

316th FIGHTER SQUADRON



MISSION

LINEAGE

316th Fighter Squadron constituted, 24 Jun 1942

Activated, 6 Jul 1942

Inactivated, 7 Nov 1945

STATIONS

Mitchel Field, NY, 6 Jul 1942

Norfolk, VA, 6 Jul-28 Oct 1942

El Amiriya, Egypt, 23 Dec 1942

El Kabrit, Egypt, 3 Feb 1943

Libya, 15 Mar 1943

Tunisia, Apr 1943

Kairouan, Tunisia, 2 Jun 1943

El Haouaria, Tunisia, c. 18 Jun 1943

Menzel Heurr, Tunisia, 3 Oct 1943

Cercola, Italy, 27 Oct 1943

Pignataro Maggiore, Italy, 10 May 1944

Le Banca Airfield, Italy, 7 Jun 1944

Montalto Di Castro, Italy, 15 Jun 1944

Corsica, 19 Jul 1944

Le Luc, France, 29 Aug 1944

Istres, France, 3 Sep

Amberieu, France, 6 Sep 1944
Tavaux, France, 20 Sep 1944
Luneville, France, 2 Jan 1945
Stuttgart, Germany, 3 May-20 Oct 1945
Camp Shanks, NY, 6-7 Nov 1945

ASSIGNMENTS

324th Fighter Group, 6 Jul 1942-7 Nov 1945

ATTACHMENTS

79th Fighter Group, 15 Mar-21 May 1943

WEAPON SYSTEMS

P-40, 1942-1944
P-47, 1944-1945
P-40F
P-40L
P-47D

COMMANDERS

HONORS

Service Streamers

None

Campaign Streamers

Tunisia
Sicily
Naples-Foggia
Anzio
Rome-Arno
Northern France
Southern France
Rhineland
Ardennes-Alsace
Central Europe
Air Combat, EAME Theater

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

Distinguished Unit Citations
North Africa and Sicily, [Apr- Jul] 1943
Cassino, 12-14 May

French Croix de Guerre with Palm

EMBLEM

On a black disc, border orange, piped light blue, a she-devil red, high-lighted yellow, hair flammant, horns white, leaping from flames red, orange, and yellow in base, and grasping a white trident held diagonally across body, point to dexter chief. (Approved, 2 Sep 1943)

The 316th Fighter Squadron's fiery patroness was created from ideals brought to light by a young pilot's wife, Mrs. David E. Carpenter. She was then given her form by the artful skills of a 314th pilot named Marve Warnke somewhere in the North African Desert in March of 1943.

Helen Harriman Carpenter, wife of flight leader, David E. Carpenter of the 316th gave a speech which inspired the Hell's Belles insignia. She spoke of the great losses women would suffer should Hitler's dream of world domination be realized.

With his wife's words still fresh in his mind, Captain Carpenter took to his drawing board and sketched out a rough outline of a flaming beauty. The sketch was then taken by Troy Upton and two other pilots across to the 314th's side of the field where Marve Warnke finalized the design and polished it to completion.

The Hellish Beauty was thought to possess the ability to be anywhere in the twinkling of an eye and could quickly vanquish gremlins, thus accounting for the squadron's top-ranking maintenance record. She was ever alert and the pilots under her protection delivered a devastating blow to the forces threatening the ideals she represented.

Quote from Helen Carpenter's speech: "Women have the most to lose would Hitler achieve his dream of world domination, and in Germany they've lost the most. Why, all women are for in Nazi Germany is to bring future soldiers into the world and it's the same way throughout German -dominated Europe. Women everywhere, on earth, in heaven, and in hell surely must resent the treatment Hitler's triumphs have given them. That's why I think our insignia should have something to do with women."

MOTTO

NICKNAME

OPERATIONS

Combat in MTO and ETO, 1 Apr-25 Jul 1943, and 30 Oct 1943-30 Apr 1945.

