

317th FIGHTER INTERCEPTOR SQUADRON



MISSION

LINEAGE

317th Fighter Squadron constituted, 24 Jun 1942
Activated, 3 Aug 1942
Inactivated, 28 Oct 1945
Activated, 25 Aug 1947
Redesignated 317th Fighter Squadron (All-Weather), 10 May 1948
Redesignated 317th Fighter All-Weather Squadron, 20 Jan 1950
Redesignated 317th Fighter Interceptor Squadron, 1 May 1951

STATIONS

Mitchel Field, NY, 3 Aug 1942
Hillsgrove, RI, 3 Aug 1942-23 Jan 1943
Tafaraoui, Algeria, 28 Feb 1943
Montesquieu, Algeria, 19 May 1943
Sulk-el-Khemis, Tunisia, 3 Jun 1943
Mateur, Tunisia, 21 Jun 1943
Soliman, Tunisia, 4 Nov 1943
Foggia, Italy, 10 Dec 1943
Lesina, Italy, 29 Mar 1944
Rimini, Italy, 5 Mar 1945
Mondolfo, Italy, 3 April 1945
Vincenzo Airfield, Italy, Jul-9 Oct 1945
Camp Kilmer, NJ, 26-28 Oct 1945
McChord Field, WA, 15 Aug 1947

Hamilton Field, CA, 24 Nov 1947
Moses Lake AFB, WA, 26 Nov 1948
McCord AFB, WA, 23 Apr 1950
Elmendorf AFB, AK, 15 Aug 1957

ASSIGNMENTS

325th Fighter Group, 3 Aug 1942-28 Oct 1945
Fourth Air Force, 25 Aug 1947
325th Fighter (later Fighter All Weather; Fighter Interceptor) Group, 31 Dec 1947
4704th Defense Wing, 6 Feb 1952
567th Air Defense Group, 16 Feb 1953
325th Fighter Group, 18 Aug 1955
10th Air Division, 15 Aug 1957
5070th Air Defense ing, 25 Aug 1960
Alaskan Air Command, 1 Oct 1961

WEAPON SYSTEMS

P-40, 1942-1943
P-47, 1943-1944
P-51, 1944-1945
P-61, 1947-1948
F-82, 1948-1951
F-94A, 1950-1953
F-86, 1953-1956
F-102A, **1956 1957 1958**
F-82F
F-94A
P-40F
P-40L
P-51C
P-51B
P-51D
P-40F
P-40E

COMMANDERS

Lt James E. Tucker, 1 Sep 1942
Cpt Jack C. West, 7 Oct 1942
Maj William R. Reed, Jan 1943
Maj Lewis W. Chick, Jan 1944
Maj Herschel H. Green, 25 Mar 1944
Maj Max McNeil, 23 Sep 1944
Maj John R. Burman, 3 Apr 1945 – May 1945
Maj Hubert L. Williams, #1954

HONORS

Service Streamers

None

Campaign Streamers

Air Offensive, Europe

Sicily

Naples-Foggia

Anzio

Rome-Arno

Normandy

Northern France

Southern France

North Apennines

Rhineland

Central Europe

Po Valley

Air Combat, EAME Theater

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

Distinguished Unit Citations

Sardinia, 30 Jul 1943

Italy, 30 Jan 1944

Air Force Outstanding Unit Award

Mar 1953-Jun 1956

EMBLEM



317th Fighter Squadron emblem

317th Fighter Interceptor Squadron emblem: On a disc blue, bordered black, a stylized sun, yellow, with indented edge, piped white, forming rays, the points extending to the border of the black, over all three stylized clouds, black, issuing from sides of the disc, two from the left side and one from the right side; a star, blue, on the upper cloud and two stars, blue, on the center cloud, a bolt of lightning red, edged white, issuing from the upper cloud, lines indicating rain issuing from the upper and middle cloud. (Approved, 13 Dec 1951)

MOTTO

NICKNAME

OPERATIONS

On 3 August 1942, the 317th Fighter Squadron was activated at the Theodore F. Green Field, Hillsgrove, Rhode Island. On the first day the squadron consisted of 1 Master Sergeant, 5 Technical Sergeants, 2 Staff Sergeants, 7 Sergeants, 8 Corporals, and 199 Privates. The First Sergeant, then a Staff Sergeant, Jack Barrier, was assigned and promoted to First Sergeant, on the second day; but it was not until the third day of existence that the first officer was assigned.

