

318th FIGHTER INTERCEPTOR SQUADRON



MISSION

LINEAGE

318th Fighter Squadron constituted, 24 Jun 1942
Activated, 3 Aug 1942
Inactivated, 28 Oct 1945
Activated, 21 May 1947
Redesignated 318th Fighter Squadron (All-Weather), 10 May 1948
Redesignated 318th Fighter All-Weather Squadron, 20 Jan 1950
Redesignated 318th Fighter Interceptor Squadron, 1 May 1951

STATIONS

Mitchel Field, NY, 3 Aug 1942
New Grenier Field, NH,
Bedford Mun Aprt, MA,
Tafaraoui, Algeria, 28 Feb 1943
Montesquieu, Algeria, 7 Apr 1943
Souk-el-Khemis, Tunisia, 3 Jun 1943
Mateur, Tunisia, 19 Jun 1943
Soliman, Tunisia, 4 Nov 1943
Foggia, Italy, 9 Dec 1943
Lesina, Italy, 29 Mar 1944
Rimini, Italy, c. 7 Mar 1945
Mondolfo, Italy, 3 Apr 1945
Vincenzo Airfield, Italy, Ju1-9 Oct 1945

Camp Kilmer, NJ, 26-28 Oct 1945
Mitchel Field, NY, 21 May 1947
Hamilton Field, CA, 2 Dec 1947
McChord AFB, WA, 26 Nov 1948
Thule, Greenland, 1 Jul 1953
Presque Isle AFB, ME, 5 Aug 1954
McChord AFB, WA, 18 Aug 1955

ASSIGNMENTS

325th Fighter Group, 3 Aug 1942-28 Oct 1945
325th Fighter (later Fighter All Weather; Fighter Interceptor) Group, 21 May 1947
4704th Defense Wing, 6 Feb 1952
567th Air Defense Group, 16 Feb 1953
64th Air Division, 1 Jul 1953
528th Air Defense Group, 8 Aug 1954
95th Fighter Group, 18 Aug 1955
325th Fighter Wing, 25 Mar 1960

WEAPON SYSTEMS

P-40, 1942-1943
P-47, 1943-1944
P-51, 1944-1945
P-61, 1947-1948
F-82, 1948-1951
F-94A, 1951-1954
F-89D, 1954-1955
F-86A, 1955-1957
F-102A, 1957-1960
F-106A, 1960
F-106B
F-82F
F-82G
F-94A
P-40F
P-47G
P-47D
P-51B
P-61B
P-51C
P-51D
P-40E

COMMANDERS

Lt George B. Gingras, 3 Aug 1942

Cpt Joseph A. Bloomer, 11 Feb 1943
Maj James F. Garrett, 20 Aug 1943
Maj James V. Toner, 5 Jan 1944
Cpt Roy B. Hogg, 8 May 1944
Maj Sheldon W. Farnham, 23 Jul 1944
Maj Norman L. McDonald, 26 Nov 1944–May 1945
Maj George McCleary
LTC Howard S Askelson, #1963

HONORS

Service Streamers

None

Campaign Streamers

Air Offensive, Europe
Tunisia
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

None

Decorations

Distinguished Unit Citations
Sardinia, 30 Jul 1943
Italy, 30 Jan 1944

EMBLEM



On a light blue disc, a green dragon, with fierce expression, body scales shadowed dark green, the under part of the body in rolled scales Air Force yellow and vermillion orange, his back barbed white; his eyeballs white, with bloodshot lines; claws, teeth and fangs white outlined black, mouth pink, with crimson barbed tongue, his left claw emitting black electronic rays; his right claw grasping a red tipped, white rocket with black fins, fire exhaust proper. (Approved, 9 Nov 1955)