The 316th Fighter Squadron was activated at the Army Air Base, Norfolk, Virginia, on 6 July 1942, and assigned to the 324th Fighter Group. The first three and a half months were spent in training, and the men of the 316th did their utmost to absorb all the various techniques of aerial combat. The record shows that they learned their lessons well. On 9 October the long

awaited overseas shipment orders arrived, and on the 27th the men boarded a train in Norfolk and arrived at Camp Kilmer, New Jersey, the next day. The air echelon had left earlier for Miami, Florida, and were later flown by easy stages to the Squadron's destination - North Africa.

On Halloween, 1942 the ground echelon boarded the USS West Point, formerly the luxury liner America, which left New York early on 1 November. The Squadron was berthed on the lowest deck, promptly tagged "Torpedo Junction" by some wag, and the men settled down to days of sickness and boredom. The monotony was somewhat relieved by the sight of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, but no one was allowed ashore. On 12 November the West Point left Rio for the long haul to India, arriving at Bombay on 2 December. The Squadron's equipment was unloaded, and the men were put on a train and sent to British Army rest camp at Deolali, India. They spent several days there stretching their "sea legs" in preparation for the next phase of the trip. The cleanliness and luxury of Deolali was a welcome respite from the crowded conditions common to troopships. On 13 December the 316th boarded HMS Denera, and three days later the men disembarked in Egypt. By 23 December the Squadron was at Landing Ground 91, Amyria, Egypt, and a period of training under combat-wise supervisors followed.

The great offensive to oust the Nazis from Africa had begun with the English assault on Rommel's Afrika Korps at El Alamein on 23 October. The 316th was assigned to help the British advance, but it was not until 15 March that its pilots were deemed ready for combat. The day before the Squadron went into action it was transferred to Causeway Landing Ground, Tunisia, and attached to the 79th Group, and they flew several missions under their careful tutelage before being allowed to operate as an independent organization.

The British Eighth Army began its final assault on the vaulted Mareth Line (on the border of Tunisia and Tripoli) on 20 March, and six days later the 316th received its baptism of fire while supporting the offensive. The Squadron's P-40's roared over an intersection near El Hamma, leaving six enemy vehicles burning on the road. Despite heavy ack-ack all aircraft returned safely with the exception of Major Frederick G. Delany's (the Squadron Commander). Because of leg wounds, he was forced to land at an English field near the front; and unfortunately, he never returned to the Squadron. The unit flew mainly ground-support missions during the remainder of the Tunisian campaign, but it also mounted armed reconnaissance, counter-air, bomber escort, and destroyer cover operations in that period. On 8 May the Squadron bagged its first kill in aerial combat. A flight was returning from a dive-bombing mission over the rapidly shrinking enemy bridge-head in Africa when the pilots saw three Me-109's dive from out of the sun on the Flight Leader, Captain Robert C. Dempsey. The Germans had the bad luck not to spot the rest of the flight, and when they turned to get Captain Dempsey they were pounced on by fourteen fighters. Two of the enemy planes turned tail and escaped, but one went down in flames. On 11 May the Tunisian campaign ended.

On 2 June the Squadron was transferred to El Haouaria, Tunisia, in order to rejoin its parent, the 324th Fighter Group, and for several weeks everyone rested from the rigors of campaigning. The 316th resumed bombing escort operations during July. Preparations for

Operation HUSKY, the invasion of Sicily were underway, and 10 July was designated D-Day. The Squadron was assigned the task of helping provide air cover for the invasion. On 9 July, when it was providing top cover for a group of A-20's, the formation was jumped by over fifty ME-109's. In a flash the sky was filled with dog fights.

The 316th bore the brunt of the attack when its planes attempted to draw the enemy away from the bombers. The pilots put into play the P-40's two greatest assets, fire power and maneuverability, and dueled with the Germans for over ten minutes. The sky was filled with exploding planes, floating parachutes, fluttering shreds of wings and tails, streaks of oily smoke, and the criss-cross of tracers. The enemy could not stand such determined defense and turned for home. The trim P-40's streaked or limped, according to combat results, back to Tunisia, and the 316th found that it had destroyed eight German planes during the action. On invasion day the Squadron, along with the rest of the 324th Group, put the first American fighters over the beachhead, and the unit continued to provide air cover and close support until the Allied grip on the island was assured.

