
Book One of the
Historical Fiction Trilogy
1949
STARLINGS OF PEACE
CATHARINE A. DEEVER

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In Appreciation

Karen Randal was the first editor to read and edit "1949".

Her questions as well as her comments and personal experiences of World War II through her parents

gave me great insight as well as information about the lives of those who are part of "The Greatest Generation".

I am very grateful for her patience, skill and most of all, making our work together – harmonious.

About the author

"People will forget . . . what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel." Maya Angelou

That is why the purpose of this book is to give readers a chance to feel daily life surrounded by threats. The characters in this book are composite personalities from America, Great Britain, France and Germany who lived before me. Millions of people – who were smart, strong and brave, were not glorified in headlines. They simply survived – and and wanted to live past the blood, shattered opportunities, and lost hopes for better lives.

I met some of them in Germany, where I studied for a year as an exchange student in 1969. I returned to America to earn a BA degree in foreign languages and an MA in Communication Arts.

After graduation, I became a teacher, and my career morphed to include leadership positions in corporate training and media, government administration, non-profit management and advocacy. In every job, I worked with teams to empower goals and communicate ideas through written and visual works.

This book, *1949,* as well as the two books that follow in my "Starlings of Peace" trilogy, is fiction – except for the historical record.

I come from a peace-seeking family. I may never reach the heights of service, members of my family have. However, I can contribute to the family mission by working to capture more just the facts. My work strives to reveal the truth of those facts – and how they made some people feel.

Introduction

This story begins in January 1949 – Berlin, Germany.

The Soviet Union has blocked the Western Allies' railway, road, and canal access to the sectors of Berlin under Western control.

Three air corridors remain open the Soviets cannot close, without risking another war. Western Allies begin flying into American, British and French Berlin airfields the lifesaving supplies West Berliners need.

Those who experience that history-making year include:

Capt. John Jacob MacDonald - former U.S. Air Force pilot shot down over Berlin 1944, now an engineer for an aircraft company supplying planes for the United States.

Magdalene Eva Wells, "Maggie" – political operative in Washington DC. Seeing the suffering on rubble-filled streets, she decides to stay.

Sir Robert Anthony Taylor – British baronet and a constant presence in Berlin via the financial newspaper he owns and his connections to Parliament

Lady Evelyn Taylor – married to Sir Robert and an aristocrat in her own right. Her family owns an investment firm in London, where she is a partner

René Laurent Boulanger – a Jewish interpreter / translator was a language instructor in Paris. He flees to London before the Nazis invade France in 1940.

Violet Charlet Boulanger – Russian-speaking teacher of foreign languages and wife of René, flees to the French south with Noël, her son by René.

Sebastian Lukas Gauss – a former German soldier and POW in England, now operates a small "house hotel" and works to build a grander hotel in a recovered Berlin.

Heidimarie (Heidi) Regina Bauer – an orphan who survived among the war's ruins, unspeakable assaults and poverty.

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Chapter 1

Missed Connections

January 6, 1949, American Zone

Tempelhof Airport in Berlin, Germany

"Get me Capt. Mac!" The General hung up the transatlantic call and barked for his right-hand man. "I think he's out in one of the hangers, watching take-offs and landings."

Capt. Elgin Freeman, the General's most trusted aide, always striving for accuracy, corrected him, "He's a civilian now, sir. He's that engineer for the aircraft manufacturer."

The General slowly turned his head and targeted his aide with a one-eyed glare.

"Yes, sir. Right away, sir." Capt. Freeman saluted and whisked himself out to the intercom system in air traffic control.

Elgin Freeman was one of the first African American military officers to serve in a desegregated Command unit. Focused on "getting it right",

on all days, in all ways, he was a man who made himself essential to any mission.

A civil engineering graduate of Howard University, then West Point, Capt. Freeman had been courted by the Tuskegee Airmen. It wasn't that the Tuskegee Airmen wanted him, so much as Capt. Freeman's father wanted him to be a pilot. Elgin, who didn't want to fly, believed his destiny was on the ground getting *what* the Army needed, *where* it needed and *when* it needed it.

Elgin dreamed that George S. Patton would one day select him, out of all 1946 West Point graduates, to be his aide. General Patton, however, died in Heidelberg, Germany in December 21, 1945. So, Elgin's dream faded, and he kept his focus on continuous learning and accomplishing every task to its polished end. Elgin's father, an oft-decorated Tuskegee Airman, dropped bits of Elgin's career highlights to a number of high-ranking officers throughout the Army Air Forces. Then, after September 18, 1947, when the United States Air Force was created, Elgin benefitted from several strategic transfers. The highlight of his career to date was his assignment to Berlin.

