

**The Fighting Five-Tenth: One Fighter-Bomber Squadron's Experience during the  
Development of World War II Tactical Air Power**

by

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## Abstract

During the years between World War I and World War II, many within the Army Air Corps (AAC) aggressively sought an independent air arm and believed that strategic bombardment represented an opportunity to inflict severe and dramatic damages on the enemy while operating autonomously. In contrast, working in cooperation with ground forces, as tactical forces later did, was viewed as a subordinate role to the army's infantry and therefore upheld notions that the AAC was little more than an alternate means of delivering artillery. When President Franklin Delano Roosevelt called for a significantly expanded air arsenal and war plan in 1939, AAC strategists saw an opportunity to make an impression. Eager to exert their sovereignty, and sold on the efficacy of heavy bombers, AAC leaders answered the president's call with a strategic air doctrine and war plans built around the use of heavy bombers. The AAC, renamed the Army Air Forces (AAF) in 1941, eventually put the tactical squadrons into play in Europe, and thus tactical leaders spent 1943 and the beginning of 1944 preparing tactical air units for three missions: achieving and maintaining air superiority, isolating the battlefield, and providing air support for ground forces. Fighter group and squadron leaders were charged with producing an effective group of fighter pilots capable of moving into the European action with ease. The dissertation focuses on one specific air unit, the 510<sup>th</sup> Fighter Squadron, the experiences of which exemplify the development of tactical air power in the European Theater of Operations during World War II.

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## List of Abbreviations

AAC	Army Air Corps
AAF	Army Air Forces
AAFFTC	Army Air Forces Flying Training Command
ACQE	Aviation Cadet Qualifying Examination
ACTS	Air Corps Tactical School
ADGB	Air Defense of Great Britain
AEAF	Allied Expeditionary Air Force
ALO	Air Liaison Officer
AWPD	Air War Plans Division
CAS	Close Air Support
CIC	Counter Intelligence Corps
ETO	European Theater of Operations
GHQ	General Headquarters
IFF	Identify Friend or Foe
MEWS	Microwave Early Warning System
NATOUSA	North African Theater of Operations, USA
OTU	Operational Training Unit
POW	Prisoner of War

RAF	Royal Air Force, Great Britain
RTU	Replacement Training Unit
SHAEF	Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Air Force
TAC	Tactical Air Command
TAC	Tactical Air Command
TAF	Tactical Air Force, Great Britain



## Introduction

This dissertation will examine the World War II 510<sup>th</sup> Fighter Squadron. The narrative illustrates, in tandem with the necessary historical background and context, the unit's experience during the evolution of the tactical air forces, despite the Army Air Force's (AAF) overwhelming preference for strategic high-altitude daylight precision bombing doctrine and heavy bombers. Before World War II, the Army opposed the creation of an independent air force, embittering air force leaders who recoiled from the mission of providing air support for ground forces. It is ironic, then, that tactical air power—and the tactical units' coordination with ground forces—fostered the good will between air and ground commanders that ultimately made air force independence possible. When the war ended, no one could deny the effectiveness of the AAF. Moreover, no Army commander would deny that tactical units were largely responsible for that result, leading Army leaders like Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower to conclude that air operations were best left to the air force based on the excellent combat record air power garnered for the Army.

The squadron operated as part of the 405<sup>th</sup> Fighter Group, along with two other squadrons—the 509<sup>th</sup> and the 511<sup>th</sup>—within the Ninth Air Force. Contributing as one part of the larger, three-squadron group, the men of the 510<sup>th</sup> consistently achieved results beyond the successes of the other two squadrons. As 510<sup>th</sup> pilot, and future South Carolina Senator, John W. Drummond explained, "Why did they call the 510th?... They

knew what they was gonna get when they did....You go back and look at some of the real tough ones...when they had the toughest ones, they gave it to the 510<sup>th</sup>.”<sup>1</sup> The squadron’s success stemmed from talented airmen, ground crews, the P-47 Thunderbolt, and a small number of trailblazing leaders in the air and on the ground.

Overemphasis on strategic bombardment weakened the Army Air Corps (AAC), later the Army Air Forces, and skewed American World War II planning. The implementation of tactical aviation came late and in spite of the reservations of the AAF’s highest officials. As historian Richard P. Hallion explains in *Strike from the Sky*, “the prevailing influence of strategic air warfare tended to work against developing a cohesive tactical air-ground doctrine.”<sup>2</sup> Once the AAF acknowledged the potential of the tactical units in World War II, the needed tactical doctrine, aircraft, and air operations evolved under air leaders that truly believed their air units would bring victory to the Allies.

Tactical air power evolved in World War II adhering to three sequential missions set forth by the Ninth Air Force, with the first two missions preceding D-Day, and the third coming after the invasion. The first mission, gaining and maintaining air superiority—or control of the air—was achieved by destroying the enemy’s air forces in the air through aerial combat and on the ground through attacks on aerodromes. Control of the air severely limited the enemy’s ability to enter the combat zone. The tactical units achieved the second mission, isolating the battlefield, by attacking such enemy transport systems as marshaling yards, roads, railway lines, locomotives, and rolling stock. These

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<sup>1</sup> Sen. John W. Drummond, “The 510<sup>th</sup> Was There,” DVD (undated).

<sup>2</sup> Richard P. Hallion, *Strike From the Sky: The History of Battlefield Air Attack, 1911-1945* (Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989), p. 53.

interdiction missions were designed essentially to close off the enemy at the front from reinforcements and resupply.

The third and final mission, providing air support to ground forces, was to be attempted only after the first two missions were successful. This third mission took two forms. One was close air support (CAS), which was defined by attacks on enemy forces in close proximity to friendly ground forces. The second, armed reconnaissance (recon) missions, involved flying in advance of the ground forces and attacking the enemy's military potential before the friendly forces came within range. Often, armed recon missions offered the opportunity to observe and report the enemy's positions to ground forces based on the view from above. Both components required a sophisticated communication system between ground and air forces able to convey constantly the fluid positions of friendly and enemy forces. The tactical units employed strafing attacks—machine gun or cannon fire from a low-flying aircraft—and bombing attacks at enemy ground forces and artillery.<sup>3</sup> The experience of the 510<sup>th</sup> followed this same evolution, beginning with the squadron's time in England flying escort for heavy bombers as well as fighting for air superiority, to interdiction missions on the Cherbourg Peninsula preparing for the Allied invasion, and finally supporting the campaigns of Gen. George S. Patton and the Third Army.

While there were dozens of fighter-bomber squadrons flying for the tactical air forces during World War II that could have served as subjects for a project of this kind, there are several reasons why the 510<sup>th</sup> squadron, specifically, is an ideal air unit to follow. Most important among these is that the squadron was present and participating in those battles that came to exemplify the significance of tactical air power, most especially

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., pp. 1-2.

supporting ground forces as part of the Nineteenth (XIX) Tactical Air Command (TAC). Brig. Gen. Elwood “Pete” Quesada, as leader of the IX Fighter Command, which included the IX and XIX TAC, described the group’s successes during Operation COBRA—the first example of successfully coordinated and executed air support of ground forces in the European Theater of Operation (ETO)—as “beyond imagination.”<sup>4</sup> In a letter to the 405<sup>th</sup> Fighter Group, commander of the XIX TAC, Brig. Gen. Otto P. Weyland described the group’s air support to the Third Army during the Battle of the Falaise Pocket, as part of the “most dramatically successfully combined air-ground military operation known to history....” Finally, describing the group’s participation in what came to be known as the Battle of the Bulge, Weyland wrote, “the 405<sup>th</sup> Group again contributed greatly to the success of our operations which crushed the last German offensive out of the Ardennes salient.”<sup>5</sup>

The 510<sup>th</sup> is also ideal because of the men who comprised the unit. These men are great characters and their stories reflect the individual’s experience—one consisting of fear, glory, humor, and heartbreak. They often tried to make the best of a dangerous and increasingly deadly situation. Sometimes that took the form of building social clubs out of scraps left by retreating Germans on the Continent; sometimes it meant gathering around a shaken pilot as he explained why his wingman had not made it back; sometimes it took building softball fields and organizing dances; other times it equaled an entire squadron sitting in silence, in the mess hall at dinner time, after a day when only a

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<sup>4</sup>Headquarters, Ninth Air Force European Theater of Operations Public Relations Office, “An Advanced Fighter Base, Ninth Fighter Command, Normandy...” in 405 FG, “Group History,” July 1944, IRIS No. 00090630, in USAF Collections, Air Force Historical Research Agency (hereafter cited as AFHRA).

<sup>5</sup> 405 FG, “Group History,” February 1945, IRIS No. 00090631, in USAF Collections, AFHRA.

fraction of the flights made it home. To describe simply the evolution of tactical air power without the personal stories of these men is to lose sight of the toll this evolution took on the individual. Therefore, this dissertation is anchored in their wartime experiences.

Finally, the squadron serves as an ideal subject because, following the war, the men of the 510<sup>th</sup> compiled a remarkable amount of primary source material and were more than eager to share it. Men from the squadron gave speeches, wrote essays, and preserved their memoirs. As many as were able met once a year at reunions and produced countless newsletters and booklets—keeping the men informed about the lives of their squadron mates and providing a forum for recollection—and, of particular importance to this project each one who was asked graciously responded to requests for interviews.

The story of American air power based on strategic bombardment theory is well-represented within the historiographies of World War II and American military aviation. In contrast, this project concentrates on the tactical air forces, and moreover, on the pilots within that air force, recognizing the squadron's place in the larger story of how the AAF reevaluated the possibilities of tactical air operations and developed a tactical air force that played such an integral part in the Allied victory—all in such a short amount of time. And while the story of tactical development has been told through the experiences of its leaders, it has not been told through the experiences of the airmen. World War II veterans have penned memoirs but few works acknowledge the significant role the men played in the larger evolution of tactical air power—perhaps because they did not realize their place in the story, or perhaps because when asked about their war experience, the

men found themselves constantly answering inquiries limited to D-Day and bomber airplanes. This study will carry the story beyond the chronological and subject limitations to provide a more focused picture of the air war in Europe.

The dissertation spans the squadron's World War II experience, from Drew Field in Tampa, Florida, to their last European base in Marseilles, France. Chapters one and two are historical background, with all following chapters organized according to the squadron's air base assignment. Each of the following chapters will consist of the macro military context at the time and the continued development of the tactical air forces, and the micro day-to-day experiences of the squadron. Both the micro views of the group and squadron and macro view of the groundbreaking developments in thinking about and implementing tactical air power are important components of the same story. The men of the 510<sup>th</sup> Fighter Squadron did not develop the tactics of the Ninth Air Force, but they helped prove that they were a good idea. The unit did not choose to fly air support for one of the greatest ground commanders in American history; they simply offered Gen. George Patton and his Third Army everything they could muster, and thus contributed mightily to his extraordinary success. Finally, the squadron was not concerned with whether they flew for an independent air force or for the Army, but their successes proved to doubters that air power worked best when under the direction of airmen—airmen more concerned with the war effort than achieving independence.

From an air force determined to win the war with independent, strategic air operations came fighter squadrons like the 510<sup>th</sup> which contributed directly to the Allied victory through coordinated tactical air operations. Tactical air operations not only bolstered the army's ability to defeat the enemy in the air and on the ground, but

squadrons such as the 510<sup>th</sup> ultimately strengthened the air force and their fight for autonomy. Before delving into the day-to-day activities of this talented, and often entertaining, fighter squadron, it is important to look first at the indoctrinated resistance to tactical theory within the AAC and AAF, as well as the evolution of air doctrine that eventually allowed the 510<sup>th</sup> to achieve the extraordinary reputation the squadron still enjoys today.

## Chapter One:

### Air Power from 1911-1943

The earliest application of the airplane as a weapon occurred in 1911 when Italy went to war with Turkey, each nation vying for control of Libya. During the ensuing battles, the Italian air force provided reconnaissance, artillery spotting, supply and personnel transport, and bombed the Turkish army's ground forces, supplies, and facilities around the clock. Significantly, as the world was first introduced to air power and a new age of warfare, the Italian air force essentially demonstrated the same fundamental roles of air power still in practice today. From the ranks of those airmen who flew in Turkey came Giulio Douhet, an Italian air power theorist whose vision would greatly influence American airmen shaping the United States air forces following World War I.<sup>1</sup>

Originally commissioned into the artillery after graduating at the top of his class at the Genoa Military Academy, Douhet went on to shape not only the Italian air force but eventually every air force in the world with his prolific—though career-ending—advocacy of air power. At the heart of his vision of air power, and the demise of his career for that matter, was Douhet's insistence that its efficacy was dependent on an independent air force out from under the thumb of ground commanders who neither

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<sup>1</sup> Col. Phillip S. Meilinger, "Giulio Douhet and the Origins of Air power," in ed. Col. Phillip Meilinger, USAF, *The Paths of Heaven: The Evolution of Air Power Theory* (Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama: Air University Press, 1997), p. 3.



grasped the possibilities of air power nor possessed the knowledge or experience to employ it properly.<sup>2</sup> The necessity of an independent air force, controlled by airmen, coequal to the army and navy, and free to construct doctrine and educate its forces accordingly—without the interference of ground commanders—was thus bred into the notion of air power from the very beginning.

Additionally, Douhet argued that the greatest contribution of air power resulted from the employment of the airplane as a strategic weapon striking vital centers within the enemy's homeland, not tactically supporting ground forces.<sup>3</sup> Thus from its inception, the theory of air power was anchored in the belief that the success of an air force depended on independence and that independence depended on a carving out a strategic mission free from supporting ground forces. By the time the United States was preparing for World War II almost three decades later, this same notion of independence, for better or worse, drove the actions and decisions of air force leaders.

To understand fully how entrenched the Army Air Forces were in Douhet's notion of independence at the dawn of World War II, it is appropriate to examine briefly the evolution of American air power theory from its debut on the world stage during World War I to the seminal interwar developments, and ultimately the air plan for World War II. Equally telling are the lengths to which the air force went to avoid doctrine that promoted any subordination to the ground forces through tactical air operations, showing a cultural permeation throughout the air force that, in the minds of many airmen, the success of tactical air operations directly jeopardized the eventual independence of the air force. Finally, of tremendous importance is how tactical air power developed despite

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., pp. 1-2.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

institutional opposition and thrived in combat despite leaders allocating the majority of the AAF's resources to strategic operations.

Between the Italians' introduction of air power in 1911 and the beginning of World War I in the summer of 1914, there was undeniable excitement regarding the new air weapon. Accordingly, nations began developing their own means of introducing airplanes into combat. France had already amassed an impressive amount of experience implementing limited air operations during the first Balkan war of 1912 and the colonial revolts in Morocco in 1914. Rebels and governmental forces in Mexico used airplanes purchased from the United States and France, respectively, in 1913 for reconnaissance as well as bombing.<sup>4</sup>

But the Great War—with all the belligerents, with all the miles and miles of front line, with the all the new advances by military technologists—offered a grand stage on which to employ the newer, deadlier weapons afforded each of the Entente and Central Powers by the robust national economies of the industrialized West. Perhaps equally characteristic of World War I was the frustration of junior officers who blamed, in large part, their superiors' failure to make the most of new weapons like the airplane for the giant death toll by the war's end. A generation of soldiers thus emerged who equated innovation with victory, and uninspired leadership with defeat and unnecessary loss of life.<sup>5</sup>

The American air experience during World War I was brief, as the Army Air Service entered too late and the Armistice came too soon after that. A mere 138 tons of

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<sup>4</sup> Hallion, *Strike From the Sky*, pp. 11-12.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 11-13.

ordnance was dropped by the Americans, compared to the more than 543 tons dropped by the British in just the summer of 1918. For their efforts, the British air services—the Royal Navy Air Service and the Royal Flying Corps—were granted independence and formed into the Royal Air Force (RAF). The Army Air Service, which had been predominantly employed for ground support providing recon reports, artillery spotting, and on rare occasions chasing off enemy aircraft threatening the infantry, remained a part of the Army and no closer to the independent force many airmen already considered necessary for success.<sup>6</sup>

Like their European counterparts, many American airmen, felt that myopic ground commanders with no understanding of the revolutionary potential of air power had kept them from realizing their full potential before the war was over. This belief then translated into the often fanatical postwar edict that air power should be left to airmen—or, that ground commanders had no business telling airmen how to use their air weapon.<sup>7</sup> From this junior class came the future air leaders of the United States. As they witnessed subordination of air power to ground commanders to the detriment of its potential, these men vowed not only to gain independence for their air force but to steer doctrine and strategy so far in the opposite direction of tactical air support missions so as to never again tether their airplanes to the whims of ground forces.

Accordingly, the United States' premier apostle of air force independence during the interwar years was World War I pilot William "Billy" Mitchell. As Col. Mark A.

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<sup>6</sup> Timothy Moy, "Transforming Technology in the Army Air Corps, 1920-1940: Technology, Politics, Culture, and Strategic Bombing," in ed. Dominick A. Pisano, *The Airplane in American Culture* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), pp. 302-303.

<sup>7</sup> Lt. Col. Mark A. Clodfelter, "Molding Air Power Convictions: Development and Legacy of William Mitchell's Strategic Thought," in *Paths of Heaven*, p. 88.

Clodfelter concludes in his article “Molding Air Power Convictions: Development and Legacy of William Mitchell’s Strategic Thought,” when Mitchell’s ideas on airpower began to take shape based on his own experiences during World War I, those ideas were “intimately tied to the concept of an independent air force.” Mitchell, who inspired a sort of cult following among those airmen bent on independence, had not only the flying experience of the war to build a reputation upon but also his close association with strategic advocates Gen. Hugh Trenchard of Great Britain and Giulio Douhet himself, who by 1921 had published *Command of the Air* and consequently provided strategic advocates with their Bible. To his followers, Mitchell was considered righteously confident and brave; to his detractors he was an insubordinate hot head whose privileged upbringing had left him unaccustomed to hearing the word “no.” He emerged from World War I sold on the importance of an independent air force allowed to control the development of air power and combat aircraft.<sup>8</sup>

Mitchell and his cohorts began to develop official Air Service doctrine soon after the war’s end. The dissemination of their theories was made possible, in large part, by the founding of the Air Service School in 1920 at Langley Field, Virginia. For the Air Service, having been officially acknowledged as a combatant arm of the Army in the Army Reorganization Act of 1920, the establishment of the school represented first, proof that the Air Service was now a permanent part of the United States military and second, that Air Service leaders considered their particular form of combat so specialized that it became of the utmost importance that air officers be trained for air operations with the Air Service by the Air Service only.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., pp. 87, 90.

While the name of the school evolved (from the Air Service Field Officers' School in 1920, to Air Service Tactical School in 1922, and finally the Air Corps Tactical School (ACTS) in 1926 coinciding with renaming the Army Air Service the Army Air Corps), the school's curriculum and personnel continued to reflect the remarkable influence of the Mitchell camp within the Air Service and AAC. The school provided Mitchell and his followers with a venue for forming and disseminating their theories regarding air power and the future role of the air force. From the time Mitchell returned from World War I, sold on independent strategic bombing and the need for a fleet of bombers, and the creation of the air school, he and his camp seemed to find a balanced outlook with regards to the potential of pursuit aircraft. This was due to the increased importance he placed on obtaining and maintaining air superiority, a mission he believed pursuit aircraft most aptly suited for.

In 1921, the Mitchell camp agreed with their colleagues in the U.S. Army and Navy who maintained that even with the addition of the airplane, wars would continue to be won and lost in the same traditional manner as before, with Mitchell only suggesting that airplanes would make triumph less costly and much less difficult. He proposed a balanced air force with 60 percent pursuit aircraft and personnel and the remaining 40 percent split between bombardment and attack. But, within a few years, Mitchell had shifted his position considerably, focusing instead on an air force based almost entirely on bombardment. The reason for this seems to be two-fold. First, Mitchell realized that supporting the ground forces offered far fewer opportunities to make a case for independence than strategic bombing. Second, as long as ground campaigns remained

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<sup>9</sup> Robert T. Finney, "History of the Air Corps Tactical School, 1920-1940," (Research Studies Institute, USAF Historical Division, Air University, 1955), pp. 7-8.

the primary means of winning a war there was very little room for the revolutionary effects Mitchell predicted of air power. In other words, if the air force could not break away from supporting ground forces long enough to make an impression with strategic bombing, then it would always play second fiddle to the ground forces and never gain independence. Once more, with the ultimate goal being air force independence, strategic bombing was seen as the pathway towards it and tactical support of ground forces a roadblock.<sup>10</sup>

Along with Mitchell's message of independence—one that must have resonated with the majority of the airmen in the Service—his increasingly iconic stature was only bolstered by his “exile” in San Antonio, Texas and his court-martial in 1925. When asked for his response to the tragic crash of the Navy's airship the *Shenandoah* in 1925, Mitchell released a statement that suggested the dirigible's crash, and the deaths of fourteen members of the crew, were the direct result of the “incompetency, criminal negligence, and almost treasonable administration of the National Defense by the Navy and War Departments.” An incensed President Calvin Coolidge initiated the court-martial himself and ordered an official review of the nation's air services in order to refute Mitchell's claims. The review board, which became known as the Morrow Board for board chairman and investment banker Dwight Morrow, not only deemed Mitchell's allegations unfounded but also came down against the idea of an independent air force. Less than two weeks after the Morrow Board released its report, Mitchell was found guilty of violating the Articles of War on 17 December 1925. He resigned from the service a month and a half later on 1 February 1926.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Clodfelter, “Molding Air Power Convictions,” in *Paths of Heaven*, p. 95.

