Force. As people, we would be foolish to ever forget the price those men paid to insure our freedom. This is one small step toward remembering.

## INTRODUCTION:

In 1947, when the Army Air Corp gave way to the newly formed Air Force, much was done to preserve the heritage left from the early history of military aviation. Military traditions are passed from one generation to the next as a reminder of the special courage and sacrifices made in the line of duty. This paper is a proposal to reinstate one part of Aviation History, which should never be forgotten. Specifically, the return of the Air Force Flight Engineer Aircrew Badge (Wings). These wings, originally awarded during World War II by the Secretary of War, were first authorized on 19 June 1945 and remained part of the new Air Force after it became a separate branch of the service. These distinctive wings, with the propeller and radial engine in the center, were awarded to members of this profession in recognition of their sacrifices and contributions to the war effort.

Tradition itself has many definitions. Part of tradition is the passing from one generation to the next, symbols of past accomplishments. The Flight Engineer Wings are just that. Forged by the fires of World War II, each badge becomes a living reminder of duty, honor, and country. By returning these badges to active service, the Air Force will reaffirm it's commitment to honoring those who fell in the defense of our nation. The resurgence of pride this nation has undergone in the past few years must continue.

Pride in their country and themselves is a maior part of this issue for all flight engineers. New Flight Engineers that graduated were driven, in part, by the prospect of wearing those distinctive wings. Those who graduated had these special wings as proof that they had endured one of the toughest training courses in the military service. This proposal is not a request to create a new device, but the return of something already awarded. Air Force Flight Engineers have a bright future. Many of the recent aircraft purchased by the Air Force use Flight Engineers as part of the basic flight crew. These aircraft include the C-5, C-141, E-3, E-4, and KC-10 along with our fleet of C-130 aircraft. Aircraft such as this will be the backbone of air power well into the next century. Let us reach back into the past and remember. Without it, we have no future.

Recently, the Military Airlift Command brought to their aircrew members a part of their World War II history, by issuing the WWII leather flying jacket type A-2.

The following is a short history of the Flight Engineer career field and the wings they once wore.

## HISTORY

The first Air Force Flight Engineers date from the introduction of the B-29 bomber. It was the first aircraft that needed a third person to control the mechanical functions while the pilots maintained directional and altitude control. This individual was designated as the Flight Engineer. At first the plan was to cross-train pilots as Flight Engineers, but from the standpoint of personnel availability, interest, attitude, and motivation; the plan was not successful. The duties required were closely related to those of the B-17 and B-24 crew engineer. A select few of the crew engineers did attend the first formal schools and upon completion were promoted to officer ranks. Engineer training reached a peak in 1945 with engineer positions manned by both officer and enlisted personnel. In recognition of their duties and contributions to the war effort, special Flight Engineer wings were designed. By the direction of the Secretary of War, the Adjutant General of the Army issued AG order 421 (See attachment 1) on 19 June 45 formally authorizing these wings. The original order was signed by the Chief of Staff, General of the Army George C Marshall. This order was reinforced the following year by the new Chief of Staff, General of the Army Dwight D Eisenhower (See attachment 2)

All of the commissioned officers assigned as Flight Engineers were grounded by the Air Force in 1948. While most were seeking careers in other fields, a small group maintained an interest in the specialty. Several years later these men were recalled as the Korean conflict caught the Air Force with a shortage of B-29 and B-36 Flight Engineers. This small group of Flight Engineers were all that remained to provide supervisory and OJT training when the formal performance school was reopened for airmen flight engineer candidates. The Strategic Air Command promoted several enlisted Flight Engineers to commissioned officer grades to man the B-36 units at the squadron, wing, command and Air Force levels. The Air Force was desperate for qualified people to attend and pass the formal performance school at Chanute AFB. The Air Force tried many different ideas to relieve the chronic shortage of personnel. This shortage of Flight Engineer Candidates led to the one time lowering of the initial entry standards to accept airman basics into performance school. This program, like several others, was a complete failure.