He excelled at achieving – quietly. The "white military" only saw the products of his work. The "colored" military wanted to resent him, but couldn't figure out how. If there had been enough time during the Berlin Airlift, to plaster Capt. Freeman's image all over military recruitment posters, they would have. The sienna tones in his skin softened his eyes-front approach. His voice was rich and persuasive, so that when he issued a command, subordinates obeyed without grumbling.

When he expressed an opinion, it was backed up by fact and the experience of all the mentors who'd preceded him, including the General he now served.

The trail-blazing General had specifically requested a black officer with fine-detail management credentials. Capt. Elgin Freeman arrived at Tempelhof to serve as the General's administrative aide in November 1948, just four months after Truman created the President's Committee on Equality of Treatment and Opportunity in the Armed Services. Freeman's dignified

calm in constant crisis was "essential" to keep the General on task, on time, and fuel efficient.

As suspected, the former Capt. John Jacob MacDonald was, indeed, down in an open hanger at Tempelhof Airport. It was late morning and just above freezing.

Tempelhof was perfect to meet the Berlin Airlift's intense schedule of off-loading supplies, prepping planes to return to Rhein-Main, Wiesbaden, Celle, or Fassberg in Germany. There, the planes' bellies would be refilled with life-saving goods, fly back to Berlin – and keep Berlin citizens alive.

Capt. Mac was watching, listening, sniffing the air for any odor not associated with an aging C-54 transport, now a cargo plane for the Berlin Airlift.

Mac turned to the military mechanic beside him. "Sergeant, you need to get into that engine's lower section. Check the connecting rods."

"Yes, sir," the sergeant nodded and scurried up his steel ladder.

"Ok, you can turn the radio back on now," Capt. MacDonald agreed. The mechanics had been listening to "Ghost Riders in the Sky", sung by Vaughn Moore on RIAS Radio Berlin.

When the radio was switched back on, RIAS Radio Berlin was broadcasting the news. The mechanics groaned, "We missed our *song*!"

"Well, it's not going to kill you to hear what's going on in the world," Mac chuckled.

"Excuse me, sir – but *we're* what's going on in the world. We're livin' the news every day. You'd think they'd treat us better."

Before Mac could respond with appreciation for their eat-on-the-run dedication, a mechanic in the back shouted, "How are you going to vote on letting enlisted guys into the Harnack House tomorrow?"

Mac stuck his clipboard on his hip, "What's a 'Harnack House'?"

Several mechanics stopped their fingers from twisting screwdrivers. One shot back with a caustic quip, "Give it up, Capt. Mac. It's the the swankiest military club in the American sector. You surely must have been a guest of some *officer*. Up until now, enlisted guys were allowed in. There's a vote tomorrow to *keep out* guys like us."

Another mechanic joined the sarcasm, "Oh, sure, it's OK to let in *German* women – our former enemies, for cryin' out loud. But it was *us* guys, who won the war!"

Mac nodded in agreement. He didn't know what the mechanics were complaining about, but he surely believed they needed to be treated better.

That was what he was thinking. What he said was, "When do you guys have time to go to a club anyway! All you do is eat, sleep, and fix airplanes."

He was working with 148 maintenance personnel, often many less were on hand. Divided into three shifts, working twelve hours on and twenty-four hours off, each shift was, in turn, divided into three crews.

An "alert crew," usually twelve to sixteen men, carried out the preflight checks of the airframe, engines, landing gear, fluids, and electrical systems. They inspected the radio and radar systems.

Alert crews also provided turnaround maintenance. Aircraft pilots would notify the tower of any complaints or problems before they landed. If the problem was minor, the alert crew would deal with fuel, oil, others issues and execute repairs on the flightline. If the work was beyond their capability, they turned the aircraft over to specialized crew that repaired engines, electrical systems, hydraulics, radios, props, or other systems.

Mac felt an internal groan as he remembered what crews had to do to perform 50-hour inspections. Those inspections were designed to reduce the need for unscheduled maintenance by identifying and correcting problems before they became serious.

That work was thankless. It included a thorough cleaning of the aircraft, the replacement of spark plugs, an oil change, inspections of the airframe,

engines, and aircraft systems. The 50-hour inspection usually took about five hours to complete.

The work of any mechanic, regardless of shift or task was grueling, constant and full of hardships. All the mechanics damn well deserved to listen to the radio – as long as they could hear imperfect timing, the creak of weakening steel and the lack of an expected spark. So, the radio was turned on and off around the clock.

Mac, who'd already worked with all the shifts, day in and day out, was ready to lobby whoever was in charge of comfort and morale. If the guys had any time to go to whatever the "Harnack House" was, then the 'higher-ups" should put them in a limousine and drive them there.

Mac pursued his lips in empathy, but added, "Don't know anything about a night club and votes of who gets in. All I know is that I've got – *we've* got work to do here and now."

Everyone went back to work and listening to the radio.