First Lt. John D. Geiser became temporary Commanding Officer, and served until 1 September, when 1st Lt. James E. Tucker, the first pilot to be assigned to the squadron, was appointed Commanding Officer. Capt. Oliver M. Kaufmann assumed the duties of Adjutant. With the influx of pilots and group officers during the next several days, basic divisions of personnel were made and the various departments began to take shape. Operational training began, with the acquisition of twelve P-40s, from the 86th Fighter Squadron. Intense, vigorous training missions were scheduled in interception, ground gunnery tactics, dive-bombing, and simulated dogfights.

P-40s were idle only when bogged down by weather, flying from dawn to dusk and frequently at night. On 7 October, Capt. Jack C. West was appointed Squadron Commander, relieving Lt. Tucker who was transferred to Headquarters, 325th Fighter Group. On 13 October, Staff Sergeant Pilot Watkins Mayo was killed when his plane crashed at Norwood, Massachusetts. On 23 December Lt. Bart Judge failed to return from a routine training mission, and not until several months later was it learned that he had crashed to his death.

On 2 January 1943, the pilots, with Capt. West in command, left Hillsgrove for Langley Field, Virginia, where they stayed prior to boarding the aircraft carrier Ranger with a complement of P-40s. On 3 January, the first air echelon composed of 4 officers and 48 enlisted men departed from Hillsgrove for Miami, Florida, prior to going overseas. This group was followed three days later by a second air echelon of 4 officers and 14 enlisted men, who also went to Miami. On 23 January, 5 officers and 187 enlisted men left Hillsgrove and traveled to Camp Kilmer, New Jersey. Here they were staged for 2 weeks in preparation for overseas departure. On 7 February the ground echelon left Camp Kilmer and proceeded to Staten Island, New York, where they boarded the Navy transport, U.S.S. Lyon. The Lyon pulled out of New York harbor early on the morning of 8 February, and after a 2 week voyage across the Atlantic, marked occasionally by

submarine alerts, arrived at Oran, Algeria, moved on down the bay and anchored at Mers el Khebir. By truck and train, the squadron was taken to its first bivouac area near Ste. Barbe de Tlelat. The bivouac area, more aptly named "Mud Hill" by the men, soon became a brief and unforgettable interval in the squadron's history. Here marked our first days on foreign soil, and our first association with intense cold, chilling dampness, rain and mud. Meanwhile, the air echelon had flown from Miami, through South America, across the South Atlantic to Africa, and arrived at Casablanca on 28 January 1943. On 1 March the air and ground echelons were united at Tafaraoui Air Base, some 20 miles from Oran. While at Casablanca, Capt. West was transferred and 1st Lt. William R. Reed was appointed Commanding Officer.

The stay at Tafaraoui was the final phase of operational training, with the pilots flying patrol and convoy escort missions, and flying combat formation flights, led in most instances by Lt. Col. Philip Cochran. Some of the ground work consisted of overhauling and assembling P-40s and P-38s, which were sent to fighter groups already at the front. From Tafaraoui most of the personnel had their first opportunity to view life in a large North African city. Frequent trips were made to Oran, and the indelible impression of this ancient and modern city with its colorful inhabitants, both French and Arab, its small winding streets, its dirty ragged children, and the beauty and history of its temples and mosques, left us fascinated. For a while most of the days were bright and sunny during March, although the nights were extremely damp and cold. Then the rains came in April, and sometimes continued without let up for as much as a week. Added to this was the mud which made our stay at Tafaraoui very uncomfortable and unpleasant. As there were enough aircraft on hand for only two squadrons, lots were drawn to determine which organization would stay back, with the 317th losing the draw.

