

327th FIGHTER CONTROL SQUADRON

MISSION

LINEAGE

327th Fighter Control Squadron, activated, 20 Mar 1943

STATIONS

Orlando, Florida

Camp Myles Standish, Massachusetts

Port of Embarkation, New York

Gurock, Scotland

Aldermaston, England

Colchester, Essex, England

Ibsley, Hants, England

Landed near Grandcamp, France 7 June 1944

Cricqueville, France

Villedieu, France

Le Teilleul, France

Mamers, France

Aillieres, France

Versailles, France

Paris, France

Laon, France

Jamoux, Belgium

Verviers, Belgium

Liege, Belgium

Bruhl, Germany

Marburg, Germany

Weimar, Germany

ASSIGNMENTS

COMMANDERS

2Lt Edward J. Dennis

1IT Jack L Powell

Maj John P. G. McPhee

Maj Henry L. Fetherston

LTC C. B. Crockett

Maj Michael J. Brady

Cpt Robert I. Jones

HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

EMBLEM

MOTTO

NICKNAME

OPERATIONS

There were 19 different changes of station in the 26 months and often the squadron resembled nothing more than a band of gypsies. The race across France and Germany was nerve wracking because of the constant movement but comfort was sacrificed for necessity and the realization that every step nearer Berlin was a step nearer peace.

To Maj Fetherston must go the major credit for the squadrons success. He took over when the squadron went to France and upon him was thrust the major burden of coordinating activities during the hard days of St Lo and the Battle of the Bulge.

In the 26 months the officers and men of the 327th were to know every type of living conditions. There were pup tents in Normandy, swanky hotels and chateaux in Belgium, abandoned school hoesues with shattered windows which were no defense against the whistling winter winds; German barracks and apartments.

There were highlights too. There was London and Paris and Brussels.

The squadron arrived in France on 7 Jun 1944. The men had been unable to land because of severe enemy action. As the LSt waddled in the French port near Grandcamp, a troop transport was sunk

a half mile aft of starboard. The transport had struck a mine. Less than 3 minutes later, a sister Liberty ship struck another enemy mine-this time only 100yards away from the anxious onlookers of the 327th Fighter Control Squadron. The ship looked near enough to touch. The dark sky was shredded by fingers of red, white and blue lights, viciously beautiful in the ominous darkness.

There are two published versions of the history of my father's outfit, the "Record of the 327th Fighter Control Squadron." In the summer of 1945, the 327th Fighter Control Squadron was stationed in Weimar, a city in eastern Germany which would soon become Russian occupational territory. The Americans had to leave.

Several weeks earlier, soldiers of the 327th had left a 47-page manuscript and photographic plates for publication at the Knabe Printing Company, a shop located in Weimar. The Squadron was unable to retrieve copies of the published histories before leaving town, and the Russians subsequently refused to release either the published books or the manuscript and photographic plates that the 327th had left behind.

An abridged "Record" without photographs was therefore published in the U.S. in 1946 and distributed to all Squadron members. The fate of the original remained a mystery until 2000 when Weimar construction workers at the Knabe Printing Company discovered about 30 copies of the 1945 "Record of the 327th Fighter Control Squadron" concealed under floorboards. This historical gem contains numerous rare wartime photographs and a series of group pictures of about 100 members of the 327th Fighter Control Squadron.

For a fascinating account of a 327th Fighter Control Squadron lieutenant's harrowing attempt to retrieve copies of the original Squadron history from Weimar after it had become part of the Russian Occupation Zone, see Fenmore Seton's article in the June 2002 issue of the Ninth Flyer, a publication of the Ninth Air Force Association.

There are a few inaccuracies in Mr. Seton's article. As pointed out in a September 20, 2008 letter from Bernd Schmidt, chairman of U.S. Veterans Friends, Germany, the first few paragraphs of Mr. Seton's article are factually incorrect. These paragraphs purportedly describe circumstances surrounding the successful retrieval of the original "Record." In addition, Mr. Seton's trip to Weimar most likely took place in July 1945, not June, as stated in the article. Finally, the person Seton refers to as "Smith" is actually Bernd Schmidt.

Unit history states that the "Squadron is the first completely Mobile Fighter Control Squadron and...the first Fighter Control Squadron to be shifted from the role of an Air Defense unit to an Air Support unit.

