

## Clarence Leonard Tinker



Clarence L. Tinker, the first head of a separate aviation organization in the National Guard Bureau, was born on November 21, 1887, in Osage County, Oklahoma. An Osage Indian, he grew up in Pawhuska, Oklahoma, in what was then known as Indian Territory. As a young man, he attended Wentworth Military Academy in Lexington, Missouri, and then joined the military, serving in the Philippine Constabulary from 1908-1912. He then served in the infantry in 1912, and was a captain during World War I. His experiences in World War I convinced him that aviation was the key to the future and he transferred to the Air Service in 1920. After learning to fly at March Field, California, Tinker held various positions including as an instructor at Kelly Field, Texas, and was rated as a command pilot and combat observer. He was promoted to colonel in 1936, and in November of that year he was transferred to the National Guard Bureau to serve as the personal pilot for Chief of the National Guard Bureau Major General Albert Blanding, a job Tinker's wife Madeline described as "cushy."

But, it was a prestigious and highly visible position that enhanced his career prospects. Tinker flew Blanding all over the United States and got to know many important people. He met President and Mrs. Roosevelt at White House social functions on three different occasions while assigned to the Bureau. In addition to

his piloting duties, Tinker had responsibility for the National Guard's aviation training.

Tinker took charge of the Bureau's new Aviation Division which first appeared in its organization chart on July 1, 1938. Although individual Army aviators had been assigned to the Bureau since the early 1920s to oversee the Guard's fledgling aviation program, the Aviation Division was the only combat or support arm of the National Guard represented in the Bureau by its own separate office. The remainder of the NGB remained organized along functional lines such as personnel and finance. Establishment of the Aviation Division reflected the growing importance of air power in America's pre World War II military buildup.

In 1940, Tinker received a promotion to the rank of brigadier general and left the Bureau to serve as commander of a bombardment group and wing. Promoted to major general in 1942 and in command of the Seventh Air Force, General Tinker was killed in action that June while leading a flight of bombers against the Japanese Combined Fleet near Wake Island. In 1943, the Oklahoma City Air Depot was renamed Tinker Air Force Base in his honor.

Charles J. Gross, PhD, and Gregory W. Ball, PhD

ANG History Program