Broadcasting out from RIAS Radio Berlin now was news from two days earlier, when CBS war correspondent, Bill Downs had reported something about East Germany's "People's Police" purging 10,000 members from the force for "political unreliability and lack of professional aptitude".

The "No Failure" pressure in West Berlin was relentless and now part of Mac's daily grind. "Capt. Mac", as he was affectionately called, flowed out of his civilian routine in Washington D.C. on short notice. The second he stepped down onto Berlin's Tempelhof tarmac, he was thrust back into the non-stop rhythm and demand of the U.S. Air Force.

Out of military uniform now, he was comfortable in his civilian engineer's coveralls. His light, reddish blond hair cast a glow on his handsome face. Although he no longer had the legs to play basketball or baseball, he still had all the other muscles needed to stay off America's "not-quite-A-team" bench.

His manufacturing company's bosses had put him on the next plane to Germany right after they'd suffered a back-hall, chewing-out by a couple of U.S. Senators on the Appropriations Committee.

In March, 1948, the Western Allies had tested their ability to feed, fuel, medicate and keep West Berlin's 2.7 million people alive by air support. That test, called the "Little Lift" prefaced their launch of a larger operation and buoyed hopes that the West could defy the Soviet's land blockade, beginning June 24, 1948.

So, Mac was back *in* Berlin, rather than flying over it.

It had been nearly four years since Mac had returned from his refuge in the United States. In 1944, Nazi flak had targeted his B-17 Flying Fortress, shot jagged metal fragments into his awesome beast – where it would do the most damage.

March 6, 1944, Capt. Mac and his ten-man crew had joined 813 other bombers, escorted by 944 fighter jets, on a bombing mission to destroy Berlin's war industry from above.

Massive destruction was required to weaken Nazi defenses to the point that an Allied invasion of the continent could be guaranteed. Mac didn't know then that the invasion would start on "D-Day", June 6, 1944.

For Mac, however, his patriotic contribution had been nearing its end on "Black Monday", March 6, 1944.

Mac and his crew were flying tight in the bomber train, taking their place in the three aerial divisions, stretching out over 93 miles.

As with most big missions – things went wrong.

To start, the lead navigator in the First Air Division forgot to make the proper correction for crossing head winds, so the entire First Air Division flew deep into Germany, drifting south of their intended track.

Nazi radar pickets deduced the intended flight path of the bombers and vectored their fighters to intercept the bomber train's lead elements.

Losing sight of the First Air Division, the lead navigator of the Third Air Division was forced to do his own navigating. He made the corrections for cross wind and got the remaining bombers where they should be – but without their defensive fighter jets.

The results of the navigational error cost the bomb group 15 of their 16 aircraft.

Mac and his crew survived that day, but the entire Force was ordered back to Berlin two days later, and incredibly, the next day after that.

In the month of March, that United States Air Force mission lost over 400 bombers and fighters, including Mac's "fortress" and some of his crew.

During Mac's last mission, its memory now veiled by the European mist through which his plane fell, the trajectory of his career was changed forever.

The mission had been going well. Mac and his crew had dropped their payload on Berlin's Ekner bearing factory and were flying back to England.

Amid the fierce sound of war in the sky, Mac felt his hydraulic system start to fail. Primary and secondary control surfaces started to go. Mac could feel the heat within the plane's faithful heart.

Then, his stick went out. His plane was going to fall.

Mac's first thought was his crew. Over the intercom, he barked, "Prepare to abandon plane." He stated the plane's altitude and approximate position between Berlin and Hamburg. No water showing below. Crew mates acknowledged his message received.

Still, he kept flying northwest to get everyone as close to Allied territory as possible, which he estimated to be about an hour away.

Mac knew his plane, bolt for bolt. So, he knew the crew had about a minute before a fire would take them all.

"Bail!" Mac shouted over his intercom. One by one, his crew obeyed and started dropping out of the open bomb bay doors.

Suddenly, he saw fire on the left wing. He felt himself be yanked up by his bomber jacket collar.

His crew was jumping out in good order. Whoever was behind him pushed him out as their burning plane was crashing down behind them. A trail of burning parts – some big, some small, soared down all around them.

Mac didn't know when he pulled his chute. He just knew that he was falling slower.

Above him, Mac heard, then felt – the air ripple. Another plane exploded. Fiery chunks of that plane were whizzing past him.

Still falling, he felt a slash down his left leg. Then, he saw both his pants legs catch fire.

Mac shook his legs, begging the wind to blow out the fire for him. He had to start sucking for breath. Every breath was hot and smoky.

The wind and his struggle finally smothered the fire before he was smashed against rocky ground. His consciousness was fading to gray, but military training forced him into an automatic roll. Above him, his chute floated down, then collapsed around him. Any remaining sparks threatening one of America's heroes blew away as ash and a bad memory.

Then, the slow power of dark flowed over him. He was now just another pilot – who had crashed and burned.