The prosecution of Mitchell was easily woven into the larger narrative of the Army, Navy, and War Department keeping the air force under their thumb for fear of the revolutionary potential of air power outshining the more traditional branches. While often exaggerated into an “us versus them” scenario to serve various purposes, and posited repeatedly as old school versus the new by airmen, the bitterness among air, ground, and sea forces was quite real. The Army and the Navy were aware of Air Service leaders’ desire for an independent air force, and both branches were against the idea. An independent air force would siphon funds, men, resources, and equipment away from both branches and sideline them while the air force exercised complete control over the newest technological development in warfare.<sup>12</sup>

Despite the air leader’s preference for bombardment doctrine, the Army’s Training Regulations No. 440-15 *The Fundamental Principles for the Employments of the Air Service* (TR 440-15), issued on January 26, 1926, made clear the air forces’ place in the hierarchy of military operations. The document outlined the mission of the Army as “the destruction of [the enemy’s] armed forces,” thus necessitating that “strategical and tactical offensive be taken and maintained until a decision be reached.” The mission of the Air Service, as specifically outlined, was to “assist the ground forces to gain strategical and tactical success by destroying enemy aviation, attacking enemy ground forces and other enemy objectives on land or sea, and in conjunction with other agencies to protect ground force from hostile aerial observation and attack.” In addition, the air

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., pp. 102-104.

<sup>12</sup> Lee Kennett, “Developments to 1939” in ed. Benjamin Franklin Cooling, *Case Studies in the Development of Close Air Support* (Washington, DC: Office of Air Force History, United States Air Force, 1990), p. 45.

force would provide aerial reconnaissance for ground forces. In other words, the Army would only employ the Air Service in support of the ground mission. The main offensive objective would be attaining and maintaining the air superiority necessary for ground forces to achieve Army objectives free from aerial attack. Pursuit aviation, “being responsible for the destruction or dispersion of enemy aerial forces” would “protect the observation and attack aviation carrying out their missions and also protect ground forces from aerial attacks.”<sup>13</sup>

Perhaps most injurious to those within the air force resentful of the innate subordination assumed in the ground support role was that the pursuit units would operate “under the direct orders of the Army commander.” Furthermore, when air forces were tactically assisting ground forces, the document explained that “this cooperation is best accomplished by placing the attack aviation units directly under the command of the ground commander charged with the tactical handling of the forces involved.”<sup>14</sup> TR 440-15 officially stated what strategic advocates had always maintained was an indissoluble bond between tactical air operations and subordination to the ground commanders who, as the air leaders saw them, were grossly underqualified to direct any air operations, tactical or otherwise.

The same year that TR 440-15 was produced, the textbook for the ACTS’s *Combined Air Force* course—regarded as the most important course offered—declared that developing bomber technology would soon make pursuit aviation obsolete based on the aircraft’s inability to stop or defend against a large, organized bomber attack.

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<sup>13</sup> US War Department, Air Corps Training Regulation 440-15, *Fundamental Principles for the Employment of the Air Service* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 26 January 1926).

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*



Bombardment aviation, in contrast, was to become the primary component of future air operations because, as would be stated repeatedly by a myriad of AAC leaders—the bomber would always get through—no matter the enemy’s defenses and without the need for escort by fighter aircraft.<sup>15</sup> The course did not reflect, in the least, any of the directives put forth in TR 440-15 and in fact, from 1927 to 1934, the course served as a breeding ground for the theoretical framework of strategic high-altitude daylight precision bombing doctrine. These theories were then legitimized within the AAC through inclusion in the course’s text and instruction.<sup>16</sup>

Within the discussions and theories put forth by airmen, who considered the course an arena for presenting radical ideas regarding the future of air power, were five crucial propositions: the primary goal of any air attack is to undermine the enemy’s will to resist; morale can best be destroyed by attacks deep into the interior of the enemy’s homeland; air power is inherently an offensive weapon and impossible to stop; air power should be used extensively in strategic operations because air power is the only military option for hitting distant targets with minimal effort and material; and finally, targets must be completely and decisively destroyed or neutralized before moving on to the next target. Clearly, these propositions were not in line with an air force whose primary mission was supposed to be air superiority, or an air force who was supposed to be predominantly employing pursuit aviation. As a result of the developing doctrine at ACTS, and despite Army directives ordering otherwise, the fighter aircraft “lost its pride

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<sup>15</sup> Moy, “Transforming Technology in the Army Air Corps,” in *The Airplane in American Culture*, pp. 306-307.

<sup>16</sup> Lt. Col. Peter R. Faber, “Interwar US Army Aviation and the Air Corps Tactical School: Incubators of American Air power” in *Paths of Heaven*, p. 215.

of place” to the bomber in the minds of many within the AAC.<sup>17</sup> The invincible bomber would be the cornerstone of bombing doctrine and bombing doctrine the cornerstone of the independence mission.<sup>18</sup>

In 1935, Army—with contributions from both air and ground leaders—produced a new Training Regulations 440-15, this time titled *Air Corps: Employment of the Air Forces of the Army*. The updated document officially introduced the concept of “Independent air operations,” defined as “operations conducted by air forces acting independently of ground forces.” While independent of ground forces, the missions were still to be “assigned by the commander in chief of the field forces.” According to the 1935 TR 440-15, the primary advantage of bombardment aviation was its increased radius of action. Contrary to the superior position strategic bombing enjoyed among many AAC leaders, “bombardment aviation” was listed alongside the equally important attack and pursuit aviation missions. Attack aircraft were primarily associated with high speed-low altitude attacks while pursuit aircraft were “equipped, organized, and trained primarily for air combat.”<sup>19</sup>

Of significance was the new document’s emphasis on cooperation and coordination. Such coordination, the document reads, “assumes special importance when an air force is composed of more than one class of aviation and the missions of the various classes require them to operate at different times and places in the accomplishment of a common mission.” This new, coordinated air force, incorporating

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., pp. 214-216.

<sup>18</sup> Moy, “Transforming Technology in the Army Air Corps,” in *The Airplane in American Culture* pp. 306-307.

<sup>19</sup> US War Department, Air Corps Training Regulation 440-15, *Employment of the Air Forces of the Army* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 15 October 1935).

bombardment, attack, and pursuit aviation classes—in addition to the transport and training classes of aircraft—represented a well rounded air force, “capable of operating in close cooperation with ground forces, or independent thereof.” In fact, the air force as described in the 1935 TR 440-15 resembled the balanced air force originally envisioned by Mitchell in the early 1920s. But, lest the acknowledged independent operations of bombardment aviation lead to airmen’s expectations of independent air operations in general, the document also included the stipulation that all air operations remained “under the direct control of the Chief of Staff as commander in chief of the four armies.”<sup>20</sup>

The Army was not the only entity insisting on a well balanced air force despite the best efforts of the strategic bomber advocates. From within the air force there were those who felt the overwhelming, and largely uncontested, adoption of strategic bombing doctrine threatened the future of the air force. In an attempt to measure what was being taught in the *Combined Air Force* course at ACTS against actual air operations, Chief of Staff Col. Hugh Kerr asked operational units such as the 3<sup>rd</sup> Wing (comprised of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Attack Group and the 20<sup>th</sup> Pursuit Group) to study the 1937-1938 textbook, and share their suggestions and criticisms for how better to align curriculum with operational realities. Many of the officers found worrisome the massive amount of doctrine unchallenged by combat experience. Specifically, it was noted that “caution should be sounded against too ardent adoption of peace time theories and hypothesis [*sic*] when they are not supported by actually demonstrated facts nor by the experiences of the only war in which aviation was employed.”<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

The preeminence of strategic bombing, a doctrine dependent on aircraft technology that did not yet exist and without firsthand experience—not to mention that the planned bombing missions would be carried out sans escort—remained unjustified in the minds of tactical air leaders. Yet, to the chagrin of those witnessing the doctrinal phasing out of fighters, the idea of strategic bombing still captivated many more within the highest ranks of the AAC than existing tactical doctrine. Commander of the 8<sup>th</sup> Pursuit Group, Lt. Col. A. H. Gilkeson, included in his assessment of the ACTS curriculum, “The recent academic tendency to minimize, if not entirely dismiss, the consideration of the fighting force as a powerful and extremely necessary adjunct of the air force has led to the teaching of doctrines which have not been established as being true and might even be fatally dangerous to our aim in the event of armed conflict.”<sup>22</sup>

Less than a year after the audit of the ACTS curriculum, President Franklin D. Roosevelt called for a significantly expanded air arsenal and war plan in 1939. The majority of the AAC already accepted and promoted the primacy of strategic bombing and heavy bombers when the United States began preparing for war. Hence, the majority of the AAC’s leadership saw a chance to make an impression. Eager to exert the air force’s sovereignty and sold on the efficacy of heavy bombers, air leaders answered the president with strategic air doctrine and war plans stressing heavy bombers. Seemingly ignoring field testing and flight trials in the winter of 1939-1940 that showed both the weaknesses of the AAC’s available bombers and the impressive capabilities of the

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<sup>21</sup> Lt. Col. M. F. Harmon and Maj. Oliver Gothlin, “Comments on Air Corps Tactical Document,” attached to Kerr Letter, p. 2 in Faber, “Interwar US Army Aviation and the Air Corps Tactical School: Incubators of American Air power” in *Paths of Heaven*, pp. 223-24.

<sup>22</sup> Lt. Col. A. H. Gilkeson, “Endorsement to Commanding General, 2<sup>nd</sup> Wing, GHQ Air Force,” on Kerr letter, p.2, *ibid*.

fighters when matched against the other, air leaders continued to push an agenda centered on high-altitude daylight precision bombing carried out by heavy bombers presumably capable of defending themselves. This was despite a report by Maj. Gen. Delos C. Emmons, commander of General Headquarters (GHQ), titled “Annual Tactical Inspection,” which included Maj. Harold George’s own admission that “There is no question in my mind but that American bombardment units could not today defend themselves against American pursuit units.”<sup>23</sup>

In March 1940, Maj. Gen. Henry “Hap” Arnold, as Chief of the Army Air Corps, ordered from the Air Corps Board a report outlining the types of pursuit and fighter aircraft needed to defend effectively the bombers flying strategic missions. The board was stacked with strategic bombardment advocates and ACTS administrators who, not surprisingly, cautioned against diminishing the primacy of bombardment aviation within air doctrine or curtailing bombardment missions in the absence of fighter escort. In other words, the AAC would continue to uphold the conviction that the bombers were invincible despite Emmons’s report earlier that summer. The board also suggested modifying existing aircraft to meet pursuit needs, most likely attempting to save most of the budget for the expensive heavy bombers AAC air doctrine revolved around.<sup>24</sup>

Notwithstanding the high regard with which the Army considered fighter and pursuit aviation and the consequent existence of fighter forces, fighter doctrine, and the continued development of fighter aircraft, high-altitude daylight precision bombing was regarded as the most appropriate application of air power by most in the highest ranks of

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<sup>23</sup> Emmons to the Adjutant General, subject: Report of Annual Tactical Inspection, GHQ Air Force, IRIS No. 11993399, 28 July 1939 in Robert F. Futrell, *Ideas, Concepts, Doctrine: Basic Thinking in the United States Air Force* (Maxwell Air Force Base: Air University Press, 1989), p. 97.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79.

the AAC. When the time came, the air force's plans for war represented as much. Tactical operations and support of ground troops, while an undeniable presence within the AAC, would take a back seat to the offensive strategic operations of bombardment aviation which, to most, represented the future of air power and the future of the air force. The AAC eventually went to war with a doctrine that was unprecedented, incongruent with Army doctrine, and indifferent to the tactical air forces. To understand just how this was possible, despite running counter to the accepted means of doctrinal development—based more on experience and considerably less on theory—one must consider the remarkable influence ACTS had on the AAC and World War II.

The school provided a way to disseminate knowledge for airmen by airmen, with curriculum managed by the Air Service not the ground commanders. From 1936 to 1940, students at ACTS were taught a “well-established version” of unescorted high-altitude daylight precision bombing. During this era at ACTS—characterized by the undeniable influence of strategic bombing—261 of the 1,091 graduates became general officers in World War II. As Lt. Col. Peter Faber points out in his article, “Interwar US Army Aviation and the Air Corps Tactical School: Incubators of American Air Power,” this group of attendees eventually comprised 80 percent of the air force's senior leadership during World War II, eleven out of the thirteen three-star generals, and three of the four four-star generals serving during the war—all “systematically indoctrinated” to the virtues of strategic bombing.<sup>25</sup>

Out of this group came the “Bomber Mafia,” a name given to those in the AAC unabashedly promoting strategic bombing by those who resented it. The Bomber Mafia

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<sup>25</sup> Faber, “Interwar US Army Aviation and the Air Corps Tactical School: Incubators of American Air Power” in *Paths of Heaven*, p. 212.

consisted of such air force luminaries as Hap Arnold (future commander of the Army Air Forces in World War II), Frank Andrews (future commander of all United States forces in the European Theater of Operations), Jimmy Doolittle (future commander of the Eighth Air Force), Ira Eaker (future Chief of Air Staff), Haywood Hansell (future commander of XXI Bomber Command and prolific strategic bombing theorist), Harold Lee George (future commander of the Air Transport Command), and Carl Spaatz (the first Chief of Staff of the United States Air Force). Out of this group came the air plans for World War II.

In the summer of 1941, Roosevelt ordered each branch of the armed forces to present plans outlining the amount of manpower and equipment each needed to secure an Allied victory. Major General Arnold, now Chief of the Army Air Forces, as the AAC was renamed on 20 June 1941, had recently formed the Air War Plans Division (AWPD), headed by Lieutenant Colonel Harold George and staffed by bomber enthusiasts, including Maj. Haywood Hansell. When the president's request came down, George saw this as an opportunity to "sneak ACTS doctrine into a major War Department planning document via the back door." Thus, the drafting of AWPD1, the air force's annex to the war plans FDR requested became the "blueprint for strategic air warfare in Europe."<sup>26</sup> From the start, the planning group's unwavering devotion to strategic bombing miffed Army leaders who felt the air plan was wildly unbalanced. Army Chief of Staff Gen. George Marshall, for one, considered the AWPD group "immature," "not trained at that

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 224.

kind of staff work,” and preoccupied with “taking stands.”<sup>27</sup>

Hansell claimed decades afterwards that AWPDI “was probably the most influential document in the brief history of air power in the United States.” He and his fellow planners anchored AWPDI in three premises: first, modern nations cannot wage war if their industries are destroyed; second, aircraft can penetrate any known air defenses and destroy any known target with bombs; and third, air warfare is therefore a method of destroying the enemy’s ability to wage war, a primary means of striking a major blow toward winning a war rather than a direct auxiliary to surface warfare.<sup>28</sup>

AWPDI outlined the AAF’s scheme to weaken severely both the German military and the nation’s civilian morale. This was to be achieved through “a sustained air offensive against German military power, supplemented by air offensives against other regions under enemy control which contribute to that power.” Submitted on 12 August 1941, AWPDI predated the bombing of Pearl Harbor and therefore, understandably, allotted more time than was ultimately available before the United States joined the Allied Powers.<sup>29</sup> Planners determined that the Germans’ morale was “already low because of sustained suffering and deprivation and because people [were] losing faith in the ability of the armed forces to win a favorable decision,” and projected that “heavy and sustained bombing of cities may crush that morale entirely.”<sup>30</sup> The selection of targets,

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<sup>27</sup> Marshall cited in Forest Pogue, *George C. Marshall: Ordeal and Hope*, p. 290; memo Marshall to Arnold, 22 June 1941, cited in Mark Watson, *Chief of Staff*, p. 163 in Thomas A. Hughes, *Over Lord: General Pete Quesada and the Triumph of Tactical Power in World War II* (New York: The Free Press, 1995), p. 77.

<sup>28</sup> Lecture, “The Development of the United States Concept of Bombardment Operations,” given by Haywood Hansell, Jr., 16 February 1951, Haywood Hansell Papers, IRIS No. 1032817, MICFILM 34142, Series 3, box 4, folder 1, USAF Collections, AFHRA, pp. 5-6.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14 and Appendix 1.



and the doctrine that followed, continued to echo the AAF's contention that heavy bombers delivering powerful blows to vital centers within the enemy's homeland was the best way to win a war.<sup>31</sup>

AWPD1 was influenced heavily by British intelligence regarding German industry—leading the drafters to specially target the German electrical power system, transportation system, oil and petroleum systems, railroad marshaling yards, and German civilian morale. Ironically, the plan did not at all reflect the experiences of the Royal Air Force (RAF) during the Battle of Britain in the fall of 1940, which challenged everything strategic doctrine depended on: bombers were not invincible, fighters could bring them down, the RAF fighter squadrons proved more effective against the Luftwaffe than the German fighters defending the bombers in escort formation, and bombing cities did not crush civilian resolve. On 15 September 1940, 200 German bombers had advanced towards London in numbers larger than any bomber force deployed before, but the battle quickly turned into a contest of fighters as 250 British Spitfires and Hurricanes met the German bombers and their fighter escorts over east London. By nightfall, sixty German bombers (30 percent) were destroyed and a second wave had turned back. Britain's victory concomitantly exemplified the effectiveness of fighters and the vulnerability bombers. Germany lost close to 600 bombers and 668 fighters throughout the Battle of Britain; Britain lost 832 fighters and a significant number of pilots.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Haywood Hansell, "American Air power in World War II," TMs (microfilm), Haywood Hansell Papers, series 1, box 1, folder 1, USAF Collection, AFHRA; Hansell to Maj. James L. Cate, 24 February 1947, series 2, box 2, notebook 1; Hansell to Col. Edgar P. Sorenson, 11 February 1943, USAF Collection, AFHRA.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> John Keegan, *The Second World War* (New York: Penguin Books, 1985), pp. 88-102.

Britain's advantage was the ability to maintain a reliable, combat-ready fleet of fighters—600 available daily—which bolstered its ability to defend against the onslaught of German bombers. While both the RAF Fighter Command and the Luftwaffe relied heavily on pursuit groups, by the fall of 1940, Britain's fighter planes came off the assembly lines at a rate of 500 a month. Germany's war machine could only deliver 140 Messerschmitt 109s (Bf-109) and 90 twin-engine Messerschmitt 110s (Me-110) per month—46 percent less than Britain's monthly output. While the final totals show Britain suffered higher aircraft losses, the Germans not only lost the more expensive Heinkel He-111, Dornier Do-17, and Junkers Ju-88 bombers, as compared to Britain's fighters, but the Germans suffered losses from which they had no means of recovering. The Germans also had relied on faulty intelligence that suggested Britain would not be able to make up for lost aircraft, which proved an egregious underestimation of British industry.<sup>33</sup> Also important to note, with regards to manpower, is that during the Battle of Britain, when British pilots survived a crash in the homeland, they could be rotated back into the flying force, while German pilots who survived a crash in enemy territory were taken prisoner and kept from returning to their air force.

While AWPDI predictably put a heavy emphasis on strategic bombardment, calling for the procurement of 13,038 medium and heavy bombers organized into 151 bomber groups, strategists specifically noted—and officially acknowledged for the first time—the need for escort fighters capable of accompanying the groups on long-range missions.<sup>34</sup> Interestingly, when the AAF eventually called for an increase in its own

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Hansell, "The Development of the United States Concept of Bombardment Operations," Haywood Hansell Papers, p. 14 and Appendix 1.

fighter force, American factories accommodating Britain's need for large numbers of fighter planes under the Lend Lease Act found the transition from building British fighters to American fighters much easier than that needed for producing big bombers. The assembly of P-38s and P-47s in those same plants required little change to the assembly line, or to the work force.<sup>35</sup>

With AWPDI approved officially in September 1941 by General Marshall and Secretary of War Stimson, Arnold wrote to Maj. Gen. James E. Chaney, made Commander of the European Theater of Operations (ETOUSA) that January, and laid out the AAF's latest procurement plans. Arnold explained, "We have concluded that it will be possible to base in the United Kingdom ultimately 20 Groups of B17s and B24s, 12 Groups of B29s, and 22 Groups of B29s or other types of heavy bombers, making a total of 54 Groups, which at 52 operational airplanes each, gives a total of 2,808 operating heavy bombardment airplanes."<sup>36</sup> The Boeing B-17 Flying Fortress was the AAF's first heavy bomber and had been available to the air force for almost four years when Arnold made these early predictions for heavy bomber strength in England. The AAF had been given prototypes for the Consolidated B-24 Liberator in 1939, but mass production did not begin until 1944. The Boeing B-29 Superfortress would not make its first test flight until 21 September 1942. The earliest B-29s were actually built before testing was completed, leading the AAF to develop modification centers where last-minute

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<sup>35</sup> Thomas Hughes, *Over Lord: General Pete Quesada and the Triumph of Tactical Air Power Theory* (New York: The Free Press, 1995), pp. 72, 76.

