

## The Distinguished Flying Cross Society Preserving the Memory – Sharing the Heritage

*Al Ciurczak-Founder of DFCS*



The Society began when **Alexander D. Ciurczak**, a retired Air Force Captain who was twice awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross in World War II, could not locate an organization that was dedicated to the DFC. Ciurczak, known to everyone as Al, best explained how he carried forth with incredible determination, in order to turn an idea into a national organization.

“It all started with an advertisement in the *Retired Officers Magazine* of September 1993. The ad read as follows:

**USAF Distinguished Flying Cross: Is there an organization or society whose members have been awarded the USAF DFC? If not, why not? I would be willing to start one. Write: A.D. Ciurczak, 34552 Camino Capistrano, Capistrano Beach, CA 92624.**

With many individual responses, a letter from an editor of a military-oriented magazine and the Defense Department indicating there was no record of an organization made up of members who were awarded the DFC, a handwritten letter-writing campaign began. Letters went to HQ Air Force, HQ AFMPC/DPMASSA, Randolph AFB, Texas, the Legion of Valor Association, Airmen Memorial Museum, the Chief of Staff, US Air Force and any other address that sounded promising. Several negative responses almost led to abandonment and it wasn't until a reply was received from General Merrill A. McPeak, Chief of Staff, USAF, that he felt the Society could become a reality.

The Chief of Staff's letter got the program going again. Letters went to every organization relating to aviation that could be found. In the meantime, the local library came in handy and solved the problem of how to get a non-profit organization started. Then we had to deal with the development of the articles of incorporation and the bylaws. About this time, wishes to win the lottery or have a family lawyer/friend to help were in order. Talk about paperwork! There were letters and forms to the Secretary of State, the IRS, phone calls, applications more complicated than income tax forms, etc.

Finally, in April of 1994, a letter from the Secretary of State indicated that the approval process was officially started, which meant the paperwork was forwarded to the IRS for review. Then more forms...then a letter from the IRS saying the review could take up to 100 days.

The letter writing campaign continued with lists from 'Who's Who' and a list of Vietnam organizations supplied by the Chief of Public Affairs in the Pentagon. The most disappointing aspect of this campaign was to find that none of the services maintained a listing of DFC recipients.

Meanwhile, individuals responded to notices placed in newsletters such as *Kings Cliffe*, published by the 20<sup>th</sup> Fighter Group Association; *Military*, published in California and covering all branches; *Journal*, published by the Second Air Division Association; *WWII Air Commando*, published by that association and *Flak News*, published by the 398<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group (H) Memorial Association.

It wasn't until 31 May 1994 that The Distinguished Flying Cross Society received recognition from the California Secretary of State. Then on 6 June 1994, the Internal Revenue Service gave its approval for a non-profit, tax-free organization under Section 501 (C) (19) of the Internal Revenue Code”

### **The DFCS was Inaugurated on the Fiftieth Anniversary of D-Day**

On the auspicious fiftieth anniversary of D-Day, The Distinguished Flying Cross became an official non-profit organization. In actuality, the real work of creating a fraternal society had just gotten under way. The first Board of

Directors consisted of the following members and provided the direction for the DFC Society: Al Ciurczak, Bill Coats, Jack Mates and Wayne Turner.

Ciurczak's basement served as the initial headquarters for the fledging organization. The formative meetings were held at Ciurczak's house in Capistrano Beach, California or in the homes of the other board members in San Diego. However, as the group swelled to twenty members, a suitable hotel was found for the gathering of DFC recipients.

While the base of the organization was in Southern California, written communication and telephone correspondence was conducted throughout all fifty states and Canada. As the months progressed, meetings were held and plans were developed for a convention. With the concentration of membership in San Diego, that location seemed the logical selection.

The first convention was held in San Diego, California in October 1996 at the Town and Country Resort Hotel and concluded with a banquet on the final evening. It was attended by 275 people; a number which exceeded all expectations and got the DFC Society off to a successful start. Even more importantly, the organization accomplished its goal of bringing together the first significant group of individuals with a common background and purpose.

## **The DFCS Matures into a Respected National Organization**

As the DFC Society's membership grew, so did its goals. In the first decade of its existence, the Society had 4,100 members and created an Honor Roll listing its recipients on the organization's website. As of the present time, the DFC Society has more than 6,000 members. To guide the Society and help focus its goals and objectives, a Mission Statement, Vision Statement and Statement of Heritage was developed along with Society bylaws.

The current bylaws state, "Regular members are individuals who have been awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross and have joined the Society. They are required to maintain membership in the National DFCS in order to be members of a regional chapter." Associate members are 'spouses, relatives and descendants of individuals who were awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross and are members of the Society." Associate members are also required to maintain membership in the National DFCS in order to be members of a regional chapter.

To further the history and traditions of the men and women who were awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross, the Society established the Ward Macauley Scholarship Fund in 1998 which has made financial awards annually to deserving descendants of DFCS members. The program was first endowed by Lydia Macauley and named in honor of her husband, Ward Macauley.

Based on the success of the initial DFCS gathering, the organization has held biennial conventions in various locations throughout the United States to reunite recipients of the Distinguished Flying Cross. Each convention has included various programs, lectures, tours and other activities which have provided a forum for patriotic, historical and social endeavors.

A DFCS news magazine is published three times a year to keep members informed of Society activities and to highlight personal accounts of its members' exploits. As compared to the first mimeographed newsletters, the contemporary news magazine, featuring color graphics and photographs, are digitally produced and shared throughout the international aviation community.