Finally, on 11 May the squadron received orders to join the other squadrons that were stationed at Montesquieu.. Arriving there the ground echelon found out that the squadron's pilots had flown their first combat mission on 19 May, escorting B-26s over Decimonannu Airdrome, Sardinia. Enemy aircraft were engaged in combat, and six victories were scored by the group, with the loss of one P-40. Capt. Herschel H. Green, the squadron Operations Officer, destroyed one Me-109, his first victory and also the squadron's first victory, on the first mission. During the stay at Montesquieu most of the missions were directed at the Mediterranean islands of Sardinia, Sicily and Pantelleria. On 26 May the squadron suffered its first loss in combat. While the planes were returning from a mission, one of our pilots was forced to make a landing in the sea. Within a few minutes he was seen in a life raft which had been dropped to him by another P-40. Later reports revealed that Air Sea Rescue had been reached, and that the pilot had been spotted and licked up by a seaplane, but that it had crashed attempting to take off after the rescue had been completed and all personnel aboard were lost.

After the finish of the war in Tunisia, the squadron was moved to a landing strip in a barren, desolate valley, near Souk el Khemis. The heat was so intense here, that the crew chiefs were at times unable to service the aircraft. Tools, equipment, and the planes themselves could not be handled because of the intense heat. Consequently, the planes had to be serviced only during the early morning and night. In June operations against the Island of Pantelleria grew in fury and intensity as the campaign neared its climax. Missions were literally flown from dawn to

dusk, with our aircraft flying escort to medium bombers, strafing enemy airfields, installations, and shipping facilities, and bombing with fragmentation, 500, and 1,000 lb. bombs. The Pantelleria campaign was concluded. P-40s of the squadron had proved their mettle in combat. They had achieved seven victories, suffered two losses had flown 240 sorties, pioneered the carrying of 1,000 lb. bombs on a P-40, never lost a bomber to enemy aircraft during its escort, and flew 3 missions a day with the same planes. There was no pause after the surrender of Pantelleria. The very next day, on 12 June, planes of our squadron together with other squadrons escorted B-26s who were attacking airfields in Sicily.

On 21 June, with combat operations against Sicily still in effect, the squadron moved to a base near Mateur, Tunisia. On 10 July, Capt. Reed, the Squadron Commander, failed to return from a mission. 16 days later, Capt. Reed was on his way back, safe and uninjured. Shot down over the Mediterranean, Capt. Reed had parachuted into the sea, near an abandoned lighthouse. Hiding out there for 8 days, and with his emergency rations gone, he was forced to seek help from some Italian fishermen, who took him to Trapani, Sicily, and turned him over to the Italian police. With the invasion of Sicily by the Allies, shortly afterward, the Italian police of Trapani returned Capt. Reed to American paratroopers entering the city. After the Sicilian campaign was well underway, the squadron concentrated all its efforts on Sardinia, and until the surrender of Sardinia, with the other two squadrons of the group, was the only fighter group to participate in the Sardinian campaign. It was over Sardinia that the squadron scored its greatest victory in combat, up until that time. Accounts of individual actions are difficult to record and the activity was so furious that complete details of time and place are not available for each victory. On 30 July 20 P-40s of the 317th and 16 P-40s of the 319th Squadron took off on a fighter sweep, to rendezvous over Sardinia. As they turned to fly south over the west part of the island, they were attacked near Sassari and 20 miles north of the rendezvous point where they were to meet the 319th coming from the east. The attacking force consisted of 25 to 30 Me-109s and Ma-202s, bringing the estimated total of enemy aircraft engaged to between 40 and 50 planes. Radio communications with the other squadron was poor, and repeated inquiries received no answers, so the 319th was unable to locate the battle. In the brief, intense battle that occurred, 20 P-40s engaged and destroyed 21 enemy aircraft. General observations on the encounter show that in addition to the 21 victories and 4 probables reported, there may have been many more. It is believed that Lt. Robert Sederberg, who singly went to the aid of a fellow pilot who was being attacked by 5 Me-109s, in addition to destroying one Me-109 for sure, scored at least four victories. Lt. Sederberg was last seen engaged in combat with 5 Me-109s. Many months later he was reported a prisoner of war in Germany. The squadron continued operations until 22 September 1943 when it flew its last mission with P-40s. Shortly afterward the squadron was assigned P-47s and men were dispatched to Casablanca, Algiers, and Bizerte to assemble the new aircraft. Soon after receiving the P-47s the rainy season began, causing the squadron to cease operational training at Mateur.. On clear days training missions were greatly intensified to regain the lost time. Our stay in Mateur was on the whole rather dull and uneventful, Mateur offering little in the way of fun and entertainment for the men. This was somewhat offset by the almost nightly visits of the German Air Force to Bizerte and the extremely effective and picturesque flak that would greet them on their arrival. Their methods of attacking Bizerte from the rear invariably would bring them over our base, causing some