In the mid 1950's the Strategic Air Command Flight Engineer program died, with most of the officer Flight Engineers reverting back to the grade of Master Sergeant and remaining in the career field. This was the last time that the officer Flight Engineer served in the Air Force. Reviewing regulation from that time period revealed that these men, who had earned the Flight Engineer Wings, were allowed to keep them. Air Force Regulation 35-80 dated 10 Oct 1950, allowed service members to continue to wear badges previously awarded. This regulation does not show the Flight Engineer Badge as a separate design. This was the first indication we have to the Flight Engineer Badge being lost. This also explains why the badge was still being worn by service members during the middle to late 1960's.

In the late 60's and into the 70's, most of the veterans of World War II had retired and this legacy was lost with the passage of time. By this time the Air Force was engaged in the Viet Nam conflict and all of our efforts were directed to the war. No one it seems, had the time to look back into the past and correct this iniustice. So by the early 70's this part of Air Force history faded away when these men retired. Some of these people, who had seen this country through three wars, took with them the last reminder of their courage and sacrifice.

The central question of exactly when the wings were discontinued remains a mystery. Historical records are incomplete, but it seems that the Flight Engineer Wings were dropped from the books sometime during the early 1950's. For the first few years after the birth of the Air Force in 1947, the Air Force used Army manuals until the new service could write their own. This transition progressed throughout the 50's. AFR 35-10 was not published until MAY 1959. It seems that in the haste to write new regulations/manuals for the Air Force, these wings were simply lost in the shuffle and forgotten. One can only assume that the Flight Engineer Badge was lost in the transition from the Army Air Corps to the US Air Force.

Turmoil has surrounded this career field throughout it's history. Devastated by several unfortunate occurrences over the years, the past has left scars that are visible today. For example, during the early days of the Viet Nam conflict, many Flight Engineers were pulled from the cockpit duties and sent overseas in their secondary maintenance Air Force Specialty Codes. Many of these young men never returned to their previous flight engineer duties. Today many people who might otherwise volunteer for this career field have not because of this apparent instability. The flight engineers have a long future ahead of them with the present force of aircraft in the Air Force inventory. The prospect of renewing this tie with our heritage will be a positive step for rebuilding confidence in the career field.

The modern flight engineer is involved in many aspects of the Air Force mission. After completing the required internship in the maintenance career field, the prospective flight engineer candidate must endure a rigorous selection process. After this screening process sent to attend the flight engineer performance school. Once they graduate from this school, these people have many different and challenging assignments to look forward to. Serving in every major air command in the Air Force, from everything from the dusty C-130 full of supplies, to the Air Force One and the President of the United States.

## IMPACT

We must examine the impact that this proposal would have on the career field and the Air Force in general. In many ways the Air Force stands to benefit. The renewed pride and esprit de corps for the current flight engineer force will be a symbol to all enlisted people that their contributions to Air Force history matters.

This action would symbolize the U.S. Air Forces commitment to the enlisted flying force as a partner in the total mission concept. The flight engineer comprises the largest enlisted flying career field in the military. They are also the most diversified. Flying in SAC, TAC, AFSC, ASD, and especially MAC, the flight engineer is a vital link in our national security. No other enlisted career field has had such a far reaching impact on the Air Force mission. Almost all of our strategic airlift missions, every one of the vital AWACS aircraft, and the newest addition to the strategic air refueling fleet (KC-10) require a flight engineer, an intricate part of the aircrew, to successfully complete the assigned mission. With recent modifications of the C-141 fleet and the purchase of the KC-10's and C-5B's, the need for a strong flight engineer force has never been greater. By returning this symbol of their proud past, the Air Force can take a positive step toward rebuilding the morale of this vital career field.

Over the past four decades, no other enlisted career field has held such an impact on the combat readiness of this nation, airlift, refueling and surveillance capabilities. Several times during this period, due to the shortage of flight engineers, we would not have been able to meet our peak as a vital fighting arm. These shortages are caused by a variety of problems. While the lack of volunteers can be traced to more normal problems faced by other career fields, the flight engineers have several unique problems to overcome. Besides the demanding training standards that the students must face, they have to look forward to time away from their families, and long strenuous hours in the cockpit. Because the entry level for this career field is a minimum grade of E-4, these people also realize that their promotions to a higher pay grade often takes longer than it would in other career fields. Having been decommissioned twice during that period plus the indignity of losing their wings, it's no surprise that many flight engineers feel disheartened.