A low grunt from behind him startled Mac into the present. The author of the grunt was also an American hero, just of higher rank.

"You're not hiding from Capt. Freeman, are you?" The General stepped to Mac's side, in front of one of Berlin's Airlift cargo planes. Like Mac, the General also wanted to see, hear, smell – feel whatever the former bomber pilot did.

"No, sir." Mac turned sharply toward the General and saluted.

"At ease, son," the General softened and squeezed Mac's shoulder closest to him. "When is your manufacturer going to deliver my new plane Congress authorized?"

Mac, "at ease" but still erect, looked squarely into the General's eyes. "It's not ready, sir."

"Well, *where* is it!" The General's hands snapped to his waist. "It's months overdue." Pulling in a generous breath, the General clipped, "I just got off the phone with *my* boss at the Pentagon. He told me that Senator Wells is now on a plane for Berlin to drill *me* for answers on the delay. Thank God he won't be staying long. He's got to get back for Truman's Inauguration, in a couple of weeks on the 20th."

From out of the mysterious back hallways behind Tempelhof's staging area, marched Capt. Elgin Freeman. "I've got the contracts, schedules, schematics –"

The General's outstretched hand and one-eye glare, sharpened by decades of war, prompted Capt. Freeman to surrender his official binder. The General opened the binder by the tab identifying the timeline.

Mac turned back to listening for complaints from the Skymaster's aging engine, shaking off stiffening in his right leg. Mac wanted to walk it off, but "now" would have to wait.

"If I may, General," Mac bent down to peer beneath the belly of the Skymaster to guess why mechanics were working on the other side. "We're all pretty sure that the Soviets will open their blockade before the year is out. Your people are doing a heroic job keeping these tired, old beasts in the air. They'll fly for you until the Blockade is over."

"*Not* the right answer, son. Senator Wells sits on *both* the Appropriations and Armed Services Committees. Plus, he's bringing his wife and daughter with him."

Noting that Mac was not sufficiently intimidated by this news, the General added, "Well, if you think you can con a U.S. Senator, just wait until you go up against his *wife*. She attended the State Department's Foreign

Service School – and God bless you, if you try to talk your way around his *daughter*. She raises money for the Party. One minute with her, and you won't have enough money left to pay your rent for a year."

Mac always faced man-made threats with calculation. He'd lived through being captured by Nazis, surviving infected wounds – then, prison camp. Yet, none of that was as cruel as getting the news that his big brother had been killed at Pearl Harbor.

He'd been seventeen at the time. He'd wanted to enlist the day he'd learned of Tom's death. Mac was furious and ready to fight on Tom's behalf, but they'd told him at the 10th Transport Group, Patterson Field, Ohio, that he was too young.

He had spoken of his decision to enlist with his parents only once. His parents and younger brother, Dan, had been broken by Tom's death. Their hearts were still in pieces when Mac told them what he was about to do.

Their horrified reactions were filled with "you can't"! Then, "how could you!" He was not dissuaded. He just changed his plan.

He hitched a ride to Patterson Field and lied about his age.

Two years later, his father would take his calls and converse in "lawyerly" terms. His younger brother would greet him, ask questions about training, then the phone would be taken away from him. His mother wouldn't speak to him at all until World War II was over, when his father permitted him to come home for a visit.

The General was waiting for Mac to be suitably impressed by the forces of nature the U.S. Senate was sending to get what it wanted.

"All I can do, General, is tell the truth." Mac stiffened his posture.

"Ummm," the General studied the concrete floor of the Maintenance Bay. "We've got Korea coming up. That's not classified. We all know it's coming, and we need the capacity of your new plane."

Mac nodded a soft apology, "I'm here to figure out what we can, General – you and me." Mac looked out to the runway where another plane was

coming in with food for Berlin. It was landing three minutes ahead of the plane behind it.

"We're all flyers here," Mac directed the General's view to the runway.

The General bent down to pick up a wayward screw that had been rolling across the concrete maintenance floor. He pitched it into a nearby trash can, then looked out into the Berlin weather. His gaze then returned to Mac. "We may all be flyers, but you're the only one here who's an engineer for the manufacturer."

"Yes, sir." Mac paused to calculate how much annoyance he could cause the General in one day.

"Spit it out, Capt. Mac." The General, fully briefed on Mac's background, was prepared to treat him with a bit more patience.

"I'd like to get over to Gatow's airport in the British sector, get close to the Royal Air Force planes there. Would Capt. Freeman be able to get me clearance, and –"

"Done." The General grunted again as he stuck a cigar in his mouth. Capt. Freeman pulled out a lighter, fired up the General's cigar, and gave Mac a nod of comradeship.

"Thank you, General," Mac smiled with surrender and saluted.

Making a parade turn, the General acknowledged, "Carry on."