MOTTO

NICKNAME

Dragons

OPERATIONS

The 318th Fighter Squadron, 325th Fighter Group, was activated on 3 August 1942 from the 85th Fighter Squadron, 79th Fighter Group at Bedford, Massachusetts. After moving to Grenier Field, New Hampshire, in October 1942, the squadron was alerted for overseas movement on 2 January 1943. Under the command of First Lieutenant George B. Gingras, twenty-three pilots left Grenier Field on that date for "destination unknown". On 6 January 1943, an air echelon,

consisting of seven officers, one flight officer and sixty-one enlisted men, followed the pilots. On 22 January 1943, the remainder of the squadron, consisting of six officers and 188 enlisted men, was moved to Camp Kilmer, New Jersey to await the order to embark. On the evening of 7 February 1943, this group of men boarded the U.S.S. Lyon at Staten Island and sailed at 2400 hours.

On the morning of 22 February 1943, after two weeks at sea, the main body of the squadron landed at Oran, Algeria. From there, it proceeded to Ste. Barbe de Tlelat to remain for one week before moving to Tafaraoui Airbase. The air echelon had flown from Miami, through South America to Africa, finally arriving at Medouina Airdrome near Casablanca, on 28 January 1943. The pilots and their aircraft had been taken aboard the Aircraft Carrier Ranger, from which they flew on 19 January to land at Casablanca. After some difficult liaison work, the entire squadron was eventually assembled at Tafaraoui on 28 February 1943.

Training was carried out at Tafaraoui until 7 April 1943, when orders were received to move the squadron to Montesquieu Air Base, Algeria to commence combat flying. This movement is significant in as much as it was the first of its kind to be completed almost entirely by air. The 500 mile journey was accomplished by C-47 type aircraft, making frequent trips to and from the new base, which was at that time the most advanced in the Strategic Air Force. By 15 April 1943, the 325th Fighter Group (two squadrons) and the 320th Bomb Group were installed on the field situated on the outskirts of an Arab village, and consisting of East – West and North-South runways hemmed in by hills at an elevation of 3800 feet.

The 318th Fighter Squadron flew its first mission on 17 April 1943. It was a rather uneventful affair, but like all first missions drew much flak comment from the pilots. One plane was lost due to enemy fighters, but Flight Officer Howard Cook bailed out successfully after receiving an eye wound and after destroying one Me-109, - the first victory for the 325th Fighter Group. During the first month combat missions did not come too fast, but the squadron was turning in a good performance. Along with the rest of the 325th Fighter Group, the 318th was carrying out assignments that had not been attempted previously with P-40 type aircraft in the Mediterranean Area. Every mission flown from North Africa was done so largely over water. Warhawks of the squadron and the group were the first to carry 1000 pound bombs and did so repeatedly and with success. On 28 May 1943, what is believed to be the longest P-40 mission over flown in the Mediterranean Theater was carried out. The target was Trapani/Milo Airdrome, Sicily, located 325 miles from base and causing the planes to remain in the air for over three hours.

After the cessation of hostilities in North Africa officers and enlisted men of the 318th lost no time in going on to the battlefields. The area between Sousse and Bizerte was thoroughly covered, and men returned to Montesquieu with an amazing collection of war trophies ranging from Diesel trucks to German jeeps, side arms, patches and medals.

There wasn't much to do at Montesquieu during leisure hours. A truck took a few men to Souk-Ahras each day to let them have a little freedom in a not unpleasant town situated thirty-five

miles north of the base. Also the Roman ruins of Nadaure were located not far from the base and proved of interest to almost every member of the squadron. Early in May motion picture programs started on a hillside near the 318th area, and though they were closely akin, for the most part, to the "Perils of Pauline", they were eagerly attended by all.

Action of the 318th against targets in North Africa lasted actually less than a month. At the same time, missions were being flown against the Mediterranean Islands of Sardinia, Sicily and Pantelleria. It was over and in the vicinity of these places that the squadron really established its record with P-40 type aircraft. While at Montesquieu, during mission flown to the Islands, the squadron destroyed eight enemy aircraft. Despite no lengthy toll of victories, the unit had performed every task assigned to it in an outstanding manner, never losing a bomber due to enemy fighter action and accomplishing every mission successfully and effectively. Mechanical maintenance by the end of May was also excellent, with 97% of the squadron planes participating in each mission completing the assignment.