Everyday we lose many of our best people to the airlines and other jobs, because they feel unappreciated. No other career field in the Air Force has been so devastated by similar misfortune. By returning part of the flight engineers' legacy to them, we can begin to restore the pride to this historic career field.

Another benefit would be in the recruitment of people to fill future requirements. Over the years this career field has had trouble attracting qualified volunteers. By restoring this symbol of the past, we can again find the bright young people we need to insure our future combat crew readiness. Having a symbol of past achievements to offer new people entering this field is one way to ease the task of recruiting qualified candidates. If the young men and women entering training have something as honored as the flight engineer wings to work for, the Air Force will benefit in many ways. Not only will they apply themselves even more to the task at hand, but they will be excellent spokespersons in the future.

The direct cost for these wings would, to the Air Force would be minimal. To authorize these wings again, a simple change to AFR 35-10 would have to be approved. AFR 35-10 should reflect that these wings are optional items for people authorized to perform duty in AFSC 113X0C (Performance Qualified Flight Engineer). These wings should be sold as an optional uniform item through the AAFES clothing sales system. The only modification that would have to be made to the original wings would be the inclusion of the star for the senior flight engineer wings and the star and wreath for the chief flight engineer wings. This could be accomplished by the manufacturer after the Air Force grants the approval to sell these items once again. Once the up-dated design is approved, civilian firms who stand to profit from the sales of these wings will bear the expense of fabricating and producing these wings. If the individual chooses to wear these wings, they can buy them as an optional uniform item at their own expense.

There are over 3000 active duty flight engineers in the Air Force today. With all of the aircraft assigned to the reserves and national guard units today, this figure is well over 7000 individuals who would need these new wings. If current prices are any indication we can use \$5.50 per set on the average as a baseline figure. Most people keep at least two sets of large wings and two sets of small wings for normal wear. (7000 X 4 X \$5.50) This would indicate a gross profit to AAFES and the manufacturer in excess of \$154,000.

## SUMMARY


In the past few years several career fields in the Air Force have been authorized a specific badge to identify their specialty. Following is a list of these badges as authorized in AFR-35-10:

JUDGE ADVOCATE BADGE  
SECURITY POLICE BADGE  
ATC INSTRUCTOR BADGE  
AF RECRUITING SERVICE BADGE  
FIRE PROTECTION BADGE  
AIR TRAFFIC CONTROLLER BADGE  
AIRCRAFT MAINTENANCE/MUNITIONS BADGE  
EXPLOSIVE ORDNANCE DISPOSAL BADGE  
MISSILE BADGE  
WEAPONS CONTROLLER BADGE  
ADMINISTRATION BADGE  
COMMUNICATIONS/ELECTRONICS MAINTENANCE BADGE  
MEDICAL TECHNICIAN BADGE  
METEOROLOGIST BADGE  
SUPPLY-FUELS BADGE

It seems the aircrew member is a generic figure since all of the enlisted crew members, regardless of their specialty field, wear the same wings. This does not differentiate a loadmaster from a boom operator or flight engineer. We in this field have to work extra hard to maintain proficiency and combat readiness.

For over 40 years the Air Force has struggled to form it's own identity. At times, unintentionally, we appear to be insensitive to the events of the people who made our own history. The recent interest in Project Warrior has revitalized in all of us a desire to remember our past. As we have seen, this proposal does not ask for the creation of a new device. We, as flight engineers, simply endeavor to have something returned to us that once was ours. The boost in moral and esprit de corps that can be achieved as a result of this simple act cannot be understated. These wings carry with them the memory of every man that ever wore them. It is not a prerogative of the current generations to inhibit the memories of our predecessors. We must strive to recall each of their gallant contributions to freedom. To ignore the sacrifices of the past is to desecrate the honor of our fallen brothers.

This proposal is of great benefit to the Air Force. It accomplishes a great number of positive steps at a minimum cost to the government. One, is the boost in morale for the Air Force Flight Engineers, past, present, and future. Two, the dramatic commitment the Air Force will be making, not just to history, but to the future as well. No one should be allowed to forget the enormous legacy entrusted to us by past generations. Many of the young men who carried these wings into battle, never returned. It is our duty to carry their banner forward.

  
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