<sup>36</sup> Arnold to Chaney, 26 January 1942, in Subject File No. 9: "Air Force," World War II European Army Records, National Archives, [www.Fold3.com](http://www.Fold3.com) (accessed 8 June 2013).

adjustments were carried out so as to avoid slowing down production. Clearly, Arnold was planning for an air war employing the big bombers almost exclusively.<sup>37</sup>

The “22 Groups of B29 or other types of heavy bombers” suggests that the AAF expected to introduce another heavy bombardment airplane before the land invasion. The prediction underscores the doctrine and commitment to strategic bombing going back to 1939, with 37 percent of the predicted heavy bomber group strength flying aircraft designed, tested, and produced before the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor. The remaining 63 percent of heavy bomber groups’ reliance on yet-to-be-produced airplanes shows the AAF’s undeniable intention to maintain its commitment to a strategic bombing campaign throughout the war, seemingly without regard for what the tests of battle might offer. Incidentally, the 1,768 B-29s and “other types of heavy bombers” never materialized as most of the Superfortresses went to Asia, used most notably for the Tokyo raids and the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.<sup>38</sup>

Arnold’s letter went on to call for an additional ten groups of medium bombers at fifty-two aircraft each, making a total of 3,328 bombardment airplanes for the planned strategic bombing campaign in Europe. The letter also shows the limited role Arnold and others supposed pursuit or fighter groups would play in the European Theater, with Arnold estimating that ten groups of pursuit planes would be based in England. Seven of the ten groups would be based in northern England and Scotland. Of the seventy-four

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<sup>37</sup> Boeing International, “B-29 Superfortress,” <http://www.boeing.com/boeing/history/boeing/b29.page> (accessed 14 June 2013).

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

groups in Arnold's plan, fighters were to account for less than 14 percent, and were mostly relegated to the northern United Kingdom.<sup>39</sup>

Evidence of Arnold's steadfast faith in the infallibility of his heavy bombers is seen in the schematic chart he enclosed with his letter to Chaney. Arnold did not mention once, throughout the entire chart outlining the organization of the AAF in Great Britain, the possibility of a heavy bomber being taken out by the enemy either in the air or from the ground and, accordingly, offers no procedural instructions should this occur. Conversely, he does offer the appropriate AAF response should the Germans bring down a fighter airplane, explaining "In the event a pursuit airplane is forced down, the B-17 leading the second flight will fall out and render such assistance as possible....The remaining pursuit wingmen will join the first flight and will proceed on course. In the event additional airplanes are forced down, the flight will continue on course." Arnold's procedures shed light on the unfortunate assumption he and many others in the AAF maintained—that fighters could not bring down heavy bombers and that there was little need for escort by the more fragile fighters. Both of these assumptions would prove to be woefully incorrect.<sup>40</sup>

If Arnold's correspondence throughout the war presents a diplomatically measured, albeit clear, preference for strategic bombing, the correspondence of Commander of the Eighth Air Force, Brig. Gen. Ira C. Eaker leaves no question as to the bravado behind the strategic bombing campaign and the prickliness with which it would be defended before detractors. Even in the most formal of communications, Eaker rarely

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<sup>39</sup> Arnold to Chaney, 26 January 1942, in Subject File No. 9: "Air Force," World War II European Army Records, National Archives, [www.Fold3.com](http://www.Fold3.com) (accessed 8 June 2013).

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

held back his disdain for Army plans suggesting the air force cooperate with ground forces and only acquiesced when it became clear that the bomber force originally projected by Arnold would not be possible. In his own letter to General Chaney dated 26 April 1942, he insisted “it is still believed that the original all-out air plan for the destruction of the German war effort by air action alone was feasible and sound, and more economical than any other method...time does not allow for the completion of this total air effort, hence it now seems wise to combine a limited air effort with ground forces to open a Western Front....” Eaker went on to insist, “It is strongly recommended that this ground air effort be not allowed to reduce the Air Force effort against material installations which are supporting the German war machine. The destruction of ammunition, engine, or tank factories may serve to relieve the pressure on Russia quicker than any second front which may be set up.”<sup>41</sup>

“Time,” Eaker argued, was the only inhibitor with regards to the air force’s ability to win the war single-handedly, and if there had to be a western front opened by ground troops, “limited” air support to ground forces was all the AAF should commit to. Furthermore, when considering the reason for the Allies’ opening of a second front in the west was to relieve the overtaxed forces in the east, Eaker’s suggestion that the AAF’s strategic bombing campaign could “relieve the pressure on Russia quicker than any second front” suggests that not only were the time constraints inhibiting the bombing campaign, but also that, in Eaker’s mind, the strategic bombing campaign shared equal

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<sup>41</sup> Brig. Gen. Ira C. Eaker to Maj. Gen. James E. Chaney, 26 April 1942, in Subject File No. 9: “Air Force,” World War II European Army Records, National Archives, [www.Fold3.com](http://www.Fold3.com) (accessed 8 June 2013).

importance—with regards to effect—to the combined Allied invasion of northern Europe.<sup>42</sup>

What Army ground commanders felt about the AAF's contention that properly executed air power, given the necessary budget and time for production and training could render ground forces obsolete, is evidenced in the terse communication between Eaker and Eisenhower. Having just replaced General Chaney as the Commanding General of the ETOUSA, Lieutenant General Eisenhower wasted no time making known his vision for the role of air power. Writing to Eaker on 21 July 1942, Eisenhower stressed that “the mission of the Eighth Air Force, in collaboration with the Royal Air Force, is to initiate immediately the maximum degree of air operations with the view of obtaining and maintaining domination of the air over Western France by April 1, 1943 and be prepared to furnish the maximum support of the forward movement of U.S. Army ground force by late summer....”<sup>43</sup> Eaker's Eighth Air Force did not accomplish the two missions Eisenhower considered essential to a successful invasion in Europe, that is gaining and maintaining air superiority before the invasion and providing air support for the ground forces—the tactical groups of the Ninth Air Force, on the other hand, did.

Strategic advocates had waited for more than two decades for the chance to make a pronounced impression on the military community with strategic bombing. When that time came in the summer of 1942, they needed a victory to justify the billions of dollars spent on bombers and the nearly one-third of the Army's manpower it commandeered just to get to this point. More urgently, planners needed to justify a complete reversal of

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Eisenhower to Eaker, 21 July 1942, in Subject File No. 9: “Air Force,” World War II European Army Records, National Archives, [www.Fold3.com](http://www.Fold3.com) (accessed 8 June 2013).

the traditional practice of developing doctrine based on field trials and actual wartime experience, choosing instead to, as historian Thomas Hughes would later describe it, “fit the war into their own ideas of combat.”<sup>44</sup> Unfortunately, summer air operations in northern France showed that fighters could most certainly take down bombers and that when over a target or under attack, fighters offered the best line of defense for bombers. Furthermore, air operations in North Africa showed strategic bombing to be an inappropriate application of air power from the start.<sup>45</sup>

On 4 July 1942, Eaker planned a bombing raid over an enemy aerodrome in Holland with six American light bombers, six of the RAF’s light bombers piloted by American airmen, and no fighter escort. Two out of twelve, or 15 percent, of the bombers were shot down. A month later, the first European raid employing heavy bombers exclusively was carried out over a railroad yard in Rouen, France. The bomber formation consisted of twelve B-17s, with six RAF Spitfires flying escort, and all eighteen aircraft made it back to base safely. In September, ground fire claimed the first two B-17s shot down over Europe, with three more B-17s and one B-24 shot down in October.<sup>46</sup>

Meanwhile, in North Africa, the AAF went into the desert with a doctrine based on destroying the morale of the enemy population and the destruction of vital industrial targets using big bombers. Yet, North Africa lacked both industrial targets and enemy populations. This left the Allied air forces with only tactical interdiction missions and

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<sup>44</sup> Hughes, *Over Lord*, p. 82.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> National Museum of the United States Air Force, 2 February 2011, “AAF Enters Combat from England,” <http://www.nationalmuseum.af.mil/factsheets/factsheet.asp?id=1507> (accessed 17 June 2013).



support of ground troops as its mission in the desert.<sup>47</sup> What became evident was that the AAF's fervent decision to promote and defend strategic bombardment doctrine to the detriment of tactical forces produced a situation where existing AAF doctrine only offered one, very rigid answer to the ever-fluid realities of the air war.

The AAF thus submitted a revised air plan on 9 September 1942. AWP42, as the new plan was named, was therefore a reactionary document drafted to address the initial failures and difficulties befalling the Allies that summer. The far less optimistic plan dealt with the possible collapse of the Eastern front in the European Theater of Operations (ETO) after German Lt. Gen. (*Generalleutnant*) Erwin Rommel had captured Tobruk in North Africa in November 1941 and Stalingrad came under siege in August 1942. Fearing that a Russian defeat in the east would release hundreds of thousands of German soldiers for operations in the west, the document focused on securing "essential land, sea, and air communication with the United Nations" as well as with the Middle East, Ceylon, Australia, New Zealand, Hawaii, Alaska, and the reoccupation of Burma. But, in reality, AAF leaders were already looking forward to the war on the Continent, where the bomber forces were most likely to make the impression strategic advocates intended.<sup>48</sup>

According to the new plan, the strategic air forces of the AAF would carry out the daytime bombing of industrial centers because, it was argued, American bombers were the only aircraft equipped with the Norden optical bombsight, which had been

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<sup>47</sup> Hughes, *Over Lord*, pp. 86-88.

<sup>48</sup> Lecture, "The Development of the United States Concept of Bombardment Operations" given by Hansell, 16 February 1951, Haywood Hansell Papers, series 3, box 4, folder 1, pp. 15-23.

specifically designed for daylight bombing.<sup>49</sup> The RAF would carry out nighttime raids on German cities and cultural targets as means of chipping away at civilian resolve. AWP42 also recommended targeting the enemy's air force on the ground as German fighter attacks were making bombing runs increasingly difficult and dangerous for RAF bombers. Planners added German submarine construction yards to the list of targets, in large part due to damages to Allied shipping in 1942, and when new intelligence revealed Germany's opportunely clustered rubber and aluminum plants, planners included these new strategic targets as well. AWP42 lacked any plans for, or reference to, escort fighters. Hansell, one of the plan's developers and champions, later admitted, "This is obviously one of the greatest faults of AWP42" and suggested the omission resulted from the assumption "that it was not considered possible to design and produce such aircraft in such a short time."<sup>50</sup>

The air operations during the first two months of 1943 dramatically changed AAF operations in World War II. On 27 January 1943, sixty-four B-17s and twenty-seven B-24s set out on the AAF's first bombing mission against targets inside Germany, at Wilhelmshaven. The initially timid Luftwaffe fighters approached their first encounter with the AAF with only light resistance.<sup>51</sup> The next week, in a raid over Emden on 2 February, a defensive fighter force comprised of Me-110s, Bf-109s, Ju-88s, and Fw-190s attacked the bomber formation in waves. Without fighter protection, only thirty-four of

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<sup>49</sup> For more on this, read Stephen L. McFarland, *America's Pursuit of Precision Bombing, 1910-1945* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995.)

<sup>50</sup> Hansell, "The Development of the United States Concept of Bombardment Operations," 16 February 1951, pp. 15-23.

<sup>51</sup> National Museum of the United State Air Force, "Luftwaffe Interceptors," [http://www.nationalmuseum.af.mil/factsheets/factsheet\\_print.asp?fsID=1579](http://www.nationalmuseum.af.mil/factsheets/factsheet_print.asp?fsID=1579) (accessed 16 June 2013).

the thirty-nine bombers on the mission made it back to England.<sup>52</sup> With losses at almost 13 percent—over double the established maximum acceptable attrition rate on a single mission—the bomber’s reputation suffered a significant blow.<sup>53</sup> Still, suggested deviations from strategic bombing strategy met stiff resistance from AAF leaders who seemed to take it personally when anyone, especially Army ground commanders and war planners, questioned the thousands of bombers they proposed for the campaign, mentioned tactical fighters and air support, or brought up the heavy bombers’ need for escort.

Writing to Lt. Gen. Frank Andrews, who took over as Commander General, ETOUSA when Eisenhower was promoted to Supreme Commander of the Allied Expeditionary Forces in the North African Theater of Operations (NATOUSA) in November 1942, Eaker emotionally presented his concerns regarding “the very serious depression in morale of [the] bomber forces, due to the failure to build them up to what they know to be a requisite proportion if they are to continue to exist or do a worthwhile job.” Even in the face of substantial losses, Eaker adamantly maintained that “they know they are going down as a result of combat losses which are not being replaced” but argued that “they have demonstrated unmistakably the ability of the heavy bomber to beat off fighter opposition and to reach and bomb its target effectively without fighter support.” He went on to argue that “they know that German industry can be destroyed and German morale can be cracked if they but had the force.” Finally, Eaker warned that

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<sup>52</sup> Eighth Air Force Historical Society, “World War II 8<sup>th</sup> AAF Combat Chronology: January 1943 through December 1943,” [www.8thafhs.org/combat1943.htm](http://www.8thafhs.org/combat1943.htm) (accessed 16 June 1943).

<sup>53</sup> Keegan, *Second World War*, p. 426.

“their morale and their keenness to continue with combat cannot be sustained unless some hope can be given them.”<sup>54</sup>

Whether Eaker was actually concerned with the emotional wellness of his Eighth Air Force or he was using the weakness of the bomber forces to voice his own frustrations with the pace of the strategic buildup is not clear. What is understood is that Eaker knew he had an ally in fellow airman Andrews, who understood what was at stake as the AAF continued to push strategic bombing. As Eaker explained, “your appointment as Theater Commander has given a big boost to the morale of the 8<sup>th</sup> AF because of your thorough understanding of true Air Force operations and the fact that you have been a principal torch bearer for a proper U.S. Air Force for many years.” The low morale of his bomber crews was understandable considering the losses the Eighth suffered beginning with Eaker’s raids over France in the summer and fall of 1942. What remains unclear is how the results of those missions convinced Eaker, or any of his airmen, that they had proved the bombers’ invincibility to fighter opposition or the ineffectiveness of fighter escort. It was to be a moot point nonetheless as the Eighth’s operations from England were slowed while the North African campaign took precedence.<sup>55</sup>

In February 1943, mutual distrust between air and ground forces marred the AAF’s first attempts at close air support during the Tunisian Campaign as the Americans fought their first large-scale battle against the German army at Kasserine Pass. Ground forces repeatedly accused the air forces of ignoring their calls for assistance and leaving them susceptible to aerial attacks. Meanwhile, the ground forces were so shell-shocked

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<sup>54</sup> Eaker to Andrews, 27 February 1943, in Subject File No. 9: “Air Force,” World War II European Army Records, National Archives, [www.Fold3.com](http://www.Fold3.com) (accessed 8 June 2013).

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

from aerial attacks that they often shot at any incoming aircraft, and as a result brought down a significant number of the Army's own airplanes. Additionally, the air forces became frustrated by the ineffective, small-scale attacks ground commanders ordered, piecemeal and all over the map, keeping them from the deep sweep operations needed to attack the Luftwaffe's air forces while still on the ground and attain air superiority—the first priority of tactical air operations. This lack of communication, the most important element of air-ground operations, created resentment between the two that only furthered the deterioration of the air-ground effort.<sup>56</sup>

Following the Kasserine debacle in February 1943—a battle that highlighted both the disorganization of air and ground forces as well as the crushing capabilities of the Luftwaffe when unchecked by Allied air—Eisenhower implemented a sweeping reorganization of the Allied forces in the Middle East. First and foremost was the centralization of air and ground commands. As a result of the air reorganization, Air Marshal Sir Arthur Coningham was given command of the Northwest African Tactical Air Force, comprised of both American and British air units. Coningham immediately reformed the faulty air-ground coordination and control system. Ground commanders could no longer order air units here and there depending on their immediate needs. Instead, the perceived need and appropriate response was determined by the highest ranking Army officer at unit level and by tactical air unit commanders. Ground commanders initially balked at the reforms while airmen considered anything an improvement over the chaotic misuse of tactical air power thus far.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Hallion, *Strike from the Sky*, pp. 169-72.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 171-72.

For the AAF and the Army alike, the experience at Kasserine revealed the need for a definitive explanation of the future employment of air power. Ground and air forces both had to reach a mutual understanding regarding the capabilities and limitations of the air force. The success of coordinated air-ground operations depended on each maintaining a clear appreciation for the priorities of air power and its appropriate application, thus the drafting of the enormously influential FM 100-20 *Command and Employment of Air power* in July 1943. Considering the field manual's opening statement, "LAND POWER AND AIR POWER ARE CO-EQUAL AND INTERDEPENDENT FORCES; NEITHER IS AN AUXILIARY OF THE OTHER," it is not hard to imagine why the document is known as the AAF's "Declaration of Independence." FM 100-20 provided the air force with a means of presenting clearly its priorities and capabilities, but more than that it provided a platform to assert its independence before the entire military community.<sup>58</sup>

Beyond asserting the co-equal status of the air force, the document put forth two additional principles of air force doctrine. First, air superiority should be the first priority of the air force because without it, the success of land battles is impossible. While the claim that field battles could not be won without the air forces' preemptive destruction of the enemy's air force exasperated ground commanders, the claim had been substantiated by the ground forces' experience in World War II up to that point and, in no small part, signaled the development of a more experience-based doctrine. Second, the document presented the air force's longstanding belief that air power proved most effective when under the control of airmen. The document reads, "SUCH CONCENTRATED USE OF

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<sup>58</sup> US War Department, Army Field Manual 100-20, *Command and Employment of Air Power* (Washington, DC: United States printing Office, 21 July 1943), all-caps included in original document.

THE AIR STRIKING FORCE IS A BATTLE WINNING FACTOR OF THE FIRST IMPORTANCE. CONTROL OF AVAILABLE AIR POWER MUST CENTRALIZED AND COMMAND MUST BE EXERCISED THROUGH THE AIR FORCE COMMANDER....”<sup>59</sup>

While strategic air operations were addressed in FM 100-20—the general aim of which was defined broadly as “defeat of the enemy nation,” with objectives found in “vital centers of the enemy’s lines of communication and important establishments in the economic system plan”—the lion’s share of ink was devoted to tactical air operations. This seems understandable given the experiences in North Africa. Clearly, tactical forces were to play a crucial part in the air war on the Continent as the desert campaigns had shown that strategic bombing could not be the only air response. But the parameters of tactical units’ contribution would be dictated succinctly and powerfully within FM 100-20, and not left up to the whims of individual ground commanders. In other words, if tactical forces were to play a significant role going forward, the AAF, not the Army would define their contribution.

The mission of the tactical air forces was to be three-fold. In order of priority, tactical air units would first “gain the necessary degree of air superiority” through attacks on the enemy air force in the air and on the ground. This primary mission was broadened to entail achieving and maintaining air superiority in the theater rather than just over the battlefield. Second, units would “prevent the movement of hostile troops and supplies into the theater of operations or within the theater,” isolating the battlefield through attacks on enemy communications, supplies, and rear forces. Third, tactical air units would “participate in the combined effort of the air and ground forces, in the battle area,

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

to gain objectives on the immediate front of the ground forces,” or the destruction of targets on the ground made possible by “combined air-ground effort, teamwork, mutual understanding, and cooperation...essential for the success of the combined effort in the battle effort.”<sup>60</sup>

Although AAF leaders remained reluctant to recognize tactical air operations as an alternative to strategic bombing, Allied war planners did begin expanding the contribution of tactical air units in Europe separate from strategic air operations, much to the disapproval of Eaker, who called any reallocation of resources, aircraft, or personnel to the tactical air force “a grave mistake.”<sup>61</sup> Arnold, on the other hand, saw the buildup of tactical forces as means to an end. In May 1943, he recognized that if there were two air forces, one strategic and one tactical, this would free his strategic forces from having to provide air support to ground forces. Brig. Gen. Laurence Kuter, returned from North Africa and recently appointed Arnold’s assistant chief of staff, wrote of the new arrangement, “It is the pattern of the future, the way in which air power in collaboration with armies in the field will beat the enemy and win the war.” What Arnold and others did not realize at the time was that they had written their big bombers out of the soon-to-be-reformed strategy needed for victory in Europe.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Eaker to Air Chief Sir Charles F. A. Portal, 9 June 1943, in Subject File No. 9: “Air Force,” World War II European Army Records, National Archives, [www.Fold3.com](http://www.Fold3.com) (accessed 8 June 2013).

<sup>62</sup> Futrell, *Ideas, Concepts, Doctrine*, p. 137.



## **Chapter Two:**

### **The Development of the Ninth Air Force**

In October 1943, AAF leaders began revising the hierarchy and missions for the Eighth and Ninth Air Forces, designating the Eighth as a strategic air force and the Ninth (IX) as a tactical air force. The Ninth was moved from the Middle East and had transferred to it all the tactical air force units of the Eighth's Air Support Command and part of the Eighth's Service Command, reformed as the Ninth's Air Service Command.<sup>1</sup> Arnold selected Maj. Gen. Lewis H. Brereton as Commander of the Ninth Air Force and Brig. Gen. Elwood Quesada as leader of the IX Fighter Command, which included the IX and XIX Tactical Air Commands (IX and XIX TAC).