On 2 June 1943, the 318th Fighter Squadron moved from Montesquieu to Souk-el-Khemis, Tunisia. This was a temporary field to be occupied for only two weeks. Between 5 June and 11 June operations were carried out exclusively against the Island of Pantelleria. 318th planes flew as many as three missions a day during this period and were highly instrumental in bringing about the surrender of the island. It is interesting to note that Pantelleria was the first and possible the only enemy territory to be completely defeated solely by means of air power.

What is remembered of Souk-el-Khemis is mostly unpleasant. Men of the squadron were able to enjoy for the first time swimming in the Mediterranean, but on the other hand, the camping area was a veritable hellhole of heat. For hours after a take-off dust lingered over the treeless valley in which the airstrip was situated. Thousands of flies were constantly in tents and about the mess hall and latrines and, to their presence is attributed the large percentage of men who suffered for days with diarrhea. On 19 June 1943, when news was received that the unit was to move northeast to Mateur, no man was sorry. The news was actually by B-26s on the 20th.

The new base at Mateur was situated just Southwest of Lake Achkel, separated from the lake by hill "508", which, though actually several miles distant, appeared to rise abruptly from the edge of the field. This hill was the first part of the surrounding territory visited by the more curious members of the squadron. The fact that fighting had continued here even after the Germans had officially surrendered in North Africa made the spot intriguing. Several days after the arrival of the unit the struggle was still in evidence in the form of a few bodies found about half way up the hill.

Operations from Mateur were concerned solely with the Islands of Sardinia and Sicily. When the latter was invaded on 10 July 1943, 318th planes flew intensive missions in support of the ground forces. It was the task of the North African Air Forces to knock out airdromes and gun positions. This task was efficiently accomplished with intercepting aircraft being blasted from the skies.

By the end of July the 318th's objectives in Sicily were demolished, so attention was turned to the sole remaining target within range, Sardinia. Attacks continued against this Island until 22 September, with the 325th Fighter Group being almost the only air unit to attack it. For this reason, the 318th claims a large part in effecting its ultimate surrender.

Mateur, as the hot months progressed, turned into a veritable dust bowl. July wasn't a bad month, but August was hell, with temperatures remaining constantly in the 100 degree bracket. The only consoling factor for this weather was knowledge of the fact that the sun had to go down in the evenings. Men would get up in the morning and take several deep breaths, knowing that they would be the last refreshing ones they would have before sunset. Each morning a kind of haze hung over the area; not a dewy mist, but a dust haze, for at Mateur water was something that could be found during summer months only deep beneath the ground. Sometimes strong winds would blow, but they brought no relief, for they always blew from the south and brought with them the fine residue from desert sands. These were the Siroccas. Even when they reached fairly high velocities and one would turn into them in the hopes of finding some refreshing quality, they would simply drive their powder burden into eyes, ears and noses and cling film-like to sweat-smearred bodies. During these days operations against the enemy continued. Men worked tirelessly on their aircraft, growing dark beneath the relentless rays of the North African sun. Tools had to be kept in the shade or they would become too hot to handle. Water in lister bags was never cool and boxes of salt tablets were consumed each day to ward off fatigue. All of this is a picture of a kind of misery. There were better things.

Passes to Tunis were not infrequent. Movies were held three times a week, and French reviews visited the camp. Bob Hope and Francis Langford put on a show. A truck went to the beach at Bizerte almost daily. Other things are also remembered. The German raids on Bizerte were always spectacular from Mateur with the exception of one night when flares were dropped over the field which was when loaded with C-47s and airborne infantry.

The command of the 318th Fighter Squadron changed while it was at Mateur, with Captain James F. Garrett replacing Captain Joseph A. Bloomer on 20 August 1943, to become the units third Commanding Officer while on foreign soil.