Although its home base remained in Africa, the 316th flew many missions from a primitive airfield only recently captured from the enemy. Many night landings were made on ill-equipped and ill-lighted field, but there were no accidents involving the Squadron - a fine example of the proficiency of its pilots. At the end of the Scilian campaign the entire Group was transferred to the Twelfth Air Force, and the pilots received a brief respite from combat. The 316th was given the job of training newly arrived pilots in all the subtleties of combat. The men began to chaff under this mundane, unexciting duty, and they welcomed orders alerting the Squadron for transfer to Italy.

On 27 October part of the unit left for Italy, but it was not until 7 November that it was fully operational at its new field near Cercola. The field located between Naples and Mount Vesuvius in the heart of "sunny Italy", was a quagmire caused by the heavy autumn rains, and the Squadron experienced great difficulties in obtaining adequate housing and working facilities. The weather also caused many missions to abort, and enemy air raids added further to the general discomfort. However, by mid-November the skies brightened and the Squadron was able to press home its attacks. Its primary role became the close support of ground troops, and every expedient for improving operational efficiency was tried.

Dive bombing was still in the experimental stage during the summer and winter of 1943-44, and the Squadron, by the utilization of varied types of bomb loads, speeds, and angles of attack, contributed greatly to the success and diversification of dive bombing and close support operations. Another field pioneered by the 316th was the use of flying-controllers in fighter-bomber operations. The idea was conceived during the Rome-Arno campaign, and sprang from the use of forward observers to spot artillery fire. L-5 aircraft were equipped with special radios, and the pilots were carefully trained in the new technique. On the morning of 23 June 1944, in cooperation with the First Armored Division, the method ("Horse-fly") had its first trail. It proved a great success, and was used not only in World War II but also in the Korean War.

On 10 May the Squadron moved a few miles closer to Rome when it shifted operations to Pignataro. The final phase of the Rome-Arno campaign opened that month with the American Fifth and British Eighth Armies driving up both sides of the Italian "boot". One of the vital keys to the German position south of Rome was Monastery Hill near Cassino, from which the enemy was able to observe much of the American front. Though almost surrounded, the enemy held on doggedly and effectively blocked progress of the Fifth Army. On 12 May the 316th and other elements of the 324th Group sent two strikes against the Germans in one of the war's best examples of fighter-bomber accuracy. The first mission was through heavy overcast and intense ack-ack fire, but five tons of bombs were dropped on German positions 300 yards from American troops. The second raid on the enemy troops, which were massing in a gully for a counterattack, was only 75 yards from friendly forces. No American troops were hit, and both missions were spectacularly successful. Two days later the 316th helped stage another brilliant attack on the enemy. The Germans had heavily fortified the little town of Castellonorato, but they could not stand the slashing tactics of the 324th Group - they surrendered without firing a shot. The Group received a Presidential Citation for these raids.

On 7 June, just after Rome had fallen, the Squadron moved to La Banca, near Anzio, where the brief stand was highlighted by night bombing by a lone German aircraft. The front was rolling forward and the 316th moved to Montalto on 15 June. This field was above Rome, and for the first few days it was close enough to the front for artillery flashes to be seen in the hills. One of the most important factors in the breakthrough to Rome and the German retreat northward was the complete disruption of the enemy transportation system, and the Squadron contributed much to this achievement. On 19 July the Squadron was temporarily withdrawn from combat in order to switch from P-40's to P-47's, but this readjustment was made quickly.

The unit left Italy on 18 July, and by the 19th it was operating out of an airfield near Ghisonaccia, Corsica. The little island was not very inviting, but an excellent swimming pool, good food, and movies made the stay comparatively pleasant. During the remainder of the summer the Squadron flew from dawn to dusk on all types of missions: dive bombing in northern Italy; making armed reconnaissance sweeps over southern France; patrolling the coasts; and escorting medium bombers of the Twelfth Air Force.