In what resembled a manifesto on the Ninth's purpose in Europe, the Ninth Air Force-ETOUSA produced "The Tactical Air Force in Operations" on 24 December 1943. The document listed the Ninth's three missions, the first of which was gaining and maintaining air superiority, achieved through offensive air-to-air combat with enemy fighters, the destruction of enemy aircraft on the ground through bombing and strafing, and denying the enemy through "bombing landing grounds, repair shops and all installations necessary for the conduct of air operations." The second mission, isolating the battlefield, prevented the movement of enemy troops, armor, and supplies within the combat zone or entering the combat zone. The third mission involved assisting direct

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<sup>1</sup> Lt. Gen. J. I. Devers to Hq ETOUSA, 9 October 1943, in Subject File No. 9: "Air Force," World War II European Army Records, National Archives, [www.Fold3.com](http://www.Fold3.com) (accessed 8 June 2013).

attacks on enemy forces, defenses, and installations on the front lines. Achieving air superiority was first and foremost and no tactical resources would be diverted elsewhere until this crucial objective was achieved. Flexibility, the report argued, represented one of the greatest assets of a tactical air force. The Ninth would offer both the ability to assemble quickly the resources needed for an immediate request from ground forces, and “through its inherent flexibility the full striking force of air can be employed against selected areas in turn.” In December 1943, flexibility—in contrast to the inflexibility of the strategic forces—was a welcome addition to the air arm after a summer and fall marked with horrific losses.<sup>2</sup>

The success of the Ninth’s third mission necessitated unprecedented cooperation and communication between ground and air forces. Building on lessons learned in North Africa, the relationship was to be based on mutual respect for the other’s abilities and limitations, each with at least a minimal understanding of the tactics and concerns of their counterpart. Soldiers were encouraged to engage with the airmen whenever possible. The report suggested “every opportunity should be taken by commanders and subordinate officers to visit operational air units to discuss mutual problems.” Similarly, the airmen were “encouraged to visit army units in the field to appreciate the problems of the ground forces under battle conditions,” all fostering a “constant process of mutual education.” Headquarters for both air and army were to be located as close as possible to maintain constant communication regarding the ground situation through daily meetings of air and ground commanders and their staffs. Moreover, it was considered particularly important to ground and air operations that intelligence officers from both ground and air “literally

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<sup>2</sup> The Ninth Air Force, ETOUSA, “The Tactical Air Force in Operations,” 24 December 1943, pp. 1-2, in Subject File No. 221: “Ninth Air Force,” World War II European Army Records, National Archives, [www.Fold3.com](http://www.Fold3.com) (accessed 8 June 2013).

eat, sleep, and breathe together” and that “day in and day out these officers should live the battle in the air and on the ground and they must do it together.”<sup>3</sup>

Planning would be a shared responsibility with air and ground officers contributing on a joint basis. It was “improper,” the report argued, for the Army to make plans and then seek the assistance of the air force, or overlook the requirements of air during the beginning phases of tactical planning. The staffs of air and ground forces were to work as a team and “in the closest of harmony,” allowing the air forces the additional time it needed to transport supplies, equipment, and personnel while keeping up with the movements of ground forces.

The Ninth’s aircraft would be built up to such numbers as to insure the tactical air forces’ ability to remain “mobile, flexible, fast moving, and hard hitting.” Tactical recon aircraft flew with fighter cover, and were piloted by highly trained recon specialists who offered intelligence above and beyond what the fighter pilots were taught to observe. Fighter aircraft provided cover for recon missions and were almost always used to destroy enemy aircraft in the air while flying sweeps and armed recon missions. Fighter-bombers carried substantial bomb loads as well as machine guns on each wing, and were to be used most effectively against targets of opportunity—or fleeting targets that would only remain the area for a short time and had be attacked without delay. The Ninth’s light and medium bombers did not fly without fighter escort and were “always measured by the availability of fighter escort.” Troop carriers transported and dropped paratroops, personnel, and evacuated the wounded.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 2, emphasis in document.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., pp. 3-5.

The Ninth decided whether or not to answer ground commanders' requests for air support by asking first, whether the target was beyond the range of ground artillery and second, whether the tactical situation necessitated a concentration of firepower beyond what available artillery could handle. One or two Army Liaison Officers (ALOs) were assigned to each air unit down to the group level and were responsible for interpreting the needs of the ground forces for the air forces. The ALOs were also charged with the vital task of maintaining a situation map with up-to-the-minute bomb lines and ground forces' positions and movement. These officers attended and participated in all aircrew briefings and sat in on all post-flight interviews or interrogations, providing abbreviated accounts of important details in advance of officially filed reports—especially in the event aircraft were awaiting the intelligence reports before takeoff. The ALOs also reported the results of each mission back to Army headquarters.<sup>5</sup>

The Ninth Air Force was designed to be self-sufficient in order to remain mobile and maintain its essential flexibility. Under the umbrella of the Ninth Air Force, there was the IX Engineer Command, IX Air Service Command, IX Troop Carrier Command, IX Bomber Command, IX Air Support Command, XIX Air Support Command, and the IX Air Defense Command. The IX and XIX Air Support Command eventually became the IX and XIX Tactical Air Command and provided close air support to the First and Third Armies, respectively, joined later by the XXIX TAC, which supported the Ninth Army.

The Ninth's operations in Europe evolved in two phases: operations before the invasion, and operations in support of the invasion. Missions preceding the invasion consisted of reconnaissance, escorting the Eighth's heavy bombers on strategic missions,

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., pp. 6-10.

and escorting the Ninth's light and medium bombers.<sup>6</sup> For the missions in support of the invasion, Brigadier General Quesada successfully undertook the challenge of turning escort squadrons into fighter squadrons capable of carrying out tactical operations in cooperation with ground forces. The transition from escort missions supporting strategic bombing operations to tactical missions supporting ground operations was slow to start because Quesada's fighters and fighter-bombers still flew the majority of their missions as escorts until February 1944.<sup>7</sup> The Allied Expeditionary Air Force (AEAF), a component of the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF) and composed of the RAF Tactical Air Force and the U.S. Ninth Air Force, helped insure the readiness of all tactical air forces in the ETO. Commander Air Marshal Sir Trafford Leigh-Mallory implemented a coordinated training program pairing U.S. and British single-engine units designed to allow the American units to learn from the British tactical units' experience in the war up to that point.<sup>8</sup>

The AEF selected five groups of targets for the tactical air forces and ordered their destruction in preparation for the Normandy invasion: coastal batteries, bridges, marshaling yards, airfields, and radar stations. The Ninth destroyed coastal batteries and obstacles to the invasion in addition to supporting amphibious operations and ground force operations. In addition to air support, the Ninth's P-47 squadrons, equipped with auxiliary drop tanks providing longer range, flew interdiction missions bombing bridges

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<sup>6</sup> Headquarters, Ninth Air Force, "Early History of the Ninth Air Force," in Subject File No. 221: "Ninth Air Force," World War II European Army Records, National Archives, [www.Fold3.com](http://www.Fold3.com) (accessed 8 June 2013).

<sup>7</sup> Hughes, *Over Lord*, pp. 110-12.

<sup>8</sup> 405<sup>th</sup> FG, "Unit History, April 1944, "Operations," IRIS No. 00287285, 536.02, USAF Collections, AFHRA.

ahead of retreating enemy forces, and bombing marshaling yards, locomotives, trains, and highway transport. Destruction of airfields reduced the number of enemy aircraft over the beaches and the Cherbourg Peninsula, while attacking radar stations took away the enemy's "eyes."<sup>9</sup>

The Ninth's Republic P-47 fighter-bombers represented the evolution of fighter aircraft from defensive airplanes guarding the homeland, to the vulnerable, yet occasionally effective dive bombers, and finally into an offensive weapon used in both air-to-air and air-to-ground combat. As World War II veteran Billy Colgan explained in *Fighter Bomber Pilot*, "fighter-bomber" came to encompass all World War II fighter units, fighter airplanes, and fighter pilots in the tactical role providing air support to ground forces.<sup>10</sup> This may be, in large part, due to the fact that despite their developmental rationale, both fighters and interceptors saw actual combat use as fighter-bombers.

In *Strike from the Sky*, historian Richard Hallion lists twenty-three different aircraft designed and acquired as "fighters" or "interceptors" used by Britain, Russia, Germany, and the United States that were actually used as "fighter-bombers" in combat. Aircraft such as the Hawker Hurricane (interceptor), Supermarine Spitfire (interceptor), Yakovlev Yak 7/9 (fighter), Bf-109 (interceptor), FW-190 (fighter), Lockheed P-38 (interceptor), Bell P-39, Curtiss P-40 (fighter), and the Republic P-47 (interceptor) all served as fighter-bombers during the war.<sup>11</sup> Colgan explains that despite the signs at

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., and HQ IX, "Early History of the Ninth Air Force," [www.Fold3.com](http://www.Fold3.com).

<sup>10</sup> Billy Colgan, *World War II Fighter Bomber Pilot* (Blue Ridge Summit, PA: Tab Books Inc., 1985), p. ix-xiii.

<sup>11</sup> Hallion, *Strike from the Sky*, p. 51.

headquarters designating the units as “Fighter Squadron,” unit rosters with row after row of “Fighter Pilot, single-engine,” Tech Orders designating the P-47D as a “Fighter Airplane,” the fact was that, regardless of nomenclature, these were fighter-bomber units flying fighter-bomber combat operations.<sup>12</sup>

Fighter-bomber pilots assigned to the Ninth came to England highly skilled, already assembled into nineteen fighter groups, and led by expert commanders. According to 510<sup>th</sup> pilot Ralph Jenkins, the Air Corps’ Group commanders typically came from the flight school classes of 1939 and 1940; squadron commanders from the 1941 and 1942 classes; and line pilots from the 1943 and 1944 classes. The average age of the commanders was twenty-six, and pilots twenty-two. Most airmen arrived with approximately 250 flying hours, though few had more than fifty hours in the P-47 Thunderbolt fighter-bombers the AAF selected for the tactical command.<sup>13</sup>

The P-47, originally designed in 1940 in reaction to Germany’s superior fighter aircraft, took more than two years to reach combat units in Europe. A supercharged Pratt and Whitney R-2800 radial engine that produced more than 2,000 horsepower with water injection, powered the airplane. Armed with eight .50-caliber Browning machine guns and a possible bomb payload of 2,000 pounds, the P-47 proved an excellent choice as an attack aircraft and fighter-bomber. The supercharger gave the P-47 outstanding high-altitude performance, and the water injection added extra speed at low altitudes.<sup>14</sup> The Thunderbolt’s bulky frame and air-cooled engine made the aircraft ideal for tactical

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<sup>12</sup> Colgan, *Fighter Bomber Pilot*, pp. ix-xiii.

<sup>13</sup> Speech, “The ‘JUG’ Best for the Job: The Contribution By P-47 Thunderbolt Units to the Victory in Europe in World War Two,” Col. Ralph C. Jenkins, USAF (Ret.), (undated, location of presentation unknown, author provided speech in written form), p. 2.

<sup>14</sup> Wesley F. Craven and James L. Cate, *The Army Air Forces in World War II*, vol. 6, *Men and Planes* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955), pp. 216-71.

missions where the greatest threat was flak from below. Air-cooled engines meant that the P-47 was not susceptible to the “killshots” other fighters like the liquid-cooled P-51 suffered when one bullet to the header tank could drain the aircraft’s coolant in seconds and lock up the engine in midair.<sup>15</sup> Although the P-47 originally lacked range—early models carried just over 300 gallons of fuel—engineers addressed this with droppable papier mâché fuel tanks underneath the airplane’s wings and belly that provided up to 200 additional gallons of fuel, eventually extending the plane’s range to 2,000 miles by 1945.<sup>16</sup>

Upon first introduction to the bulky Thunderbolt, the pilots skeptically climbed into the behemoth and wondered how their training in the considerably smaller Curtiss P-40 and Bell P-39 prepared them for the P-47. After their first flight most pilots fell in love with the airplane, and affectionately nicknamed it “The Jug,” short for Juggernaut. The excellent results of the P-47s in the spring and summer of 1944 encouraged AAF leaders, group commanders, and pilots.<sup>17</sup>

Tactical Air Command leaders, fighter pilots, and their P-47 Thunderbolts, contributed greatly to the Allied victory, due in no small part to the flexibility of the planning, doctrine, and operations. Tactical missions addressed the ever-changing needs of the Allied forces while strategic bombardment continued to lack any kind of versatility. Cooperation between the air and ground forces won the war for the Allies in Europe while the dramatic strategic bombing missions proved less effective and, in the

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<sup>15</sup> Manual, “P-51 Cooling System,” 12 July 2012, [www.51-factory.com/cooling\\_system\\_maintenance.pdf](http://www.51-factory.com/cooling_system_maintenance.pdf) (accessed 1 May 2013).

<sup>16</sup> Keegan, *Second World War*, p. 430; Craven and Cate, *The Army Air Forces in World War II*, vol. 6, pp. 196, 217.

<sup>17</sup> Charles D. Mohrle, “The Republic P-47 Thunderbolt: A Hero,” (speech, presented to Happy Warriors, Frontiers of Flight Museum, Dallas, Texas, undated), p. 2.



end, ethically questionable. Quesada summed up his sentiments regarding his tactical forces in Europe, “The fact remains that the infantry is fighting. The fact remains that the infantry is having trouble, and the fact remains that the results are proven. This does help them in their role and that’s what I’m there for. I’m willing to do almost anything to help them. I’m *not* willing to waste lives and use air power in an ineffective way, but this is effective....”<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Oral History Interview of Lt. Gen. Elwood R. Quesada by Lt. Cols. Long and Stephenson, 23 May 1975. Typed Manuscript, K239.0512-838, IRIS No. 1037750, in USAF Collection, AFHRA.

### **Chapter Three:**

Tampa, Florida, and Walterboro, South Carolina  
1 March 1943 – 13 September 1943  
And  
14 September 1943 – 14 February 1944

The AAF benefited from the claim that air power had the ability to strike the enemy in less time than it took the land and sea forces to mobilize, as put forth by air leaders in the early stages of war planning. By 1941, there were enough believers in the capabilities of the AAF that the service enjoyed a head start in recruiting and initial budget allotments. The AAF also benefitted from the nation's fascination with flight—evidences by the abundance of Hollywood movies, comic books, and novels depicting the glamour of pilot life. When the United States entered World War II, a generation of American men who had grown up hearing the stories of World War I aviators like Eddie Rickenbacker, Georges Guynemer, and Manfred von Richthofen (the “Red Baron”) rushed to the nearest AAF recruitment office. Almost all who applied desired to become pilots and because the Army removed its college requirement and reduced the minimum age from twenty-one to eighteen, more of these aeronautically-enthused applicants than ever before would realize that dream. From initial war planning through the end of the war, the AAF's response to the overabundance of aspirant airmen was to amass giant numbers of applicants, level off their ranks during training through an ever-changing set

of standards in response to operational needs, and finally, phase out the enlistment programs gradually towards the end of the war.<sup>1</sup>

Once in the service, those selected for pilot and aircrew training and who wanted to become officers after graduation had to pass the Aviation Cadet Qualifying Examination (ACQE). The test results, along with physical examinations and psychological evaluations, factored into determining the airmen's classification into one of three specialties: pilots who controlled or "flew" the aircraft, navigators who planned, charted, and guided the aircraft's position, and bombardiers who manned the aircraft's weaponry. What constituted a passing grade on the ACQE depended partially on the varying need for men in each of the three specialties. Unfortunately for some, if the AAF needed more navigators than it did pilots at the moment, the minimum score for pilots was raised and the minimum for navigators lowered. While "pilot" was the most popular classification among the airmen, the majority of the navigators and bombardiers from the 1939-1941 graduating classes were pilots who had washed out during pilot training.<sup>2</sup>

If an airman was classified as a pilot, he immediately ascended in stature and prestige among the other airmen. It was assumed he was both exemplary and elite. But for every airman who thought luck was on his side, a grueling three-stage, twenty-seven-to-thirty-week training program, where at least 40 percent of his comrades washed out, stood between him and his wings.<sup>3</sup> The Air Corps Flying Training Command, activated

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<sup>1</sup> Rebecca Hancock Cameron, *Training to Fly: Military Flight Training, 1907-1945* (Washington DC: Air Force History and Museum Program, 1999), p. 384.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 385-86.

<sup>3</sup> From early 1942 to mid-1944, the three stages of flight school lasted each nine weeks, but after mid-1944, when the AAF's quotas were met and the original dash to recruit and turn out large numbers of airmen settled down, the stages went back to their original, prewar format of three, ten-week courses; Cameron, *Training to Fly*, p. 388.

23 January 1942 and redesignated as the Army Air Force Flying Training Command (AAFFTC) 15 March 1942, was assigned to the Chief of Air Corps.<sup>4</sup>

Rapid AAC expansion after 1939 resulted in a volatile situation. The AAC needed officers and needed them out of training and into combat as soon as possible, but the immediate need meant that these officers were coming from recruiting classes admitted under lowered minimum standards. Accordingly, for World War II cadets, Preflight school was added to the already established three-stage Primary, Basic, and Advanced Flight Schools within the Training Command and addressed both problems with a standardized introductory phase required of all cadets entering Flight School. While all three classifications—pilot, navigator, and bombardier—attended Preflight, the AAC relied on a “separate, but similar” method of assimilating aircrews while not wasting time and resources on pilot training for cadets not destined for flying in combat. Instead Preflight training was modified to suit better, and more efficiently develop, each type of aircrew personnel.<sup>5</sup>

Preflight training focused on military, ground, and physical training. It was by far the stage with the least emphasis on flying and the most on ground instruction, similar to that suffered by all Army men. Charlie Mohrle went through Preflight at Kelly Field in San Antonio, Texas. He took the train down from his family home in Dallas, along with several dozen other would-be airmen, and sat anxiously watching the big city fade behind and the hill country appear ahead as they traveled south. When he arrived, Mohrle was disappointed by his first look at an airbase, expecting row upon row of airplanes crowded

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<sup>4</sup> AFHRA, Fact Sheet: “Air Education and Training Command (USAF),” [http://www.afhra.af.mil/factsheets/factsheet\\_print.asp?fsID=10983](http://www.afhra.af.mil/factsheets/factsheet_print.asp?fsID=10983) (accessed 1 September 2013).

<sup>5</sup> Craven and Cate, *Army Air Forces in World War II*, vol. 6, pp. 557-59.

all around but instead staring at row upon row of eight-man canvas tents along muddy streets, and not an airplane in sight. Far from the enchanting pilot's life he had imagined, Mohrle and every other man on base shared the twenty-five showerheads coming out of the cinderblock walls every two feet, the row of twenty basins and mirrors lined up along the opposite wall, and the two rows of twenty free-standing toilets, none separated by so much as a two-by-four. The men were each assigned to a flight that corresponded with a tent number. Inside the tents were eight cots topped with a cotton sack and a wool blanket. Each cadet was ordered to take the cotton sack and stuff it with the hay bundled at the end of the road outside. After a long first day, Mohrle patted down the lumpy mattress for a few seconds before collapsing into a deep sleep.<sup>6</sup>

His drill sergeant wasted no time listing all the ways in which at first glance Mohrle and his group disappointed him, explaining that it was his job either to make soldiers out of the sorry bunch in front of him as fast as he could, or kill them in the process. At breakfast, a lieutenant instructed the new arrivals on how to eat a "square meal." Each cadet was to sit on the edge of his seat, back straight, with both feet together and flat on the floor. With their left hands in their laps, their right hands balanced a small bite of food on the tip of their forks, lifting their utensils up vertically, and horizontally guiding the food into their mouths.<sup>7</sup>

Preflight training was intense. Cadets learned early that assimilating to the Army's way of doing things and absorbing as much of the information as possible was the best way to avoid washing out. Instruction went on for six days out of the week with

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<sup>6</sup> Charles D. Mohrle, "Charles D. Mohrle, U.S. Army Air Corps, Class of 43 – E, Gulf Coast Training Command" (unpublished memoir, in author's possession, undated), p. 2.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

the men allowed Sundays for church service and occasionally a pass to go into town for no more than five hours. Not yet aware of the amount of energy expended in the cockpit of a fighter plane and the physical endurance demanded during combat, Mohrle and his flight resented the hours spent on calisthenics, marching in formation, and running around base.