Early in October 1943, the squadron was informed that a transition was to be affected by the unit, changing from P-40 to P-47 type aircraft. No lengthy description of this undertaking is deemed necessary, but a few highlights should be recorded. Most of the work, accomplished in a combat zone, was carried out by personnel of the squadron. Assembling, familiarization and maintenance were tasks accomplished by men of the unit with little outside help. Pilots, many of whom were new, began training flights from Mateur and continued until fall rains made the dirt runways unserviceable.

On 4 November 1943, the 318th began moving from Mateur to Soliman, Tunisia. This field, with a hard surface runway, was situated approximately eighteen (18) miles Northeast of Tunis. By 7 November, the move was complete. From this time until the end of the month a rather pleasant existence was enjoyed, with fine weather prevailing and with passes being granted to Tunis and

other nearby towns. Between 19 and 23 November planes of the 318th did escort work for transports carrying high officials to the Teheran Conference, but other than this, little flying was done.

On 29 November 1943, the entire squadron was called together at Soliman and informed that orders had been received to move the unit to a staging area at Bizerte. The importance of security had been repeatedly drilled into the men, but there was no doubt that the 318th would soon be on its way to Italy. The moving of men and equipment to Bizerte caused many headaches, but was efficiently completed by 3 December. The only members of the squadron to remain at Soliman were those who had been selected to fly to Italy.

Two weeks of lazy existence followed for the main body of the squadron while the order to board LSTs was impatiently waited for. There was little to do at Bizerte, movies in the evening and card games throughout the days kept us busy. On 9 December the air echelon left Soliman on C-47s and landed at Foggia Main Airdrome, Italy. On 12 December, half of the ground echelon boarded LST #315 and sailed on 14 December, proceeding to Foggia by truck, jeep and train. The last of the squadron left Bizerte on 24 December, landing at Naples on 26 December. The entire unit was complete at Foggia Main by the 28th. Missions had begun in Italy without incident.

Foggia Main was not exactly the best spot in the world to spend the Christmas holiday and the long faces on the men didn't improve the Xmas spirit any either. Major Garrett, realizing the situation had demijohns of Italian cognac sent into the camp and our cooks surpassed themselves by turning out an exceptional holiday dinner. By mid-afternoon true holiday spirit reigned through the camp, friends in lieu of families wished each other a "Merry Christmas".

On 30 December 1943, the 318th completed another move, this time settling at Foggia #1 Airdrome, Italy. Another holiday to celebrate away from home, this time the men knew how to cope with it, the day was wet and cold but spirits were cheery and high. As weather cleared after the first few days in January, missions came fast and furious. Initially the squadron's operational range had been limited by early model P-47s. by the middle of the month planes with a greater fuel capacity permitted longer and more effective blows to be struck at the enemy. On 30 January 1944, the 318th participated in the highly successful sweep of the Villaorba area, Italy, during which the 325th Fighter Group bagged thirty-seven enemy planes.

On 5 January 1944, Major James V. Toner, Jr. was appointed Commanding Officer of the 318th replacing Major James F. Garrett.

February and most of March passed in a routine manner. Missions were flown and a steady war record continued to rise. Free time was somewhat of a problem, three day passes were issued to enlisted men who wished to visit Bari, Trani and Naples.

Between the 26th and 30th of March 1944, the 318th moved from Foggia #1 to Lesina Airdrome, approximately thirty-five north of Foggia.

Lesina, like most of the 318th bases, was a remote field, difficult to reach by ground and offering little of an appealing nature. Life continued normally. In May 1944, a second aircraft transition took place, with P-47s being replaced with the famed P-51 Mustang. This task was accomplished smoothly and was noteworthy, inasmuch as no interim was necessary between combat operations with Thunderbolts and Mustangs.

It was here that the men after many false starts finally built a 318th enlisted men's club. Everyone cooperated and the final result was a club that contributed greatly to the enjoyment on hot summer nights.