apprehension and excitement. However nothing came of this except the dropping of several parachute flares.

On 5 November the squadron moved to a landing field on Cape Bon, about 16 miles from Tunis. Here with improved weather, the squadron continued its training in P-47s. On 2 December the ground echelon proceeded to Bizerte where they were to await transportation to Italy by boat. A week later the air echelon left Solimon for Foggia Main, an airdrome just outside Foggia, arriving there late the same day.

On 14 December 1943, the squadron flew its first combat mission in P-47s, an escort mission over Corfu Island. On 20 December, the first part of the ground echelon arrived at Foggia after docking at Taranto and rode from there to Foggia, in an Italian passenger train. On 29 December the last half of the ground echelon arrived, after docking in Naples. Both of the ground echelons had crossed the Mediterranean in LSTs.

After several days at Foggia Main the squadron moved to another Foggia base, just ten miles north of the city. Our contempt and derision for reported "Sunny Italy" knew no bounds in the early morning of New Years Day 1944. A violent wind and rainstorm just before dawn played havoc with the camp and line areas. All but a few tents were torn down by the velocity of the winds, personal belongings, clothing, bedding, were strewn all over the low, marshy area as the rain continued to beat down. The mess hall where we happily contemplated a rare turkey diner, the day before, was completely demolished. Similar chaotic conditions on the line prevailed. Towards evening the fury of the storm had lessened, and preparations were made to improvise for the night. In January Major Reed terminated his required missions and returned to the United States, Major Lewis W. Chick, Jr. assuming command of the squadron. During its stay at Foggia numerous tactical and strategic combat missions were flown, with the squadron scoring impressively in aerial victories. On 30 January the Group recorded its victory of its career and the biggest aerial victory of the Italian campaign, with the 317th making an important contribution. On that day, 60 P-47s divided among the three squadrons flew to Udine, Italy, over 300 miles of water at altitudes not exceeding 50 feet, to escape detection by German radar. They arrived at the target before the B-17s, were to be over it, and so complete was the surprise sprung by the Thunderbolts, that out of some 50 enemy aircraft that were belatedly trying to escape, 37 were destroyed in aerial combat and many damaged, with the loss of only 2 of the group's planes. Our squadron accounted for twenty-four of the 37 destroyed, with Capt. Green credited with 6 of the victories. For this the Group was awarded its second Distinguished Unit Citation, the first was awarded for the 21 victories gained in Sardinia. On 25 March, Lt. Col. Chick was returned to the United States and Major Green was appointed Squadron Commander.