Just when Mohrle's daily routine seemed like a never-ending cycle through the same drills, the same marches, the same classes, the same barking from superiors constantly underwhelmed with their cadets, orders to assemble in full dress came over the public address system. For the next two hours, all 6,000 men stood in formation, minus the cadets who passed out after the first hour. And then, jeep after jeep carrying AAF officers sped by the ranks before a colonel buzzed the base in a P-39, an exciting reward for aviation cadets who had waited nine weeks to see an airplane. The last week of Preflight consisted of final exams, more jabs (immunizations), and more psychological testing before being ordered to Primary flight training.<sup>8</sup>

During Primary training, pilots learned to fly in sturdy, low-powered aircraft, such as the Vultee Aircraft BT-13 and BT-15 Valiants, during each of primary's four phases: initial, intermediate, accuracy, and diversified. The airmen performed stalls, spin recovery, climbing, gliding, forced and normal landings, and takeoffs during the initial phase. They also flew maneuvers such as figure-eights and chandelles, performed crosswind landings and maximum performance glides, and further developed their stalls and spins in the intermediate phase. Precision landings and approaches, power-on and power-off stalls, as well as short-field landings followed. Finally, the men practiced night flying, navigation, and instrument training in the simulators during the diversified

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

phase for a total of approximately twenty-eight to twenty-nine hours of airtime with an instructor and thirty-one to thirty-two hours solo flight without the instructor. In addition, the pilots clocked eighty-five hours of ground classes, or classroom instruction, covering navigation, weather, aircraft and engines, and aircraft identification, both enemy and friendly. The flight instructors typically had four students, two who flew in the morning and attended ground classes in the afternoon and another team of two with the opposite schedule.<sup>9</sup>

Before airmen advanced to the next stage of instruction, each had to perform a series of maneuvers to the satisfaction of their instructors and exhibit both knowledge and command of the controls, engines, and instruments specific to their training aircraft. The Training Command curriculum was based on interwar procedures, but was maintained during wartime by a new level of standardization sorely needed as the numbers of trainees sharply increased after 1939. As much as was possible, the curriculum aimed to reflect operational realities, although these changed so rapidly the Training Command often struggled constantly to keep up. Attempts were made to standardize instrument panels across all aircraft types to make transitioning from each airplane to the next as seamless as possible, proficiency requirements for each type of aircraft were developed at each stage of training, and while the airmen trained separately depending on classification, all members of the aircrew began with the same Preflight training.<sup>10</sup>

Pilots who passed their Primary written and flying exams went on to Basic training. Curriculum and exercises at this stage were supposed to stress those skills and practices that set military airmen apart from civilian aviators, but the changing needs of

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<sup>9</sup> Cameron, *Training to Fly*, pp. 392-95.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 388.

combat groups and perceived deficiencies in the pilots arriving in the combat zone led to constant restructuring of the coursework and flying evaluations. To ever-shifting degrees, instructors and materials emphasized the fundamentals of flying, combat maneuvers, and instrument flying. The transition phase of Basic training emphasized aircraft familiarization and fundamentals, and the diversified phase initially emphasized accuracy maneuvers, aerobatics, formation flying, instruments, navigation, and night flying, but eventually eliminated navigational and formation flights in the absence of time as the pace of the war increased. An early overemphasis on the diversified stage led to combat pilots entering the war without a sufficient grasp of the flying fundamentals, for which AAF officers overcompensated with an increased emphasis on flying fundamentals that predictably turned out pilots adept in fundamentals but inept in instrument or formation flying.<sup>11</sup>

After brief introductory courses in both, cadets were selected to pilot either single-engine or twin-engine fighter aircraft at the end of Basic. Several factors determined selection for single-engine assignment. Flight instructors often singled out the most aggressive of their flying students as ideally suited for the single-engine, or fighter, specialty. Almost as often, the cadets' stature was taken into consideration, with shorter airmen typically put into single-engine aircraft. Unlike bomber pilots who were prepared to fly in large formations with aircrews comprised of a copilot, a navigator, a bombardier, and several gunners, fighter pilots flew alone. Understandably then, those cadets exhibiting excellent marksmanship during Basic were also selected for the fighter specialty.

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<sup>11</sup> Craven and Cate, *Army Air Forces in World War II* vol. 6, p. 570.



Unfortunately for the majority of the airmen who joined the air force in hopes becoming a fighter pilot, the AAF continued to cultivate a wartime identity based almost entirely on its big bombers and thus placed a higher priority on bomber aircrews. As the historian Rebecca Cameron explains in *Training to Fly*, “The advent of war brought financial resources to implement the avowed strategic mission and, with the additional funds, new higher-performance aircraft and intricate equipment as well as diverse requirements for pilots in light, medium, heavy, and very heavy bombardment.” While the flight training facilities at the outbreak of World War II were not equipped for anything but single-engine aircraft, as few had actual bombers to train in, by the fall of 1943 the AAF was training multi-engine, bombardment pilots at a rate of 3:1, as compared to single-engine pilots.<sup>12</sup>

Along with every other student pilot at Minter Field in Bakersfield, California, Arlie Blood crowded around the bulletin board, scanning the columns of tiny print for his name on one of the two lists designating either a single or multi-engine specialty. He was elated to find his name on the single-engine list, putting him that much closer to fulfilling a lifelong dream of becoming a fighter pilot. Having been shuttled all over the Dakotas, Minnesota, and Wisconsin as a child after his mother died, Blood ended up in southern California after a buddy from back home encouraged him to go west and work the apple season with him as a way of earning fast money, which Blood planned to spend on flying lessons. Instead, he used the money to pay for an engagement ring and tiny sailboat, and eventually took a steady job at North American Aviation in 1940 as a tool designer.

The day after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, and five days before his first child was born, Blood applied for acceptance into the AAC. He met immediate resistance from

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<sup>12</sup> Cameron, *Training to Fly*, pp. 389, 400, 404.

both his boss at North American who argued his talents would better serve his defense job and his wife who argued that he was acting irresponsibly by running off to become a pilot now that he was a husband and father. Blood explained to both that draft boards would soon come after tool designers, husbands, and fathers, and that his best choice after Pearl Harbor was at least to get a say in what type of service he entered. Blood wanted to be a pilot.<sup>13</sup>

Once a cadet was selected for specialization in single-engine aircraft, Advanced stage instructors were charged with turning the airman into a skilled one-man aircrew. Advanced training had five phases: transition, instrument, navigation, formation, and acrobatics. In addition to the required seventy hours of flight training, Advanced included mandatory instrument, formation, and navigation training hours in the Link simulator.<sup>14</sup> Navigation and gunnery training increased for single-engine pilots at the Advanced training stage. Navigation was typically achieved by dead reckoning (DR), or estimating distance based on the time and speed taken to reach fixed visual landmarks—a skill considered vital for pilots flying alone or without additional navigators aboard. Single-engine pilots also had to be their own gunners, and extremely adept gunners at that, as a fighter pilot's shooting ability often determined his survival in combat. Air-to-ground gunnery practice involved aiming at ground targets and simulated strafing while air-to-air instruction involved aiming and simulated shooting at a target towed behind one of the training planes.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Arlie J. Blood, *Only Angels Have Wings* (Canyon Lake, CA: Arlie Blood, printed by KNI, Inc., 1997), pp. 28-31.

<sup>14</sup> Craven and Cate, *Army Air Forces in World War II* vol. 6, p. 572.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

The remaining task of Advanced instructors, typically combat pilots who were rotated home or recently graduated pilots from within the Training Command not yet assigned to an operational unit, was building effective and capable one-man aircrews that could also fly in formation. Formation flying represented a significant skill for fighter and bomber pilot alike. Student fighter pilots flew in three-ship flights for demonstrating skill but returned to the typical tactical flights of four, consisting of two, two-man combat teams for simulated missions. Three flights of four then comprised the tactical twelve-man combat formation. While formation flying continued as part of the Advanced curriculum, mastering combat maneuvers at low altitude maintained at least equal precedence as evidenced by the greater amount of training time devoted to the latter. Individual attack exercises where airmen flew in single file above their instructor before each peeled off for simulated attacks on the instructor's aircraft developed the students' ability to determine firing range and properly use their gun sights. Rigorous armament and fixed gunnery training was an emphasis unique to fighter pilot training. Cadets carried out their Advanced flight training in the slightly sleeker North American T-6 Texans, as compared to the BT-13s and BT-15s used in Basic.<sup>16</sup>

Following completion of the Advanced stage, newly commissioned officers trained for nine additional weeks of postgraduate coursework and flight training before transitioning into combat aircraft, typically Curtiss P-40 Warhawks. Up to this point, pilots had been gradually introduced to more and more powerful aircraft but both the AAF's hesitancy to put green pilots in an expensive high-performance combat aircraft and a shortage of tactical airplanes initially available for the front let alone training, meant that most graduates' experience in combat aircraft bordered on negligible. This

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<sup>16</sup> Cameron, *Training to Fly*, pp. 400-405.

problem was only compounded by the fact that when fighter aircraft became available to the Training Command, chances were high that the aircraft was already being phased out in the combat zone.

Efforts to modify training programs to reflect operational concepts of the combat theaters overwhelmed training officers from the beginning. Beyond the arduous task of amassing the data needed to do so—consisting of everything from stateside pilot debriefings to intelligence digests to inspection reports to minutes from the dozens of conferences and meetings attended by air leaders in every theater, every week—the real challenge facing training officers was that this information changed so rapidly and was often conflicting. By the time a standardized manual on tactics could be made available, new missions in the combat zone necessitated new skills and rendered the old ones obsolete.<sup>17</sup>

Therefore, fundamentally, the three-stage program changed only slightly throughout the war. Demonstrating proficiency in the aircraft assigned to each stage ranked higher in priority above high marks in ground instruction. Not surprisingly, when changes were made, it was the length of instruction and content in the classroom that was manipulated by training officials trying to produce trainees skilled in those areas deemed most critical in combat at the moment. Often times, according to operational realities, instruction was lengthened and shortened according to how much time the program had to meet the demand for pilots. When the Training Command filled the initial, and large, manpower quotas—and the material shortages were finally addressed—there was enough time to offer longer courses with more in-depth instruction. Accordingly, graduates

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., pp. 452-54.

matriculating through the program and moving into training units at that time were better prepared pilots.<sup>18</sup>

The Training Command during World War II, though ultimately more of a success than a failure, never developed as an efficient means of delivering highly skilled, combat-ready pilots. Instead, the program “became a triumph of numbers,” churning out the right number of pilots but often at the expense of their education by the end of the Advanced stage. The quality of pilots graduating was an immediate cause for concern as the first waves made it into combat dangerously under-skilled. The Training Command thus ordered that before the graduates could be assigned to a unit for operational unit training, all had to complete a series of specialized courses, also under the Training Command, designed to better prepare them for combat. A total of five weeks of P-40 training for single-engine fighter specialists was required, in addition to thirty hours of fixed gunnery training beyond that accrued at the Advanced stage. The additional gunnery training typically utilized camera guns with fixed gun sights, and a heavy emphasis was placed on ground strafing. Once the transitional training was complete, pilots were assigned to stateside operational units in one of the four continental air forces.<sup>19</sup>

Operational Training Units (OTU) trained pilots and crews as tactical units for deployment as groups while Replacement Training Units (RTU) trained pilots and crews for deployments as either individuals or groups to already existing tactical units in the combat zone. OTUs for fighter pilots consisted of two, three-month phases where each airman began to amass flying hours in the actual aircraft he would pilot in one of the

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., pp. 388-89, 465.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., pp. 400, 408, 414.

Theaters of Operation, performing elementary unit flying during the first stage and tactical flying in the final phase. Early on, the tactical air units' introduction into the ETO revealed the importance of formation flying and therefore the OTUs devoted a significant amount of training to takeoff, assembly, and landing in formation. Similarly, increased incidents of friendly fire on Allied aircraft by American ground forces had become dangerous enough that British air units feared flying anywhere near American troops in North Africa and in France and thus required additional training on aircraft recognition.

Training tactical air units came with unique challenges. The operational realities made little use of existing doctrine and circumstances often called for alterations to the training pilots received stateside. The time needed to prepare tactical pilots for every scenario their units would encounter in combat, let alone scenarios each unit *might* encounter, was not feasible given the limited time allotted. Moreover, because neither OTUs nor RTUs trained their pilots for combat in a specific theater until late in the war, each man received little to no training for those missions inimitable to operations in either Europe and Asia. For instance, a pilot flying escort in the Eighth Air Force received the same training as a pilot flying in the Pacific Theater of Operations where there was a lack of strategic targets, and as a pilot flying close air support for ground forces in Europe. Finally, whenever a new air manual was published by the Army or AAF—such as TR 440-15 or FM 100-20—there was no specific, service-wide explanation of what elements of the old manual were replaced by the new and what remained applicable.<sup>20</sup> Taking fighter units and working to “transform, in the shortest possible time, a graduate of the Army Air Forces Flying Schools from Trainee into a fully qualified Fighter Pilot who

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., pp. 475-77.

will be capable of taking his place as a wingman in a tactical organization” was the task of the III Fighter Command, under the Third Air Force.<sup>21</sup> From this training program the 405<sup>th</sup> Fighter Group and its three subordinate fighter squadrons emerged.

The 405<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Group, consisting of the 624<sup>th</sup>, 625<sup>th</sup>, 626<sup>th</sup>, and 627<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Squadrons, was organized at Drew Field in Tampa, Florida, on 1 March 1943 by authority of letter AG (Adjutant General) 320.2 Subject: “Constitution and Activations of certain Army Air Force Units” dated 4 February 1943.<sup>22</sup> Maj. Fred Hook served as Group Commander and Capt. Paul N. Thakara as Group Executive Officer. The group was assigned to the III Air Support Command, Third Air Force, as part of the OTU program. The mission at Drew Field was to train personnel in operational and administrative functions for combat duty. While in the Sunshine State, with the palm trees swaying, the Gulf of Mexico just miles away, and the balmy breeze blowing over the base, most of the men prematurely assumed the 405th was being readied for combat in the South Pacific.<sup>23</sup>

Preparing for its operational duties in combat, the group participated in simulated strafing and bombing attacks, as well as missions dropping CNB (chloroacetophenone, carbon tetrachloride, and benzene) gas,<sup>24</sup> over Signal Corps installations close to base. Bombing missions used small 100-pound “bombs” painted a bright blue and loaded with

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., pp. 452, 469, 472, 543.

<sup>22</sup> Office of Base Commander, Headquarters Army Air Base Drew Field, 26 February 1943, “General Orders No. 20,” in 405 FG, “Unit History,” 1 March – 31 October 1943, pp. 1-3, IRIS No. 00090619, in USAF Collections, AFHRA.

<sup>23</sup> 405 FG, “Unit History,” 1 March – 31 October 1943, pp. 1-3.

<sup>24</sup> CNB gas is similar to tear gas in that the compound is designed to “produce immediate discomfort and eye closure to render the victim incapable of fighting or resisting....The United States excludes these agents from the 1925 Geneva Convention banning other chemical and biological weapons,” according to medscape.com.

a shotgun shell in the tip so pilots could see their drops in proximity to the target. These simulated attacks prepared the group for dive bombing missions dropping gas bombs on enemy troops. CNB gas, classified as “tear gas, weak” as compared to the stronger, lesser used CNS gas—which replaced benzene with chloropicrin and chloroform—was most often employed against enemy ground forces. The effects of CNB resulted from the gas’s powerful vomit-inducing agent and lung and eye irritants. Between 1940 and 1945, the Army procured 5,282,000 pounds of CNB gas (1940: 106,000 1941: 660,000 1942: 1,871,000, 1943: 1,494,000, 1944: 1,151,000, and 1945:0). Of the ten chemical agents listed in the “chemical warfare” portion of the official postwar procurement report, CNB comprised only .75% of the 702,506,000 total pounds delivered to the Army over those five years. This indicates that this specific gas was not used to the extent of others such as chlorine and mustard gases, at 369,320,000 and 17,322,000 pounds, respectively.<sup>25</sup>

Small detachments from the 625<sup>th</sup>, 626<sup>th</sup>, and 627<sup>th</sup> squadrons participated in training maneuvers at Laurinberg- Maxton Army Air Base near Laurinberg, North Carolina, with a Troop Carrier unit flying Douglas C-47 Skytrains. The squadrons engaged in simulated dive bombing and strafing attacks to neutralize enemy aerodromes before the landing of airborne units and in support of ground forces. Two airmen were killed in crashes during these exercises. Maneuvers with the Atlantic Fleet Amphibious Command at Langley Field, Virginia, simulated strafing, bombing, and gas attacks, practicing both air support and attacks on enemy troops establishing a beachhead. The squadron completed these training missions in Bell P-39s.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Chief of Military History, “US Army in World War II: Statistics and Procurement” (Washington, DC: Office of the Chief of Military History, 1952), p. 25.

<sup>26</sup> 405 FG, “Unit History,” 1 March – 31 October 1943, pp. 4-5.



While the pilots prepared for flying missions in the combat zone, intelligence officers conducted briefing and interrogation on all missions flown. The group's Intelligence Section prepared the situation maps for the squadrons' individual Intelligence Sections. Approximately three hours before takeoff, the Group Intelligence Officers briefed the entire group on the general danger areas, mission, and route to the target. Final briefing took place just before takeoff by the Squadron Intelligence Officers, who relayed check points and landmarks to the pilots. As they would in combat conditions, pilots handed over all articles of identification to the Intelligence Officer before takeoff. Interrogation exercises consisted of Squadron Intelligence Officers calling in their flash reports to the Group Intelligence Section, where the reports were then consolidated by the group and sent to III Fighter Command via teletype. Squadron Intelligence Officers then completed their interrogation and sent their mission reports to the group which, was also sent to III Fighter Command. During field exercises, the Intelligence Sections operated from a trailer as they would in combat conditions.<sup>27</sup>

While the airmen prepared for war, actor Spencer Tracy and the cast and crew of *A Guy Named Joe* filmed nearby. The MGM picture centered on a World War II pilot who, after being killed in a plane crash, returns from heaven secretly to coach another young pilot through his missions over the South Pacific. Most sunny afternoons during the shoot, the men spent their free time watching the film's Lockheed P-38 Lightnings diving and rolling, while a Martin B-26 Marauder with a big red circle painted on the side

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<sup>27</sup> 405 FG, "Unit History," December 1943, p. 2, IRIS No. 00090621, in USAF Collections, AFHRA.

and trailing smoke simulated a crashing Japanese Betty bomber. Several of the men from the 405<sup>th</sup> even served as extras.<sup>28</sup>

The 405<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Group became the 405<sup>th</sup> Fighter-bomber Group on 15 August 1943, and moved from the III Air Support Command to the III Fighter Command, Third Air Force. The official redesignation reflected a shift in AAF operational needs. The low-altitude missions increasingly required from British and American tactical units in North Africa, as well as the forecasted ground support role of the soon-to-be-formed Ninth Air Force, meant that the dive bombing tactics and aircraft employed by the group up to this point were incongruent with operational realities and therefore the group's mission and training evolved. While the dive bombers of World War II proved essential as an antishipping aircraft, the American air forces in Europe quickly found out that over land, dive bombers were highly vulnerable to antiaircraft fire from below, and depended on the near-total absence of enemy aircraft in the area. The fighter bomber soon undertook the dive bomber's mission with greater success and survivability.<sup>29</sup> The 624<sup>th</sup>, 625<sup>th</sup>, and 626<sup>th</sup> bombardment squadrons thus became the 509<sup>th</sup>, 510<sup>th</sup>, and 511<sup>th</sup> fighter-bomber squadrons, respectively, and the 627<sup>th</sup> was inactivated, all as ordered in letter AG 322, Subject: Disbandment, Redesignation, and Reorganization of Certain Army Air Forces Units," 15 August 1943. As per those instructions, the units' redesignation did not result in change of station or assignment, although the group did receive movement orders less than a month later on 10 September 1943 directing the group to leave its permanent station in Tampa for a temporary station in South Carolina. Group

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., pp. 2-3.

<sup>29</sup> Hallion, *Strike From the Sky*, pp. 46-50.

commander Major Hook was instructed to furnish rosters of everyone making the trip to their new airbase.<sup>30</sup>

The group arrived on 14 September 1944 at the new overseas training base in Walterboro, South Carolina, a town of just 4,000 residents, located forty-five miles west of Charleston. Enlisted men were billeted in one-story, cinder block barracks on base. Unmarried officers were assigned to Bachelor Officers' Quarters, or BOQs, on base while those officers accompanied by their wives found quarters in town. Nightlife in Walterboro was limited, and beyond the small USO and a few restaurants, the squadrons had to fend for themselves, usually opting to organize their own parties in the Officers' and NCO clubs. Learning how to have a good time together, no matter where they were or how scarce proper party supplies may have been was a skill the group developed quickly and one that was sure to serve them in combat.

The options were not much better for accompanying wives. Many traveled to Charleston on shopping trips as often as possible, though two of the officers' wives got a less than friendly reception as they tried to find new maternity clothes better suited for the balmy South Carolina fall. When one of the women asked a store clerk where to find maternity clothes in town, the clerk informed the women that Charleston shops did not customarily stock that type of apparel. The officer's wife, confused by the clerk's answer, asked what women in South Carolina did for clothing when they were expecting, to which the clerk haughtily answered, "They stay home!"<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Office of the Area Commander, Headquarters Air Base Area Command Drew Field, 10 September 1943, "Special Orders No. 253" in 405 FG, "Unit History," 1 March – 31 October 1943.

<sup>31</sup> Reginald Nolte, *Thunder Monsters Over Europe: A History of the 405<sup>th</sup> Fighter Group in World War II* (Manhattan, Kansas: Sunflower University Press, 1986), pp. 5, 8-9.