The invasion of France, Operation OVERLORD, took place on June 6, 1944, and on 15 August another army waded ashore in southern France. Previous to the assault on the French Riviera, the 316th mounted many missions against radar installations near the invasion beaches. On D-Day the Squadron helped maintain fighter cover over the invading troops, and several troublesome strong points were eliminated by the unit's planes. On 21 August a small party of the 316th went ashore in southern France after a three-day ride on an LST, and they immediately began preparing the captured field at Le Luc for the arrival of the Squadron's planes. On 29 August the unit began operating from Le Luc. Keeping within range of the retreating enemy proved to be a 24-hour-a-day job. In the next six days the Squadron traveled some 350 miles, utilized three bases, and yet was able to remain completely operational throughout the period.

After only two days at Le Luc the Squadron moved to Istres Le Tube, and on 5 September the ground echelon left for Amberieu by truck. Heavy traffic, blown bridges, and numerous detours made the trip difficult. However planes of the 316th were flying out of the new base by late afternoon that day. The Amberieu field was designated an air supply depot because of its proximity to the front; consequently, it received a heavy flow of traffic. C-47's, B-24's and A-20's arrived continuously with cargoes of gasoline and supplies for the ground troops, and the Squadron's ground crews were pressed into the additional duty of unloading these aircraft. The unit's planes spent the next twelve days in attacking fleeing enemy columns, and on 8 and 9 September they struck at German rail targets near the Reich itself. On 17 September the unit moved to Tavaux. The Squadron found Tavaux comparatively luxurious, especially when the monotonous diet of C-rations ended as the supply columns finally caught up with the front. Most of the time at Tavaux was spent in training new pilots, not only for the 316th but for other units as well.

The German counterattack in the Ardennes occurred in mid-December, and the Squadron moved northward to Luneville, France, on 2 January 1945 to help blunt the enemy thrust. The ground echelon left in the midst of a blizzard, but everyone arrived at the new base without mishap. While the convey was parked on the side of a road near Luneville, the men watched the headquarters of the Seventh Army pull back from Saverne. It was a new experience for the 316th's veterans to see a retreat instead of an advance, for, since they went into action in 1943, they had been constantly on the offensive. On 5 January the Squadron was operating from the Luneville strip. Throughout January and February the 316th's fighters flew close support missions and launched interdiction attacks against the enemy in the Ardennes salient. Intense cold, frequent snow storms, and a lack of supplies severely hampered operations during that fateful winter, but the Squadron performed invaluable service in helping turn the German attack into a disastrous defeat.

On 15 March the Seventh Army began its final offensive, and the Squadron was up at the light of day to help support the attack. During the drive the 316th flew several missions a day in support of troops which were smashing their way through the Siegfried Line. The ground crews did a marvelous job in "keeping 'em flying." A production line method for rearming and refueling was worked out. As soon as the planes hit the hardstands two crews of armament men began putting bombs and ammunition aboard; fuel was pumped into empty tanks; technicians checked for damage and made minor repairs and adjustments; and the planes were ready for a new strike almost before the pilots had finished coffee.

On 14 April the Squadron played a great part in the destruction of an enemy convoy, containing an estimated 500 vehicles, that had become stalled about 15 miles northeast of Nurnberg. When the "Thunderbolts" finally departed they left a highway filled with destroyed transport and dead enemy troops. It was believed that the enemy convoy had been trying to escape an armored thrust further north of Nurnberg, but they only succeeded in being "blitzed" from the Air.

On 3 May the flight echelon moved to Stuttgart/Echterdingen, Germany, in the wake of the spectacularly advancing Sixth Army Group, but the ground crews did not reach the new base until V-E Day, 8 May 1945. The day of victory was a fitting time for the Squadron to be reunited, and the ruins of Germany made an appropriate setting for the victorious 316th. The full effect of their close air support and interdiction attacks could not be measured, but the men could be proud of their contribution to victory.

The unit remained in Europe until late in October. It then returned to the United States and was inactivated on 7 November 1945.

Air Force Order of Battle

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Sources

Air Force Historical Research Agency. U.S. Air Force. Maxwell AFB, AL.

The Institute of Heraldry. U.S. Army. Fort Belvoir, VA.