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# Jason Smith's Capitol Report - Honoring Fighter Aces

JANUARY 03RD 2014 BY DEE LOFLIN

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*Submitted by  
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### *Honoring America's Fighter Aces*

**8th Congressional District - Missouri** - America's veterans make tremendous sacrifices to defend our liberties and freedoms. Recently, I had the honor of cosponsoring HR 565, the American Fighter Aces Congressional Gold Medal Act to recognize America's Fighter Aces. This legislation ensures that Fighter Aces, 51 of whom are from Missouri, will forever be distinguished for their valuable contribution to our War efforts in World War I, World War II, Korea, and Vietnam.

To be a Fighter Ace, an individual must shoot down five enemy planes in aerial combat, a feat that has not been accomplished by an American since the Vietnam War. Of the over 1200 Americans who qualified as fighter aces, less than 115 remain alive today. Our Eighth Congressional District is home to three individuals who earned the Fighter Ace distinction. I want to share a little about each man from short biographies compiled by the American Fighter Aces Association.

1. **First Lt. Ralph "Kid" Hofer from Salem, MO**, Ralph Hofer scored 15 aerial victories as a World War II Fighter Ace flying the P-47 Thunderbolt and the P-51 Mustang in the Army Air Corps. Ralph flew with the famed 4th Fighter Group, 334th Fighter Squadron based at Debden, England. The 4th Fighter Group

started to receive their P-51 Mustangs in February, 1944 and Ralph called his "Salem Representative" from his hometown of Salem, MO. His last combat mission came on July 2nd, 1944 when on a bomber escort mission en-route to Budapest, Hungary he was attacked by German and Hungarian Bf-109's and eventually fell to Earth near an airfield in Yugoslavia where he was found dead inside the wreckage of his P-51 Mustang. He was buried in a grave near this airfield but was transferred back to the U.S. in 1950 and is buried in a grave at Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery in St. Louis.

2. **Lt. Colonel John England from Caruthersville, MO.** John England scored 17.5 victories as Fighter Ace in World War II and Korea. John was accepted into aviation cadet training and was sent to Yuma, Arizona where his flight instructor was future U.S. Senator and presidential candidate Barry Goldwater. John flew the P-51 Mustang throughout his World War II combat tour with the famed 357th Fighter Group based at Leiston, England. John was one of the highest scoring Mustang Aces of World War II and among the highest scoring Air Force Fighter Aces of all time. In 1954, John was returning from a practice mission when weather conditions deteriorated. He attempted to land but ran out of fuel and was headed for a barracks. John purposely crashed his F-86 Sabre jet to avoid hitting the barracks. England Air Force Base in Alexandria, LA is named in his honor.

3. **Captain Raymond Littge from Altenburg, MO.** Ray scored 10.5 aerial victories flying the P-51D Mustang in World War II flying with the 352nd fighter group. Raymond scored his first aerial victory in 1944 downing two German Bf 109's after becoming involved in a furious aerial dog fight with experienced German pilots. Through 1945 he continued to add to his score until he reached 10.5 aerial victories on March 25th, 1945. Ray was well respected by his men of all wars and an excellent leader. He would never back down from a fight in the air! He joined the Regular Air Force in 1946 and was sent to the 78th Fighter Group as Executive Officer based at Hamilton Field California flying the F-84 Thunderjet. He was en route to an air show at Coulee Dam, Washington on May 20th, 1949 when his oxygen supply failed and he crashed to his death.

Ralph Hofer, John England and Raymond Littge earned the Fighter Ace status for their bravery and skill in the air. It is fitting for these men, and America's other Fighter Aces to be recognized through the American Fighter Aces Congressional Gold Medal Act. So much of what happens in Washington is divided by ideological boundaries. Honoring America's Fighter Aces goes far beyond party

politics to highlight the selfless service of our nation's greatest fighter pilots.

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