Despite making the most of their free time, training remained the group's first priority. Throughout the fall of 1943, the 405<sup>th</sup> and its three squadrons continued their flight training at breakneck speed and by Halloween, personnel strength reached 105 officers and 772 enlisted personnel. Shortly thereafter, there was a major shake-up when group commander, Maj. Hook and a significant number of officers were reassigned and replaced by pilots with more experience in fighter-type aircraft. While most of the line pilots and commanders had accumulated the 700 flying hours needed for service and promotion, the group's most experienced pilots did not have 700 flying hours in fighter-bomber aircraft because they had been part of the original Bombardment Group and understandably trained in dive bomber aircraft.<sup>32</sup> Lt. Col. James Ferguson replaced Major Hook as group commander on 5 November 1943. Maj. Robert L. Delashaw took over for Captain Thackara as the new Group Executive Officer for the 405<sup>th</sup>, and Maj. Bruce Parcell replaced Capt. Glenn Doughty as Squadron Commander for the 510<sup>th</sup>. All three men were transferred to the 48<sup>th</sup> Fighter-Bomber Group in Tullahoma, Tennessee. All flying officers, save two from each squadron, were transferred to other organizations and replaced by newly assigned officers.<sup>33</sup>

Ferguson had already accumulated 2,300 flying hours in fighter aircraft when he came to the 405<sup>th</sup>. He was originally from Smyrna (now Izmir), Turkey and educated in Scotland before becoming a naturalized U.S. citizen in 1930 at age seventeen. A flying cadet for year after completing flight training in 1936, Ferguson was eventually commissioned as a second lieutenant in June 1937. In 1940, he served as the

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., pp. 5-6.

<sup>33</sup> 405 FG, "Unit History," November 1943, Section I, p. 1, IRIS No. 00090620, in USAF Collections, AFHRA.

commanding officer of the 79<sup>th</sup> Pursuit Squadron at Hamilton Field, California, and in 1942, became executive officer of the 20<sup>th</sup> Pursuit Group in Charlotte, North Carolina, and from July 1942 through October 1943 served as commanding officer of the 377<sup>th</sup> Fighter Squadron at Mitchel Field, New York. A highly regarded leader and known disciplinarian, Ferguson, the well-known devotee to professionalism, was determined to build confidence in the new fighter group. His men respected him, some maybe feared him, but most eventually recognized their leader as approachable and open minded when it came to his men and their need to unwind every now and then.<sup>34</sup>

Originally a machinist's mate second class in the Navy, Major Delashaw enlisted as an Aviation Cadet in the Army and graduated as a second lieutenant—rated as pilot—at Kelly Field, Texas in 1940. His first assignment was as a P-40 pilot with the 20<sup>th</sup> Fighter Group at Hamilton Field. He was then transferred to a fighter pilot RTU in Sarasota, Florida, and finally to the 405<sup>th</sup> in November 1943.<sup>35</sup>

Major Parcell had 1,000 hours flying time when he arrived that fall. Like Delashaw, Parcell's military career began outside the Air Corps, he as a second lieutenant in the Infantry Officers Reserve Corps (ORC). After completing flight training, he had his ORC revoked in favor of an equivalent rating in the Reserve Air Corps. Before his transfer to the 405<sup>th</sup>, Parcell served as the Group Operations Officer in the 377<sup>th</sup> Fighter

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<sup>34</sup> United States Air Force, Biographies, "General James Ferguson," <http://www.af.mil/AboutUs/Biographies/Display/tabid/225/Article/107078/general-james-ferguson.aspx> (accessed 5 September 2013).

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., "Major General Robert L. Delashaw," <http://www.af.mil/AboutUs/Biographies/Display/tabid/225/Article/107258/major-general-robert-l-delashaw.aspx> (accessed 5 September 2013).

Group with Ferguson at Mitchel Field, and also as the Squadron Commander of the 304<sup>th</sup> Fighter Squadron.<sup>36</sup>

While training with the 388<sup>th</sup> Fighter Group in Cross City, Florida, Arlie Blood's wife and son were languishing in the Florida heat. His son was constantly sick in the humidity and his wife missed her family back in southern California. Blood had accrued approximately 1,500 flying hours in the P-47 stateside with the 388<sup>th</sup> when he heard the 405<sup>th</sup> was forming in Walterboro and was looking for experienced fighter-bomber pilots. Blood requested a transfer, sold the family Ford for \$1300 in war bonds, sent his family back to Los Angeles with another one of the officers' wives traveling west, and reported to Walterboro. He was assigned to the 510<sup>th</sup> and named C Flight commander.<sup>37</sup>

Charlie Mohrle was waiting for assignment to a fighter squadron in the replacement pool at Dale Mabry Field, Tallahassee, Florida, but instead was named the Aerodrome Officer. He suffered an acute attack of appendicitis and underwent an emergency appendectomy that resulted in a two-week leave back home in Dallas. Upon his return to Dale Mabry, his doctor ordered no flying for thirty days and consequently assigned him another desk job, this time to the Military Police station in Tallahassee. Once his thirty days were up, he reported for transition training with an RTU in Miami for nine weeks before a small group of second lieutenants including Mohrle, Ben Savage, and Eugene Ziegewild received orders on 12 November 1943 directing them to the 405<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> 405 FG, "Unit History," November 1943, p. 5.

<sup>37</sup> Blood, *Only Angels Have Wings*, pp. 33, 36-37.

in South Carolina. The airmen were assigned to the 510<sup>th</sup> and C Flight, under Arlie Blood.<sup>38</sup>

The tactical fighter squadrons in the Ninth all operated in the same sortie formation. Pilots were organized into three or four groups of four aircraft, designated Flights A, B, C, and D. Flight leaders were typically captains, though the rate at which wartime pilots were promoted and assigned outpaced what was typical in peacetime. The rest of the four-aircraft flight included at least one first lieutenant and usually two second lieutenants.<sup>39</sup> These flights were further divided into two two-man teams, one pilot leading and one following, each pilot watching the other's tail. The leader flew down first and dropped his bombs; the second hesitated a couple of seconds before following the leader down, dropping his bombs and then climbing back to find the leader. While each of the four-man flights went down and came up, one of the other flights flew cover, guarding the rest of the squadron from an attack from above.

John Drummond was one of the two members of the original 510<sup>th</sup> squadron who stayed with the group. He had joined the group in Tampa, but was especially happy when the group moved to Walterboro, just 150 miles from his hometown of Ninety-Six, South Carolina. The group had nicknamed John "Ace" after Eddie Rickenbacker's famous aviation comic book series, "Ace Drummond." He had originally planned to enter the service as a paratrooper but after scoring exceptionally high on the paratrooper entrance exam, one of the recruiters suggested he take the entrance exam for aviation

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<sup>38</sup> Charles D. Mohrle, "Charles D. Mohrle," pp. 19, 20, 23.

<sup>39</sup> United States War Department, United States Army, "Army Air Forces Fighter Squadron, Single Engine," Table of Organization and Equipment No. 1-27, 22 December 1943, p.1, <http://www.militaryresearch.org> (accessed 21 June 2013).

pilots. After scoring high on that exam as well, he was off to flight school and assigned to the 625<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Squadron at Drew Field after graduation.<sup>40</sup>

The group's new aircraft began arriving in November. Republic Aviation originally designed the P-47 Thunderbolt for high altitudes, not the low sweeps the squadrons practiced daily, and the aircraft's bulky frame seemed a confusing choice. The giant aircraft looked more like a tank than a plane, but once in the cockpit, the pilots soon realized that the aircraft's shape and weight actually made it ideal for their missions. The Thunderbolt's heavy frame allowed the pilots to come screaming out of the clouds in a dive, but its high-powered engine let them pull up and climb like they were in the lighter P-39. For such a rugged aircraft, the pilots all considered the P-47 as smooth and forgiving as any they had flown.<sup>41</sup>

Taking turns in the sixteen P-47s on base, the pilots continued an intense training schedule, adding combat takeoff and landing drills, combat flying formations at high and low altitude, and both air-to-air gunnery simulating aerial combat involving enemy aircraft and air-to-ground gunnery simulating attacks on ground targets, or normal strafing and bombing drills. Officers were also required to pass a proficiency test with the Army's standard issue sidearm—the M1911 .45-caliber pistol, which took place at the outdoor gun range at Myrtle Beach Army Air Base.<sup>42</sup> Larry Gaughran remembered: “They issued us .45s but there was no point in carrying a .45, because I wasn't going to fight the German army with a .45 caliber! You couldn't hit anything with them anyhow!

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<sup>40</sup> Richard D. Young, “Senator John W. Drummond: The Story of a South Carolinian, Military Hero, and Statesman, Part I,” *Public Policy and Practice*, Institute for Public Service and Policy Research for the University of South Carolina, vol. 6, No. 1 (May 2007): pp. 7-8.

<sup>41</sup> Jenkins, “The ‘JUG’ Best for the Job,” pp. 1-2, 10.

<sup>42</sup> Nolte, *Thunder Monsters Over Europe*, p. 7.



Unless you threw it!”<sup>43</sup> Aerial gunnery took place against targets towed behind airplanes off the coast southeast of Charleston. The Intelligence Section conducted mandatory ground school sessions for all group personnel, including all enlisted men and officers, and addressed everything from enemy and allied aircraft recognition, to small arms instruction, to field hygiene, sanitation, and first aid.<sup>44</sup>

Not long after arriving, Blood found himself in the middle of an incident involving two branches of the military, a court-martial, and resulting in the death of one his men. The 510<sup>th</sup> and a Navy squadron from nearby Cherry Point often engaged in “dogfights,” all agreeing to a set of ground rules that specifically included “No attacks in the landing pattern.” One day, two Navy Vought F4U Corsairs began a head-on pass at Blood’s group of four aircraft landing after a gunnery mission. Blood barely had enough time to warn his wingman, 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. Morris P. Davis, when one of the Corsairs passed right under his nose. Davis failed to see the incoming aircraft as he tightly maintained his position in the landing formation.

When the Navy aircraft came within a few feet of his airplane, Davis’s first reaction was to pull up. Seconds later, his propeller chopped the tail off Blood’s aircraft at about 800 feet. Blood bailed out and pulled his parachute rip cord just as he hit the treetops. He had jumped too low for the larger canopy chute to deploy, but the smaller, spring-loaded drogue chute shot out and caught on a branch, eventually pulling the attached canopy chute all the way out of his pack, and leaving Blood dangling about twenty feet above the burning, broken pieces of his airplane. Luckily, the muddy swamp

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<sup>43</sup> Documentary, “The 510<sup>th</sup> Was There,” Larry Gaughran, DVD (undated).

<sup>44</sup> Nolte, *Thunder Monsters Over Europe*, p. 7.

soon swallowed the flames and most of the smoldering aircraft below and a group of officers at the gun range nearby saw the crash and came looking for survivors.<sup>45</sup>

After one of the officers climbed the tree and pulled Blood over to the trunk, both men grabbed the tree and slid down, bloodying their arms, hands, chest and face on the way down. Medics arrived soon after and put the shaken Blood into the back of an ambulance with the squadron's new flight surgeon, Dr. John Milligan. Blood's accident was Milligan's first "emergency." Milligan leaned over Blood's gurney checking his vital signs, both surgeon and pilot bouncing up and down as they rode along the muddy path back to base. Milligan handed Blood a shot of whiskey and said, "Take this, it will calm you down," to which Blood replied, "I don't think I need it," to which Milligan replied, "Well I do!" and downed the shot himself.<sup>46</sup>

John "Doc" Milligan did not fit the mold of a typical flight surgeon. Charlie Mohrle called Doc the "soul of our squadron," "our friend, our MD, our confidant, our confessor, our psychologist." Milligan had a way of recognizing when any of his men were having an especially hard time, cracking under the pressure and stress of being a fighter pilot, or if they started to sink into a dark place, dwelling on the losses or worrying they would fail to measure up. For those who, from time to time, needed help coping with the day-to-day dangers of combat training, and later combat duty, Milligan was "the glue that held [the 510th] together into an effective fighting force and a brotherhood..."<sup>47</sup> From organizing intersquadron softball games on base, to serenading the men with his skillful renditions of "Danny Boy," to mixing cocktails during the

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<sup>45</sup> Blood, *Only Angels Have Wings*, pp. 36-37.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 37-38.

<sup>47</sup> Charles Mohrle, correspondence with author, 12 November 2004.

squadron's parties, Milligan's version of protecting and maintaining the physical and mental health of his men went beyond what any of the officers had experienced in the Army before meeting him.

That day, it was also Milligan's unfortunate duty to inform Blood that his wingman had not made it. Davis had also bailed out when his propeller was damaged badly in the collision. Like Blood, he had attempted to pull his chute too low, but sadly he had not landed in the trees like Blood, instead slamming to the ground in a small clearing, and dying shortly after. The Navy court-martialed the Corsair pilot. Blood, along with Group Commander James Ferguson, were required to attend. Ferguson was furious and went to trial eager to see that the Navy punished their airman severely. As was required, Blood testified and relayed the details of the incident as he remembered them, but before he dismissed Blood, the prosecutor asked him to tell the court what he believed was the appropriate punishment for the offending pilot should he be found guilty. Blood replied, "The loss of my wingman cannot be replaced. The Air Corps has lost a well trained pilot. Sending the Navy pilot to prison would also be a loss of another well trained pilot. Send him to combat and let him contribute to winning the war." Looking at the Navy pilot, he continued, "And if he is sent into combat, he must remember to double his effort because he caused the loss of a good pilot whose effort is now lost." Colonel Ferguson did not agree and told Blood so on the tense and unfortunately long car ride back to base.<sup>48</sup>

Readying the group for combat continued, and it seemed that every week the AAF added new sets of required skills and training to the ever-expanding catalog of fighter pilot maneuvers, reflecting the operational needs of tactical units in combat. The mission

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<sup>48</sup> Blood, *Only Angels Have Wings*, pp. 39-40.

of the operational tactical forces at the time was “first and foremost, the neutralization and destruction of enemy air forces...[and next] the destruction of enemy columns by light bombers and roving fighter-bombers.”<sup>49</sup> Flight training for the month included aerial gunnery, navigation, P-47 instrument reading, group and squadron flying formations, escort flying, and scramble and interception training. The 510<sup>th</sup>, in particular, showed a 200 percent increase in the monthly aerial gunnery scores. Group Headquarters issued orders for an extended field exercise in early December, but poor weather conditions forced the group to postpone the exercise after a freak snowstorm and severe freeze threatened to shut down the base and surrounding town. Once the cold weather eased up, the group bivouacked a couple of weeks later on the base’s south side and simulated combat conditions as best they could, sleeping in pup tents, cooking on field kitchens, and digging foxholes with Army-issued entrenching tools. The pilots practiced strafing with several simulated attacks on the camp, and the Intelligence Sections carried out interrogations and briefings just as they would in actual combat scenarios. Along with their aerial training, the squadrons completed five separate five-to-eight-mile marches carrying full field packs, the last one on New Year’s Eve conducted in full blackout conditions alongside the entire group convoy.<sup>50</sup>

A week into the New Year, the Preparations for Overseas Movement, or POM, Team inspected the 405<sup>th</sup>. After finding the group in excellent condition, Warning Orders and Movement Orders arrived on 10 January 1944. The Base Property Officer turned over all equipment deemed not absolutely necessary for daily operations to the appropriate supply agencies. Shipping lists were prepared, and packing was 95 percent

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<sup>49</sup> Hallion, *Strike From the Sky*, p. 171.

<sup>50</sup> Nolte, *Thunder Monsters Over Europe*, pp. 7-8.

complete by the end of January. This kept the supply sections from having to unpack large portions of supplies already prepared for overseas shipping. The thirteen aircraft remaining with the squadron were prepared for transfer while the rest were either turned over to other organizations or sent to the 485<sup>th</sup> Sub-Depot there in Walterboro to await parts necessary for repairs. A field radio net connecting the squadrons and the group was established, as was a teletype net, both of which assured communications among the group once in the combat zone. Mechanics sat for daily classes in radio maintenance. Flying training was discontinued on 24 January 1944.<sup>51</sup>

Milligan and the medical sections conducted physical examinations, eliminating all who were unfit to serve and scheduling corrective procedures for men whose ailments or injuries he considered not as severe and that allowed them eventually to meet minimum standards. Commanding officers subjected the clothing and equipment of every officer and enlisted man to showdown inspections and issued replacement requests for missing or damaged items.<sup>52</sup> Each man received a new large duffle bag for travel in place of the two barracks duffle bags each had used up until then. Intelligence officers lectured all personnel on the importance of secrecy and censorship, stressing specifically their move to the Theater of Operations. Group strength totaled 141 officers and 808 enlisted men during their last week in South Carolina.<sup>53</sup>

Before the 510<sup>th</sup> left for combat in Europe, John Drummond chose to say a special, albeit reckless goodbye to his friends and family in Ninety-Six, South Carolina.

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<sup>51</sup> 405 FG, "Unit History," January 1944, Sections IV-VI, IRIS No. 00090622, in USAF Collections, AFHRA.

<sup>52</sup> "showdown inspections" are detailed inspections of each individual's uniform and equipment to check for needed repairs or replacement.

<sup>53</sup> Nolte, *Thunder Monsters Over Europe*, p. 8.

Despite specific restrictions on such stunts, Drummond took his P-47, eventually named the “Raid Hot Mama” and decorated on the nose with a nude woman wearing a gun holster holding two six-shooters, flew it to Ninety-Six and buzzed Main Street, delighting locals and Drummond’s family. A livid Ferguson threatened to toss “Ace” out of the Air Forces over the incident. Narrowly avoiding the demise of his military career, Drummond’s only reprieve lay in the locals’ refusal to testify to the flyover when his commanding officers opened an official investigation. Unable to prove definitively it was Drummond’s P-47, but thoroughly convinced nonetheless, Ferguson demoted Drummond to second lieutenant, forbade him from leaving the base for the remainder of their time stateside, and ordered him to sleep in a pup tent outside the BOQs, coincidentally right along the path officers returning from a night out walked on their way back to their warm beds indoors.<sup>54</sup>

Ferguson and Delashaw, along with the Group Material Officer and Group Operations Officer, proceeded to the aerial port of embarkation in New York, New York, on 3 February 1944 as per orders from the Third Air Force and departed from the U.S. in an Air Transport Command aircraft on 5 February 1944 , landing in Prestwick, Scotland, the next day. From Prestwick, the four officers traveled by train to London and reported to the Eighth Air Force where they received verbal orders transferring them and their group to the Ninth Air Force, formed four months before. The advanced detachment then received additional indoctrination training and proceeded to Christchurch to prepare for the group’s arrival in England.

The 510<sup>th</sup> departed from South Carolina with the rest of the group on Valentine’s Day 1944 on a troop train headed to Camp Shanks, New York—across the Hudson River

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<sup>54</sup> Young, “Senator John W. Drummond,” pp. 7-8.

from Lower Manhattan—where the group was billeted and processed for overseas movement. The base was close enough to Manhattan that many got in a few more American nights on the town before loading up and shipping off. From Fort Shanks the group traveled to its port of embarkation in Brooklyn on 26 February 1944 and then across the Atlantic for their introduction into the ETO.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> 405 FG, “Group History,” 1 March 1943 – 29 February 1944, IRIS No. 00090621, in USAF Collections, AFHRA.

## Chapter Four:

Christchurch, England  
7 March – 10 July 1944

The group's transatlantic voyage on the RMS *Mauretania* was without incident though far from the plush experience the world's fourth largest luxury liner usually provided. The 510<sup>th</sup> Fighter Squadron's officers slept in cabins while the enlisted men swung in hammocks below decks and just above the ship's waterline. Large rats darted across the overhead at night, and the men apprehensively watched for signs of submarines during the day. On 6 March 1944, the ship docked in Liverpool, a city run down and dirty, still recovering from the Luftwaffe's attacks in 1940. The men disembarked, laden with heavy field packs, their issued weapons, and their duffel bags and boarded a blacked-out train for the overnight trip to Christchurch, an English city of 20,000. Buses and Government Issue (GI) service trucks took them the rest of the way to the base located on the grounds of the old Bure Homage Manor House just outside the town, twenty-five miles west-southwest of Southampton on England's southern coast. The squadron had made it to Europe.<sup>1</sup>

With air superiority having been attained by the Allied air forces, the IX TAC spent the spring of 1944 preparing its nineteen tactical fighter groups for the second, preinvasion mission of tactical units—isolating the battlefield for the coming invasion of the European continent. Commands were organized into wings of three or more groups,

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<sup>1</sup> Nolte, *Thunder Monsters Over Europe*, p. 11.



each under its respective commander. During the first half of 1944, Quesada, now commanding the IX Air Support Command and Fighter Command, and having just come from the North African campaign where he led the Twelfth Fighter Command, was to aid in the preparation and execution of the Normandy invasion. Beginning in February and continuing through May 1944, Brereton, Quesada, and their staffs helped build the largest tactical air arm of the war.<sup>2</sup> Quesada oversaw not only the preinvasion preparations with regards to his airmen's tactical capabilities, but also the logistics of creating and maintaining a communications network for his flying forces during their push over the Channel and advance into Germany.<sup>3</sup>

Quesada's career had taken him in many directions before he arrived in England. He had always been a natural leader and a gifted athlete, playing quarterback for his high school football team in Kingston, Pennsylvania and at the University of Maryland. Quesada had enrolled in flying school before graduating. Because he did not enter flight school from a military academy, he received his military training as a cadet in ground schools. As a cadet at Brooks Field in San Antonio, Texas, Quesada quickly took to flying. After graduating from flight school in 1925, he was offered the chance to play baseball for the St. Louis Cardinals, who had spotted him while playing an exhibition game with the cadet team in St. Louis. He soon realized he did not have what it took to make it as professional baseball player and got a job with the Treasury Department's Criminal Investigation Division that often took him to Detroit on business. While in Detroit he visited friends stationed at Selfridge Field and started to miss his days as a pilot.