During the lengthy stay at Lesina Airdrome the command of the 318th changed hands three times. Captain Roy B. Hogg succeeded Lt. Col. James V. Toner, Jr. on 8 May 1944, who in turn took the position of Deputy Group Commander. On completing his tour of missions, Captain Roy B. Hogg was followed by Major Sheldon W. Farnham who assumed command on 23 July 1944. The command was changed again when Major Sheldon W. Farnham was transferred to Group operations on 26 November 1944, and Major Norman L. McDonald was placed in command.

Improvements in the cap area were constantly taking place and it wasn't long before the entire area was taking on the aspects of a permanent camp. Heated mess halls were set up for both officers and enlisted men, and an excellent shower was rigged up and every tent could boast of a wooden floor and sides.

With the beginning of P-51 missions, the 318th Fighter Squadron came into its own and was, for almost a year, to blast an impressive war record across the enemies skies. Aerial achievement may best be shown by a chronological record of outstanding events:

2 JUNE 1944 – 11 JUNE 1944 Planes of the 318th participated in the first shuttle run to Russia. During two mission on 6 June and 11 June, six enemy fighter aircraft were destroyed by the squadron.

28 JUNE 1944 Seven enemy aircraft were destroyed during a fighter sweep over the Bucharest area, Rumania.

31 JULY 1944 Eighteen enemy fighter aircraft were destroyed during an escort mission to Bucharest, Rumania. Captain Harry A. Parker destroyed four (4) during this encounter.

23 AUGUST 1944 Nine FW-190s were destroyed during an escort mission to Markersdorf, Austria.

5 NOVEMBER 1944 Captain Oscar Rau destroyed four Me-109s during a single engagement.

14 MARCH 1945 On an escort mission to marshalling yards in January, fifteen 318th P-51s outnumbered better than two to one destroyed eighteen, probably destroyed one, and

damaged two FW-190s. First Lieutenant Gordon H. McDaniel destroyed five during this encounter.

10 APRIL 1945 Two flights of 318th P-51s remained in the Regensburg-Linz target area one hour beyond the required time in order to destroy six FW-190s.

The 318th remained at Lesina longer than at any other base. Many things occurred during the more than 11 months spent there, but it will best be remembered for certain exceptional reasons. The runway was built on a hill, Malaria was very prevalent, rain and mud, monotony of existence. Trips to Rome. The passing of the front to over 200 miles from base. The establishing of an EM club. The first overseas marriage of a 318th G.I. and Officer.

Early in March 1945 the 318th moved again by air to Rimini Airdrome at Miramare, Italy, where tents were discarded for bombed out buildings. It was indeed a change from our usual run of bases, for one thing, the idea of living in a town was new and novel for most of us. Our billets overlooked the Adriatic and although we were forewarned that we wouldn't remain at Miramare we all spoke of the wonderful bathing that was in store for us as soon as the weather permitted. The airdrome was a good distance from the living area which necessitated an hourly bus service. It was here that the men met and enjoyed the friendships of British soldiers attached to elements of the English Eighth Army. Operations from this field continued until 2 April when the squadron moved back to Mondolfo Airdrome, which was its last combat base in the MTO. This base, consisting of 2 parallel runways, was shared with the 31st Fighter Group.

Through the stint of much hard work planes of the 318th without missing a day kept slamming at the enemy even during the moves. By this time the unit was so experienced in setting up bases that it was only a matter of days before we had all the comforts we enjoyed at Lesina. While at Mondolfo following the defeat of Germany, the squadron began to break up and, by 20 May 1945, only 107 original enlisted men and four officers remained.

The 318th FIS surrendered their F-94As in exchange for Bs in May and early June 1953, reaching squadron strength with the newer version just prior to the relocation. As the F-94 single-engined was truly unsuitable for operations over the vastness of the arctic and Greenland, they were one of the first squadrons to give their F-94s to the Air Material Command for refurbishing and transfer to the ANG. They too were replaced by F-89Ds.

On August 5, 1954, the first echelon of the 318th FIS arrived at Presque Isle AFB, Maine, from their NEAC assignment at Thule Air Base, Greenland.

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 NORAD Region*.