The 327th Fighter Control Squadron, later to gain fame as the first All-American organization of its type to "hit the beach" in the invasion of Normandy, officially was activated on 20 March, 1943. Between that time and V-E Day, separated by 26 drama packed months, there was to be an ever-shifting tide of personnel and the subsequent itinerary serried like a Cook's tour. There were 19

different changes of station in the 26 months and often the squadron resembled nothing more than a band of gypsies.

The race across France and later Germany was nerve-wracking because of the constant movement but comfort was sacrificed for necessity and the realization that every step nearer Berlin was a step nearer peace. The first Commanding Officer of the squadron was 2d Lt. Edward J. Dennis who gave way to Lt. Jack L. Powell. Then came Major John P. G. McPhee and Major Henry L. Fetherston.

To Major Fetherston must go the major credit for the 327th's success. He took over when the squadron went to France and upon him was thrust the major burden of coordinating activities during the hard days of St. Lo and the Battle of the Bulge.

Major Fetherston was succeeded by Lt. Col. C. B. Crockett, whose genius in controlling was an American legend. Col. Crockett had been among the first American controllers during the African campaign and he put his experience to good use in the latter days of the German offensive when the First Army, which the 327th supported, was hammering steadily at the foe.

Col. Crockett returned to the United States in May and was succeeded by Major Michael J. Brady, one of the top administrative men of the Air Force. When Major Brady transferred to 9th Air Force, his place was taken by Capt. Robert Jones, communications officer and winner of the Legion of Merit for his outstanding work during the spring and summer of 1944.

In the 26 months, the officers and men of the 327th were to know every type of living conditions. There were pup tents in Normandy, swanky hotels and chateaux in Belgium, abandoned school houses with shattered windows which were no defense against the whistling winter winds; German barracks and apartments in short, the best and the worst.

There were highlights, too. There was London and Paris and Brussels. Then, after the weary, Work-filled months, there was V-E Day.

At last, the long day of peace in Europe had come. To the grim, serious men who filed from the fat belly of the LST in the brooding dawn of that chill June day in 1944, it was a stunning answer to their hopes and prayers. For two days, the squadron had watched the mounting battle off the French coast. Arriving on 7 June 1944, the men had been unable to land because of severe enemy action. As the LST waddled into the French port near Grandcamp, a troop transport was sunk a half-mile aft of starboard. The transport had struck a mine. Less than three minutes later, a sister Liberty ship struck another enemy mine, this time only 100 yards away from the anxious onlookers of the 327th Fighter Control Squadron. The ship looked near enough to touch.

The dark sky was shredded by lingers of red, white and blue lights, viciously beautiful in the ominous darkness. So there had been days in Normandy; days of indecision and doubt; days of sickening impatience. There were days in the field when the comforts of a "lost" civilization wistfully protruded themselves on torturous memory.

There were endless days of K-rations, cold, rain, discomfort. There was the rough edge of operations-demanding more and more each passing day. There were days of hard, bitter work and nights of restless wonder as the German planes strafed continuously or the shells came whistling overhead. There was the ironic comfort of the whump of our ack-ack; there were muddy foxholes, and work, work, work!

There was the thrill of the breakthrough at St. Lo, and the knowledge of a scintillating job well-done as the commanding general, in proud and glowing terms, congratulated the squadron. There was the relentless chase through all of France-the liberation of Paris and the hysterical, ecstatic welcome that made every man feel a hero. There was the sober "sit-down" in Belgium; the nightmarish withdrawal during the Battle of the Bulge; the air power that helped break the back of the once vaunted Luft-waffe for all time. There was Germany itself; the demands of the Ruhr pocket and the ever distant front which sorely tried the genius and adaptability of the squadron.

And now, high on a lovely hill overlooking a quiet valley-a scene that belied the festering sore of nearby Buchenwald, the men of the 327th Fighter Control Squadron gathered to hear the dramatic voice of England's eloquent Prime Minister, Sir Winston Churchill. The speech ended. The BBC announcer told of the celebrations touched off "in all the old familiar places" Paris (remember the liberation); London (wonder what the Piccadilly is like tonight); New York (Broadway, Times Square ... home!).

But there was no celebration in the squadron. Only a deep weariness and thankfulness. Only a reminder of those men who could never celebrate-who had seen the promised land, but did not live to enter it.

The 26 months had been long and hard. But none could say they weren't worth the effort. They had been thrill-charged months. The men of the 327th had participated in a slice of history.

Air Force Order of Battle

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Sources

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

Unit History. *327th Fighter Control Squadron Record*. Weimarer Druck und Verlaganstalt Gebr. Knabe K.G. Weimar, Germany.