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<sup>2</sup> Craven and Cate, *Army Air Forces in World War II*, vol. 3, p. 56.

<sup>3</sup> Hughes, *Over Lord*, pp. 110-12.

In the mid-1920s, the Army held examinations that allowed applicants, if they passed, to accept a commission in the Regular Army (the Army's professional core), which gave Quesada the chance to get back in the cockpit. The examinations were held only when West Point graduates did not fill the officer vacancies in the service. Quesada passed, answering 100 percent of the questions correctly, was given a commission, and assigned in 1927 to Bolling Field in southeast Washington, D.C. Quesada participated in the famous *Question Mark* flight with Ira Eaker and Carl Spaatz, which demonstrated air-to-air refueling in 1929. In 1931, he was assigned to assist the air attaché to Cuba, Maj. Gen. James Edmond Fechet, both men accompanying the United States ambassador to Cuba, Harry Guggenheim. For two years, Quesada aided Fechet in maintaining diplomatic contact between the United States Army Air Corps and Cuba.<sup>4</sup> Fechet was famous for considering the well being and needs of his men, and also for guiding the careers of men he felt showed promise. This lesson—among countless others learned while serving so closely under a flag officer who had served as commandant of the Advanced Flying School at Kelly Field, assistant chief of the Air Service from 1924 to 1927, and finally Chief of the Air Service from 1927 until he retired in 1931—was not lost on Quesada who would exhibit similar concern for his men in World War II.<sup>5</sup>

Quesada gained most of his experience commanding flying units during the early World War II battles in Africa and Sicily. He was young, daring, and not as devoted to the doctrine of strategic bombing as were his superiors. Believing in the value of

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<sup>4</sup> Quesada, 12 May 1975, Tape 1-Side 1, pp. 2-29, 61.

<sup>5</sup> United States Air Force, Biographies, "Major General James Edmond Fechet," <http://www.af.mil/AboutUs/Biographies/Display/tabid/225/Article/107096/major-general-james-edmond-fechet.aspx> (accessed 6 September 2013).

combined arms cooperation, he made an effort to promote the understanding of the efficacy of tactical air power in the young pilots he commanded. Occasionally, while in England and unbeknownst to his superiors, he jumped into one of the airplanes and flew missions with the men. Whether this was inspired by camaraderie or just a reckless desire to see some action, Quesada had a clear understanding of the conditions faced by the pilots daily and developed a unique vantage point from which to draft his plans for the command's fighter groups.<sup>6</sup> The young general, his staff, commanders, and pilots had no more than two months to prepare, train, and perform as an effective tactical air force.

The officers and men of the 510<sup>th</sup> arrived ready to prove themselves up to the challenge. Once at Christchurch, tents on the manor's front lawn were quarters for the enlisted men, while the group headquarters, the officers' mess hall, the commanding officer's quarters, and the officers' club were located inside the house. The pilots were housed in groups of four, in nine nearby cottages off the base. Among its many responsibilities, the group's Engineering Section had the formidable task of setting up camp and scavenging for building materials around the base's trash piles to construct a floor for the Engineering Office. Showers were for officer personnel only; at first enlisted men were bused to nearby Bournemouth once a week to bathe at the Royal Bath Hotel. Milligan and the Medical Department, located in the trophy room in the estate's horse stables, eventually turned an old horse trough and a coal-fired oven into a makeshift shower system for the enlisted men to use on base.<sup>7</sup> The stables housed the

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<sup>6</sup> Quesada, 13 May 1975, Tape 2-Side 2, pp. 11, 28.

<sup>7</sup> 510 FS, "Squadron History," April 1944, IRIS No. 00060987, pp. 8-11, in USAF Collections, AFHRA.

post-exchange (PX) as well as both the Material and Personal Equipment sections, and the group motor pool.<sup>8</sup> The group's Communications Division erected a radio homing station and a communications system connecting the headquarters and the fighter groups. Major importance was put on communications for the tactical forces as they often had to respond to immediate calls. Frequently, the Communications section had to build the systems from scratch as they did not yet exist in England.<sup>9</sup> The squadron's electrical division constructed the base's power plants, field lighting equipment, battery carts, and lighting kits for the enlisted men's tents. The group was still assigned to strategic bombardment support, predominantly escort missions, and not considered fully operational for air support in cooperation with ground forces until the end of March.<sup>10</sup>

Shortly after Ferguson and Delashaw arrived, just over two weeks before the rest of the group, Delashaw was promoted to lieutenant colonel and named the new group commander after Ferguson was promoted to assistant chief of staff with the Ninth Fighter Command. Ferguson's transfer came as a shock and a hard blow to base morale, especially among the pilots. He had been with them from the beginning in Walterboro and had helped train the inexperienced fighter pilots in the states and England, critiquing every day's exercises and demanding excellence, while building the group's confidence at the same time with encouragement and guidance. Making the transition easier was that Delashaw had also been with the group since Walterboro and was universally well-liked. His smooth transition to group commander resulted from his impressive organizational experience and a thorough understanding of the training needed to produce effective

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<sup>8</sup> Nolte, *Thunder Monsters Over Europe*, p. 12.

<sup>9</sup> Quesada, 13 May 1975, Tape 2-Side 2, p.14.

<sup>10</sup> 510 FS, "Squadron History," April 1944, pp. 8-11.

fighter pilots for the war in Europe. Delashaw, along with Squadron Commander Bruce Parcell, considered unit cohesiveness of the utmost importance, and the majority of the squadron's training missions focused to some extent on enhancing group consciousness.<sup>11</sup>

When the squadron's Republic P-47 Thunderbolts arrived in Europe, the aircraft arrived without the most recent modifications, much to the disappointment of ground crews. The aircraft were supposed to arrive with special shackles to carry one 200-gallon auxiliary fuel tank under the fuselage, allowing for longer range when flying the new tactical missions over France and Germany. Instead, the crews had to outfit the aircraft on base, and with the lack of tools available, delays in flight training became an infuriating interruption to the squadron's preparation.<sup>12</sup> Uncertainty among the higher-ups regarding the planes' outward appearance delayed cosmetic adjustments as well. Headquarters deemed the natural metal finish of the planes ideal, and pilots agreed the existing camouflage paint was pointless in the air, but no airman understood why the camouflaged models could not suffice while the matter was decided. Mechanics procured 10,000 gallons of paint remover before someone at the Ninth's headquarters decreed that while future planes would have the metal finish, taking the paint off the existing planes was unnecessary. Next it was decided that the camouflage did offer protection while the planes were on the ground and that only the tops of the planes should be painted. Headquarters felt, however, that as long as the allies maintained air supremacy, camouflage was not necessary. The final decision on paint came when it was

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<sup>11</sup> Nolte, *Thunder Monsters Over Europe*, p. 16.

<sup>12</sup> James J. Haley, *The Role of the Fighter in Air Warfare* (New York: Ziff-Davis Flying Books, 1978), p. 138.

discovered that airplanes without paint flew an average ten miles an hour faster than those with paint.<sup>13</sup>

The Air Service Supply, a subordinate of the Army's Services of Supply (SOS) catering to the specific needs of the Air Forces, had also established sections in southern England. For the duration of the war, Air Service Supply organized and operated the air bases in the United Kingdom and on the Continent, secured and issued equipment and supplies to air units, and arranged for any necessary systems of air transport when supplying air units in the ETO. Army Services of Supply provided "services and supplies to meet the military requirements of all U.S. commands."<sup>14</sup> Air Service Supply had the added task of organizing and operating air bases in the combat zone that still had all the needs of an airbase stateside. Typical airbases in the ETO included facilities for both housing and sustaining the men, offices for personnel, facilities needed for carrying out air missions such as runways, control towers, air communications equipment, weather apparatus, off-base navigational aids, night lighting devices, as well as shops and warehouses for maintaining aircraft and other equipment.<sup>15</sup>

Throughout April, the squadron gradually shifted, along with most of the fighter squadrons across England, into tactical fighting units assigned to specific sectors to clear enemy troop, supply, and transport as part of their mission to isolate the battlefield. The preinvasion interdiction program lasted for approximately two months and almost all of

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<sup>13</sup> IX TAC, "Unit History," April 1944, pp. 6-7, IRIS No. 00237285, in USAF Collections, AFHRA.

<sup>14</sup> Brig. Gen. A. J. Lyon, 2 June 1942, notes from meeting at USA Army Forces in the British Isles (USAFBI) Headquarters, "Questions of Principle Governing Services of Supply peculiar to the U.S. Army Air Forces Units operating in the United Kingdom," World War II European Army Records, National Archives, [www.Fold3.com](http://www.Fold3.com) (accessed 8 June 2013).

<sup>15</sup> Craven and Cate, *Army Air Forces in World War II*, vol. 6, pp. 119-120.

the Ninth's effort was devoted to attacking marshaling yards in France and bridges across the Seine River. In order to maintain as much secrecy as possible regarding invasion plans, Quesada's tactical groups doubled their interdiction efforts by devoting an equal number of missions isolating the battlefields of Normandy and at Pas de Calais—an alternate site meant to deceive the German intelligence sections observing the preinvasion preparations and attempting to estimate the place and time of the Allies attack. The Ninth destroyed almost every German marshaling yard and aerodrome in France in the six weeks preceding D-Day. Rarely during the interdiction program, a dogfight with the few remaining German fighters in France broke out—even after air superiority was unquestionably attained by the Allies—at which point the men were allowed to exercise independent action, relying on their own flexibility and talent. While the danger of the dogfights could not be ignored, the young and eager pilots also looked forward to such skirmishes.<sup>16</sup>

Orders for the group's first operational mission on 11 April 1944 took the airmen over northwest France to begin a series of missions covering the enemy coast from the Cherbourg Peninsula to Holland, and meant that the 405<sup>th</sup> was officially operational. These missions were for the purpose of familiarizing the airmen with the local geography within their assigned sector, and soon outnumbered bomber escort missions, a development for which the men were thankful. There was an exciting increase in the bomb tonnage expended, with the squadron carrying out experiments using two 1000-pound bombs.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Quesada, 13 May 1975, Tape 2-Side 2, pp. 24-26.

<sup>17</sup> IX TAC, "Unit History," April 1944, pp. 1, 4

As the invasion grew closer, the group's commanders focused intently on their tactical training for interdiction missions and stepped up the number of training missions emphasizing low-level bombing, reconnaissance, low-level navigation, convoy patrol, and smoke-laying. Training also continued to stress cooperation with ground forces in preparation for the Ninth's postinvasion mission of providing close air support. These training missions increasingly relied on the fighter pilots' reconnaissance reports. The squadron followed the movements of the Commander-in-Chief of the American ground forces Lt. Gen. Omar Bradley's First Army. The "practice" missions were designed to hone the unit's air-to-ground recognition and reporting and were guided by the squadron's assigned ALO.<sup>18</sup>

The intelligence sections prepared the operations plotting board as well as the briefing map for the group's briefing room. Briefing was conducted on a group basis for all pilots assigned to the mission and led by the group commander, having been preemptively briefed himself by the S-2 officer whose job it was to inform the commander of enemy capabilities in the target area. Interrogation was conducted on a squadron basis, gathering any and all of the recon information the pilots were trained to observe and report, and then produce reports for the group's intelligence section. Operational training was also conducted by the intelligence section, which produced all intelligence and operational reports (except those produced by the Statistical Section). In addition, the intelligence section also processed all operational orders and relayed each accordingly, allowing the intelligence section to have complete knowledge of each mission.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., pp. 7, 15-18.



The squadron's crewmen experimented with refueling and rearming at an advanced airstrip during the mid-April field exercises to determine whether or not the mechanic crews could accommodate a fighter squadron flying two hundred sorties in a day. The results showed a deficiency in combat operations training within the squadron as well as insufficient cooperation between the squadrons and the ground crews. The Aerodrome Squadron was thereafter included as a vital part of the fighter group's future training missions. It was also decided that the pilots should receive food and drink at the airstrips and be allowed rest when possible as the exercises also showed pilots' effectiveness declined after four to five hours of combat flying.<sup>20</sup>

During May, the pilots' training included rifle practice, camouflage instruction, and training in chemical warfare. Some felt the "school of the soldier" training was a waste of time for airmen who believed they were performing their individual tasks competently, while others appreciated that they were receiving the same instruction as everyone else in the Army. But the pilots all agreed that if they were expected to participate, they preferred that the training be scheduled during the work week and not during their rest days and free time. As invasion plans developed, a new-fangled phrase around base signaled the emergence of a new, elite class among the officers, though no one was ever sure exactly who and how one qualified. The "Bigot List" denoted those few men privy to the invasion plan. "Are you Bigoted?" was commonly heard in the mess hall as the men poked around for any new information regarding "D Day" and constantly offered their own speculations for when and where it would take place. The

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<sup>19</sup> 405 FG, "Group History," April 1944, p. 4, IRIS No. 00090621, in USAF Collections, AFHRA.

<sup>20</sup> IX TAC, "Unit History," April 1944, pp. 8-9.

squadron discussed the invasion abstractly, almost as if it had yet to sink in that they would be involved.<sup>21</sup>

The 510<sup>th</sup>, as part of the Ninth's preinvasion interdiction program isolating the battlefield, carried out missions against Germany's nearby railroad marshaling yards, bridges, as well as aerodromes in northern France, with its greatest success achieved against railroads and highway bridges. The first bombing missions of the month targeted an aerodrome in Dreux, the roundhouse at Bethune Labuissiere, and three coastal gun positions just south of Calais. The squadron eagerly took off towards the targets, but excitement dwindled when IX TAC headquarters altered or canceled two out of three of the missions due to inclement weather. The airmen had not yet grasped just what a glimpse into the future the scratched missions offered.

Army Air Forces commanders helped maintain the morale of their airmen by attempting to balance the number of missions each pilot flew with the operational needs of the theater. The AAF determined the maximum number of missions flown in each tour by taking attrition rates and calculating how many missions each pilot could fly and still have a 50 percent chance of surviving the tour.<sup>22</sup> The Twelfth Air Force calculated the "maximum effort of the average flier" at closer to 60 to 80 percent chance of completion.<sup>23</sup> For the 510<sup>th</sup> specifically, the completion of tour was based on both flying hours—which the pilot took with him even if he was transferred—and the number of

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<sup>21</sup> IX TAC, "Unit History," May 1944, pp. 2-3, IRIS No. 00237286, in USAF Collections, AFHRA.

<sup>22</sup> Dwight S. Mears, "The Catch-22 Effect: The Lasting Stigma of Wartime Cowardice in the U.S. Army Air Forces," *Journal of Military History* 77 (July 2013): pp. 1025-54.

<sup>23</sup> David R. Jones, "U.S. Air Force Combat Psychiatry," in eds. Franklin D. Jones, Linetter R. Sparacino, Victoria L. Wilcox, Joseph M. Rothberg, James W. Stokes, *War Psychiatry* (Falls Church, VA: Office of the Surgeon General, United States Army, 1995), p. 187.

missions flown. Pilots in the 510<sup>th</sup> flew, on average, approximately 200 hours and at least 85 missions before completing their tours, always with the caveat that rotation out depended on a permissible military situation. In other words, if a pilot's flying time and number of missions was reaching the understood maximum but the military situation necessitated that pilot's skills and time, rotation was postponed until the military situation changed.

Additionally, commanders monitored indicators of low morale at the unit level. Specifically, flight surgeons like Doc Milligan were charged with recognizing the signs of combat fatigue and determining whether the pilot could benefit from a little rest or time away from flying. As psychiatrist David Jones explains, "Above all, flight surgeons must understand that combat fatigue is a normal reaction of a normal group of people to a dreadfully abnormal situation."<sup>24</sup> Understandably, the relationship between flight surgeons and pilots was a uniquely intimate one, as each surgeon had to know his pilots well enough to offer the best care and plan of action if combat fatigue arose.

For its part, the squadron tried to make the most of free time in England while awaiting the Continental invasion, and in between interdiction and reconnaissance missions and training. The men did their best to use what little resources they could acquire to establish social spots on base and organize activities that helped to keep their spirits high while away from home. Ingenuity helped turn the base in Christchurch, and every one of their European bases afterward, into a community with many of the comforts of home. Group morale directly influenced productivity, though admittedly to varying degrees, and depended largely on mutual trust. This trust was in turn formed through repeated mission accomplishment and social engagement. The importance of

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 188.

fostering bonds that connected the pilot to the group and the group's successes cannot be overstated. As Rebecca Cameron explained, "Once in combat, if you were to die in the smoke and fear and noise of battle above the earth, it would not be with strangers."<sup>25</sup>

The Mercury Bar, a makeshift and unofficial officers' club, was located in the base's Interrogation Tent. The 510<sup>th</sup> officers pooled the club's furnishings, whether borrowed or stolen, from other departments. Bench cushions were fashioned out of the pilots' mattresses, ashtrays fashioned from wire-lined drums pinched from the Communications Section, and shipping boxes were swiped from under the noses of the Technical Supply Section. Staff Sgt. Lynn E. Trank, the resident artist responsible for most of the squadron's nose art, decorated the Mercury Bar with "murals" depicting a day in the life of a fighter pilot. The handiest of the group built a snack bar from scrap wood. When looking for a good time off the base, local watering holes in Christchurch like Ye Old Barn Inn, The Haven, and the King's Arms drew in the young American pilots.<sup>26</sup> Many nights the men of the 510<sup>th</sup> enjoyed English pints and proudly belted out the "Old Five Tenth":

Ever singing, ever swinging, that's the old 510<sup>th</sup>.

Here they come, let them through, make way!

Ever scrapping, never napping, that's the old 510<sup>th</sup>.

On the ball, spring and fall, night and day.

They'll be cheering, you'll be hearing of our gang some day;

You'll admit we're the best in the play.

Our ambitions bring traditions that will win someday:

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<sup>25</sup> Cameron, *Training to Fly*, p. 480.

<sup>26</sup> 510 FS, "Squadron History," April 1944, p. 12.

As the 510<sup>th</sup> gets on its way.<sup>27</sup>

As summer slowly turned the English weather warmer, men turned in their overcoats to lighten up the equipment load. There were informal track meets among the fighter groups, and dance contests that necessitated the participation of nearby Red Cross nurses. The snack shop closed down and instead served up hot dogs and sodas picnic style outside in the sunshine. Sgt. Dick Thomas started up a music program in the officers' club that played requests from the men, which Thomas insisted was preceded with small lessons on the significance and composition of each piece.<sup>28</sup>

Daily training exercises revolved around an increasing number bombing missions over France, which unfortunately led to increased risk. One of the first casualties was Capt. William B. Taylor. An early-May transfer and newly selected group operations officer, Taylor was forced to bail out over Knocke, Belgium, south of Breskens in the southwestern Netherlands. On one of the few remaining escort missions, Taylor and eight others had accompanied a bomber squadron on a raid over Hanover on 13 May. His wingman was Arlie Blood, who was also the flight leader. Taylor's engine began cutting out at approximately 18,000 feet, and ten minutes later he lost power and had leaked nearly all his oil across the Belgian wheat fields below. Blood radioed to see if his wingman was all right, and Taylor radioed back that he was good for the moment but shared his doubts about reaching the base before he and the aircraft went down. Ten minutes later, at 2,000 feet, Taylor called over to tell Blood that he was bailing out. Without sufficient speed, he found himself unable to roll the airplane, as was typically necessary before bailing out, instead barely leveling the aircraft before exiting at 1,000

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<sup>27</sup> Song, lyrics by Lt. R. L. Levy in *ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>28</sup> IX TAC, "Unit History," May 1944, pp. 2-3.

feet. Taylor made it to the ground safely and waved to Blood and his flight, signaling that he had landed unscathed. Four or five Belgians who had stopped to watch him parachute down looked on as he got to his feet and ran across the field and took cover in a hedge. After circling Taylor, Blood and the other two pilots climbed back to 7,000 feet and returned to England.<sup>29</sup>

On 21 May 1944, the squadron enjoyed the Happy Hunting Day of the month. Assigned a train-busting sweep on the Brest Peninsula, the squadron's tallies for the day totaled nine locomotives, three trains, eight supply wagons, and two radio towers. In addition to the large tally, the 510<sup>th</sup> accomplished all of this, remarkably, in under an hour. Again, these missions reflected the Ninth's broader interdiction program to prevent enemy troop movement and cut the enemy's supply lines on the Peninsula, so that the battlefield was clear of enemy forces when the invading Allied forces came across the Channel in the coming weeks.