Another move was experienced on 29 March to Lesina airfield. With the understanding that the new field would be a relatively permanent one, work was begun to make the new camp as pleasant and comfortable as possible. Men were permitted to build individual houses and shacks that would quarter as many as 2 to 8 men. Nissen huts were obtained and used to good advantage for a comfortable and cheerful enlisted men's club. Rest camps to Rome and Naples

were arranged, and three and five day passes initiated for the first time. Another transition in aircraft occurred in May, this time to P-51s. With no interruptions in combat missions possible during the summer months, the work became almost ceaseless. On 2 June, 24 of our P-51s took off as part of the historical shuttle mission to Russia. 30 men comprising crew chiefs and armorers flew on B-17s that bombed enemy targets en route to the Soviet bases. In Russia, the squadron scored its first victories with the new aircraft. These victories were also the first scored by American pilots operating from Russian bases. In June and July 4 pilots were accidentally killed while engaged in training flights. Three enlisted men were also accidentally killed during the summer. On 23 September Lt. Col. Green, then leading ace of the Mediterranean Theater, with 18 aerial victories, was transferred from the squadron, and Major Max McNeil took over command. Col. Green, besides his aerial victories, flew 100 combat missions totaling 402 combat hours. He was awarded the DSC, Silver Star, DFC (with one cluster), Air Medal (with 25 clusters), and Purple Heart. Rumors of an impending move proved fruitless and the squadron began an intensive winterization program in October. During the winter months, First Sergeant George Hemperly worked diligently in carrying out the program. In January 1945 the first contingent of 10 men returned to be returned to the U.S. on 30 day furloughs were chosen and left the squadron in February.

After almost a year at the Lesina base, the squadron was ordered to Miramare, a small resort town, just south of Rimini. This was greeted with enthusiasm by a majority of the men as the long stay at the Lesina base was having a deteriorating effect on the morale. The move was begun on 1 March, with some of the men and equipment going by truck and others by C-47 transports. The new location proved agreeable to the men, with all of them being housed in unoccupied buildings. March also found the second groups of 10 men leaving for furlough in the U. S. Among this group was First Sergeant Hemperly, M/Sgt. Matthew Stone taking over as acting First Sergeant. While at Miramare, the squadron participated in the first and only raid on Berlin by the 15th Air Force.

On 3 April the squadron moved again. This time to Mondolfo, a few miles south of Fano and about 30 miles south of Miramare. Two days later, Lt. Col. McNeil failed to return from a mission over Germany. It was later revealed that he was taken prisoner. Major John R. Burman succeeded Col. McNeil as Squadron Commander. On 19 April the squadron scored its last victories of the European war, while escorting B-25s over the Brenner Pass, 6 of our fighters intercepted 17 Me-109s preparing to attack the bomber formation. In the ensuing battle, our pilots destroyed 6 of the enemy aircraft.

In two years of combat, the squadron has destroyed 213 of the 537 enemy aircraft destroyed by the group in the air. It has also accounted for many more on the ground, plus locomotives, freight cars, oil cars, trucks and river barges. It has been awarded 2 Distinguished Unit Citations and 10 Battle Participation stars. Its members have been awarded 1 Distinguished Service Cross, 10 Silver Stars, 5? Distinguished Flying Crosses, 3 Legions of Merit, 2 Soldiers Medals, 15 Bronze Stars, and 15 Purple Hearts. The squadron also had 15 aces.

The last organizational change occurred in 1969. It was the result of budget shortfalls, as were

most changes during the late 1950s and the 1960s. In early 1969, Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird announced a \$3 billion reduction in defense expenditures for the coming fiscal year. The Alaskan Air Command received its share of force reductions. The Fire Island NORAD control center and the surveillance sites at Unalakleet and Northeast Cape were closed during the last half of 1969. The Aleutian DEW Line segment was inactivated 30 September. Finally, the 317th Fighter Interceptor Squadron was inactivated 31 December 1969, which left AAC without any assigned air defense fighters. Twenty-six of the 317th's twenty-seven F-102As were transferred to Air National Guard units. One, 56-1282, which had sustained a cracked wing spar, was donated to the Alaska Transportation Museum.

Air Force Order of Battle

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Sources

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

Unit yearbook. *25th Air Division (Defense)*. 1953-1954