Blood was the 510<sup>th</sup> flight commander on an interdiction mission that employed the entire 405<sup>th</sup> Fighter Group. The 510<sup>th</sup> provided cover for the group's other two squadrons while they strafed a German supply train. When another train appeared on the tracks, this one's locomotive trailing twenty-one cars behind it, Blood requested and received permission to attack. Minutes later the train was a smoking ruin after several hits from Blood. His wingman, Lt. Leon C. Sparkman, also secured a hit, knocking out the back of the train. Ace Drummond, leading the second element of the mission, made his pass flying low on the other side of Sparkman, and spotted smoke coming from the

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<sup>29</sup> Office of the Intelligence Officer, 510<sup>th</sup> Fighter-bomber Squadron, 405<sup>th</sup> Fighter-bomber Group, 15 May 1944, "Bail out of Capt. W. B. Taylor, over Holland," Missing Air Crew Reports (MACRs) of the Army Air Forces, [www.Fold3.com](http://www.Fold3.com) (accessed 5 June 2013).

underside of Blood's aircraft as he pulled up. Drummond looked over just in time to see the P-47's canopy open and Blood bail out, but could not follow him to the ground due to the overcast weather conditions.<sup>30</sup> Blood landed in enemy territory, but managed initially to escape capture by joining up with the French Underground. The Germans eventually caught up with him a month later during an expedition with the Underground and he became a prisoner of war.<sup>31</sup> Neither his whereabouts, nor his condition was known for almost half of that first year in Europe. The 510<sup>th</sup> had lost two of its best pilots in less than two weeks and the invasion was not even underway.<sup>32</sup>

After a week of exciting—yet emotionally and physically taxing—missions, the officers threw their first official party in the ETO on Tuesday, 23 May 1944 in the Mercury Club everyone had worked so hard to complete. Doc Milligan got the party going with a concoction that took on many names as the men moved across Europe.<sup>33</sup> First known as “Rx Spiritus Frumenti” and finally as Doc Milligan's Kickapoo Joy Juice,<sup>34</sup> the crude cocktail consisted of 150-proof grain alcohol and GI cans of grapefruit juice mixed in an unused gas tank.<sup>35</sup> A three-piece band played as officers spun their English guests from the Women's Auxiliary Air Force (WAAF) around the makeshift dance floor. Lt. Boleslaw Kociencki, or “K-Kid” as he was called, treated the men to a

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<sup>30</sup> “Arlie J. Blood,” MACR, 24 May 1944, [www.Fold3.com](http://www.Fold3.com) (accessed 5 June 2013).

<sup>31</sup> For more on Arlie Blood's experience with the French Underground, his fascinating experience in a German POW camp, and his daring escape read his autobiography, *Only Angels Have Wings*.

<sup>32</sup> Nolte, *Thunder Monsters Over Europe*, p. 23.

<sup>33</sup> 510 FS, “Squadron History,” May 1944, p. 7, IRIS No. 00060988, in USAF Collections, AFHRA.

<sup>34</sup> The name of Milligan's concoction came from a similarly pungent alcoholic drink featured in Al Capp's Li'l Abner comic strip.

<sup>35</sup> Nolte, *Thunder Monsters Over Europe*, p. 43.

rousing rendition of “Ragged but Right,” his Polish accent adding an extra element of entertainment.

“K-Kid” was an “All-American” type despite immigrating to America as a teenager. Although a skilled pilot with two months in the ETO, K-Kid retained a youthful face that caused more than one army officer to do a double take as he climbed into the giant P-47. Kociencki received an Air Medal in May after having completed ten fighter-bomber sorties in England, and Quesada was on base to award the medals and pass on the AAF’s gratitude. He stood in front of the K-Kid, pinned on the medal, shook the young man’s hand, moved to the next pilot in line, and then turned back to Kociencki and asked “How old are you, son?” to which he responded “Nineteen, sir.” Quesada, wearing a perplexed expression, nodded and then asked “Does your mother know you’re here?”<sup>36</sup>

As the party continued, Group Commander Delashaw and Squadron Commander Parcell sat in the corner watching the revelry, contentedly engaging in what they referred to as “Hangar Flying.” After several hours of dancing and more than a few rounds of cocktails, the men “descended on the kitchen, on what Lt. (*sic*) Witozen had managed to leave.” Along with the good doctor’s cocktails, Lt. Edward H. Witozen had singlehandedly prepared all of the sandwiches for the evening, taking painstaking efforts to make the presentation just right, before singlehandedly eating most of them himself. A good time was had by all, leading even the group’s chaplain, Capt. Frank J. Landholt, to concede, “There never was a party quite like this one in many ways. There may never be

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<sup>36</sup> Charles D. Mohrle, correspondence with author, 12 November 2004, p. 2.



one like it again.” The observation would prove somberly accurate as many in attendance would not be there for the next squadron party.<sup>37</sup>

A feeling of nervous expectation and impatience grew as preparations for “D-Day” increased. Passes were restricted, leaves canceled, new replacement personnel shipped in, and civilians stopped at checkpoints around the city. From mid-May on, the squadron’s main source of opposition, when out on bombing and recon missions, came from the antiaircraft guns of the Luftwaffe’s ground gunners as the Luftwaffe proved less of a threat each day. The Germans’ antiaircraft artillery—*Flugzeugabwehrkanoe*, “flak” for short—came from below and was especially threatening to the squadron as the number of low-altitude missions increased.

Despite the disheartening losses of Blood and Taylor, May ended with a measure of accomplishment, and was by far the busiest month the squadron had experienced thus far. Air medals were awarded to seven men in the squadron including Lieutenants Kociencki, Blood, and Howard Curran, Major Parcell, and Captains William Taylor and Ralph Jenkins. Of the 809,000 rounds of ammunition expended by the Ninth Tactical Command, the 405<sup>th</sup> Fighter Group was responsible for 149,000 rounds—more than 18 percent—and declared the “shootingest” group. At the end of the month, IX TAC headquarters assigned each of the 405<sup>th</sup>’s three squadrons a new sector to patrol and attack when necessary between the Brest Peninsula and Holland. The airmen correctly sensed that the invasion could begin any day.<sup>38</sup>

As their summer in the ETO continued, a conspicuous change was apparent along the Channel. Hundreds of new boats crowded the waters while thousands of ground

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<sup>37</sup> 510 FS, “Squadron History,” May 1944, pp. 7-8.

<sup>38</sup> IX TAC, “Unit History,” May 1944, pp. 4-6.

troops poured into Christchurch. More checkpoints went up along civilian coastal roadways and all traffic in and out of the town was monitored. The officers' travel was strictly controlled and agents from the Counter Intelligence Corps (CIC) arrived in England ready to thwart any potential security leak. Passes and leaves were restricted to twenty-five miles from the coast. Perhaps most telling, both aircraft and personnel arrived at a noticeably swifter pace, quite uncharacteristic of the past two months in Christchurch. Anxious enthusiasm swept through the base, the anticipation at times fraying the nerves of the restless fighter pilots who were now in their third month in Europe. A strong sense of impending battle swelled as every day passed.<sup>39</sup>

On 5 June 1944, IX TAC headquarters released "Doorbell," the schedule for D-Day missions, to the group commanders, after which the base was locked down completely. When replacement pilot Capt. Charlie Appel arrived just hours after the plans for D-Day came down, the six-foot-four-inch cowboy from Wyoming could not have been farther from home. Because of his size, the AAF considered him better suited for a bomber squadron, or rather not suited for the snug cockpit of the fighter planes he requested to fly while in flight school. Whether due to his stubborn determination or the rising need for fighter pilot replacements, Appel eventually ended up with the 510<sup>th</sup> flying a P-47.<sup>40</sup>

At 0330, on 6 June 1944, the men were yanked from their slumber as the Charge of Quarters (CQ, typically an enlisted man charged with administrative tasks after hours) jostled the pilots, excitedly shaking them awake. The pilots were due to be airborne by

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<sup>39</sup> Nolte, *Thunder Monsters Over Europe*, p. 18.

<sup>40</sup> Memoir, Charles A. Appel, *Written by an Old Country Boy* (Marietta, GA: Appel, 2002), pp. 245-46.

0430. Still groggy with sleep and almost robotically pulling on their flight suits, the pilots suddenly realized that the big day had come and that their missions were less than an hour away. As the pilots reached their planes, they saw that their crews had painted each of the P-47s with broad black-and-white “invasion stripes” in order to aid ground forces in distinguishing the Allied aircraft from enemy aircraft and lessen instances of friendly fire. And while the Germans did manage a few dozen, ineffective, sorties over the beaches that day, Eisenhower was so confident of Allied air superiority that morning that he personally assured the men on the ground to fear not if they saw an airplane overhead because it would be an Allied aircraft.<sup>41</sup>

In addition to their exhaustion and fatigue from the long day—the squadron flew rotating missions for nineteen and half hours—the 6 June mission assigned to the 510<sup>th</sup> left more than one pilot disenchanted with his D-Day experience. The squadron was assigned patrol duty over the Bay of Biscay, missions that sent them in the opposite direction from the action in Normandy (but far enough from their airstrip in Christchurch to necessitate use of the P-47’s recently installed drop tanks). The Allies had a line of destroyers, spaced half a mile apart, anchored in the Channel from Land’s End to the tip of the Brest Peninsula, blocking the Germans’ subs from the peninsula’s southern coast. American B-24s and British “Walrus” antisubmarine aircraft from the RAF Coastal Command flew above the destroyers with depth charges. The bombers circled above the destroyers, the 510<sup>th</sup> circled above the bombers, and RAF Spitfires circled above the 510<sup>th</sup>.

Four of the squadron’s P-47s would take-off, fly forty-five minutes to the Channel, circle for forty-five minutes, and make the forty-five-minute return flight back

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., pp. 92-94.

to base. While this was an important mission, as U-boats creeping up on the invasion convoys could have had serious consequences, the fighter pilots cynically came to refer to their unexciting, albeit significant assignment as “The Caribbean Defense Patrol,” obviously craving a more active role in the invasion. Flying his first-ever mission in a P-47 on D-Day, Charlie Appel remembered, “All I saw on D-Day was a line of destroyers and a whole lot of water.”<sup>42</sup>

Throughout their preparations for the invasion, the communication engineers and Quesada had developed and relied heavily on three separate communication systems unique to TAC, as a means of maintaining constant communication between IX TAC headquarters, the fighter wings, groups, and squadrons, and between controllers and pilots in the air. First, The Ninth’s Communication Sections acquired two British Microwave Early Warning System (MEWS)—radar sets originally designed as a static defense system to warn of incoming German attacks. MEWS were the largest and most effective radar sets available in 1944, featuring both excellent range and echo. The British had no use for the MEWS once the Luftwaffe was seemingly eliminated and posed absolutely no threat on their side of the Channel. Quesada’s forces did not have anything close to this powerful a radar, so he asked the RAF if he could use them and was given the two they had installed on the island’s southern coast.

While in England, a system of matching radio chatter to radar blips developed after Quesada witnessed British radar controllers putting their directional finder on incoming aircraft while listening in on the airmen’s radio frequency. The Ninth’s communications engineers eventually modified their MEWS and used the radars as means of controlling their own aircraft from headquarters. Quesada, along with his

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 245.

communications department, considered the system's long range a huge asset and without it, the Ninth's controllers' communication with the tactical pilots would have suffered considering the far more limited range of existing systems.

Continuing to experiment with their new MEWS, American controllers deduced that, considering the Luftwaffe posed no threat to England, it was safe to assume that any blip left on the scope was an Allied aircraft. Controllers could hear the pilots talking back and forth among the airplanes, each offering a different explanation for where they were and how to get back to base. By listening as the pilots tried to get their bearings, and then coordinating the chatter with the blips on their radar screens, the controllers learned to put two and two together. Likewise, when controllers tuned to the necessary radio frequency, they could talk to the pilots. The system was used thereafter as an offensive weapon for getting aircraft on course to the targets instead of the defensive purpose for which it was originally designed. From that point on, the Ninth controlled all of their aircraft using this system and Quesada eventually passed down the MEWS to Brig. Gen. Otto P. Weyland's XIX TAC.

Essentially, the system stretched the range of their radar to that of their radio, which was massive considering a second, equally impressive, communication development. The Ninth Air Force enjoyed, and depended on, a communications system using FM radio unlike anything available even to Eisenhower and the ground forces. The commercial radio system in the United States was slated for a large, decade-long overhaul transitioning from amplitude modulation (AM) to frequency modulation (FM) before the outbreak of war in Europe sidelined the project and materials and resources were needed elsewhere. With the whole venture shut down suddenly, there was an

abundance of useless FM transmitters left over that subsequently ended up in pawn shops or with junk dealers. One of Quesada's signal battalion members who suspected the Air Forces could make better use of the transmitters brought this to Quesada's attention. Quesada then convinced the Signal Corps to buy several dozen of the FM transmitters and receivers. Thus, the Ninth enjoyed an FM communications net so wide and so clear that it outshone any communication network in the entire ETO.

A third communications development uniquely serving the needs of the Ninth was its Signal Corps construction battalion made up entirely of American Telephone and Telegraph (AT&T) communications engineers. A phone call had been placed to General Arnold from an AT&T executive. After realizing that dozens of his employees had been drafted into the Army as enlisted personnel, the executive suggested to Arnold that his employees might better serve the Army grouped together as a communications construction battalion. He explained further that his employees were arriving in Europe with more training than the Army could provide in five years, and that by exploiting this experience rather than assigning them to combat units, the communications experts could better serve the AAF's goals. The AT&T battalion was eventually assembled, arrived in England, and shortly thereafter developed a communication system establishing telephone communications between headquarters, the frontlines, and the fighter groups' airstrips before groups moved onto an advanced airfield. The battalion set up a dial telephone system—with calls directed to an extension independent of an operator and according to a specific dialed number—in the combat zone before there was such a

system available in the United States, hooking up half a dozen lines to panels they hung on trees and connecting the lines back to their switchboard.<sup>43</sup>

In addition to these innovations, the AAF relied on several variations of the Identify Friend or Foe (IFF) system to both identify properly, and avoid unintended encounters among, friendly forces. One variation involved a centralized communication system that kept air and ground forces informed about the others' location and proximity. Considering this, any variation in the direction of troop movement or aircraft approach signaled that the unit in question was a foe until otherwise informed. For example, when the Ninth assigned tactical units to specific areas for recon and interdiction missions, the need for communication across command lines in order to identify friend or foe decreased significantly as long as the squadrons stayed in their sectors.<sup>44</sup>

Another variation of the IFF system used by the AAF was the cooperative, question-and-answer system. For tactical units this involved pilots checking in with an air controller at take off, and when nearing the front lines, with a code word that changed daily.<sup>45</sup> A cooperative, question-and-answer system might also use radar to send out a signal to which friendly pilots have a prescribed response, or bounce standard radar signals off an aircraft in question, garnering certain bits of information from the radar return bouncing back from a passive target. Finally, picking up radio transmissions in a foreign language or transmissions on an uncharacteristic frequency could also identify

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<sup>43</sup> Quesada, 13 May 1975, Tape 2-Side 2, pp. 30-34.

<sup>44</sup> Roger Herdman, *Who Goes There: Friend or Foe?* (Washington, DC: Office of Technology Assessment, 1993), pp. 34, 38.

<sup>45</sup> Col. Harry G. Sanders, interviewed by author, 30 November 2006.

friend or foe. Additional variations included painting specific insignias, which also changed frequently, on tanks and ground equipment large enough to view from air.<sup>46</sup>

Between D-Day and 11 June, the Ninth averaged approximately one hundred flights an hour over enemy territory at nearly two flights a minute, despite bad weather on 9 June. During those six days, fighter-bomber squadrons alone had hit more than 800 objectives. The high-intensity attacks came at a cost; the Ninth lost 112 aircraft as a result of combat. Most losses came from ground fire as the Luftwaffe had very few formations over the battle area, but the 40 enemy aircraft that made it through were destroyed over the Channel and beachheads nonetheless.<sup>47</sup> After a less-than-exciting D-Day experience, the 510<sup>th</sup> pilots saw a more satisfying degree of action in a series of armed recon missions over the Cherbourg peninsula beginning on 10 June. Continuing to isolate the battlefield as the fight moved down into the peninsula, the pilots sought out targets of opportunity in their designated sectors on the ground. In addition, the squadron carried out assigned bombing missions destroying tanks, trucks, supply lines, transport vehicles, and artillery emplacements in northern France.<sup>48</sup>

On 22 June, the 510<sup>th</sup> pilots set out on a skip-bombing mission over Cloyes, France. Skip-bombing required a great deal of skill as the pilots flew at a low level, dropped their bombs and then pulled up to make a fast getaway from the drop site. The bombs were equipped with time-delay fuses that when released skipped across the ground or water like a stone, bouncing into large targets like bridges and dams and helping to

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<sup>46</sup> Herdman, *Who Goes There*, pp. 39-42.

<sup>47</sup> AEF, 11 June 1944, "Ninth Air Force Has Flown More Than 13,000 Individual Operations Since D-Day, Averaging 100 Flights in An Hour Over The Continent, Ninth Air Force Headquarters," in Subject File No. 221: "Ninth Air Force," World War II European Army Records, National Archives, [www.Fold3.com](http://www.Fold3.com) (accessed 8 June 2013).

<sup>48</sup> 510 FS, "Squadron Unit," June 1944, p. 1, IRIS No. 00060989, in USAF Collections, AFHRA.



close off the Germans from reinforcements and resupply coming in and out of the battlefield by train and boat. The target for that day's mission was a bridge recently taken over by the Germans and used for troop and supply transport. Lt. Charles Mohrle led the "yellow flight," with Lieutenant Kociencki—the K-Kid—and Lt. Ernest Boucher flying "yellow two" and "yellow three," respectively. As he pulled up and away from the target after the attack, Mohrle sighted Bf-109 fighters diving down toward them through the broken overcast.

As the German pilot and his two wingmen flew toward Mohrle, Boucher, and Kociencki, Mohrle cried out "Bandits!" over the radio. The German flight leader aimed at Mohrle in a steep dive but failed to get the P-47 in his sights. Boucher released his bombs and swung back, falling behind one of the Messerschmitts, tailing the German and aiming to fire. Kociencki pulled up from his pass and prepared to meet the same airplane for a head-on pass. The German leader's wingman fired on Kociencki, who returned fire up to zero range, accurately striking the Bf-109 just seconds before the German's aircraft smashed into his. The collision sent both airplanes plunging in a fiery spiral to the ground, and neither pilot was seen to bail out.<sup>49</sup> The Germans vanished into the haze while Kociencki's squadron circled, searching for any sign of their mate. K-Kid was gone. Realizing there was nothing more they could do, Mohrle and Boucher headed back to the base to break the news. Dinner was quiet that evening. The loss of so popular a pilot like K-Kid dealt a hard blow to the squadron's morale, but the increasingly fast-paced missions providentially allowed the fighter pilots little time for somber reflection.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> "Bolesaw Kociencki," MACR, 24 June 1944, [www.Fold3.com](http://www.Fold3.com) (accessed 5 June 2013).

<sup>50</sup> Mohrle, correspondence with author, 12 November 2004; 510 FS, "Squadron History," June 1944, pp. 2-3.

Less than weeks later, the 510th, along with the rest of the men on base, faced still more heartbreak. Leaving on an armed recon mission, the 509<sup>th</sup> Fighter Squadron took off at 1300 on 29 June, each of their P-47s carrying two 500-pound bombs. One of the airplanes suddenly lost power during take-off and failed to clear the runway. The aircraft, flown by Lt. Vincent R. James, crashed into the neighborhood of Mudford, near the southwest corner of the airstrip, and burst into flames when the drop tank underneath the airplane exploded. The Thunderbolt's eight machine guns began firing wildly and one of the two bombs detonated. Firefighters and civilians ran towards the blazing airplane and the pilot trapped inside, unaware that one more live bomb lay just a few feet from the crash.

Lieutenants Arthur F. Williams, Mohrle, and Drummond, watching nearby as the P-47s took off, ran over to warn those surrounding the blazing aircraft about the second bomb and tried to clear the area. Within seconds, the second bomb exploded, sending burning shrapnel towards the three lieutenants. Drummond caught a splinter through his ear, missing his skull by less than an inch; fragments skinned Mohrle only slightly as the swarm of broken metal tore past him; Williams was hit the worst. The shrapnel tore the muscle from the bone on his upper arms and shot through his chest out through his back, piercing and collapsing his right lung. Williams died alongside fourteen others, with an additional twenty-four injured. The pilots, who just a month before had eagerly awaited the Continental invasion, had endured a sobering introduction to the war on the Continent, with 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. James Gleeson lamenting days later, "When Lt. Williams (*sic*) eyes finally closed, the career of one of our finest wingmen came to an untimely end."<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> 510 FS, "Squadron History," June 1944, p. 7.

During the month of June, the 510<sup>th</sup> expended a total of 127,353 rounds of .50-caliber ammunition, 412 500-pound bombs, and 52 1,000-pound bombs. From their arrival in April through the end of June, the 510<sup>th</sup> flew 958 missions: 313 bombing, 300 escort, 120 strafing, 118 patrol, and 107 sweeps. Captain Jenkins led in almost every category, completing 47 missions and achieving a total operational time of 128 hours, 25 minutes. Major Parcell was a close second, completing 42 missions and 110 hours 5 minutes flying time.<sup>52</sup>

The Fourth of July 1944, the first most of the squadron had ever celebrated outside their own hometowns, came and went without the picnics and fireworks to which they were all accustomed. The day almost done, nearly passing without any excitement at all, ended with Lt. Howard “Howie” Curran claiming a downed enemy aircraft. While flying a routine bombing mission targeting railroads between Laval and Crayon, Curran spotted a Bf-109 ahead of him. He came up on the enemy’s tail and fired, sending the German aircraft diving toward the ground trailing white smoke. Curran chased the Messerschmitt down as the German pulled up and then dove again. The pursuit went on for three miles, with Curran firing at the German all the while. The Bf-109 made a steep dive to avoid electrical wires barely fifty feet off the ground and never recovered from the plunge. Curran pulled up sharply to avoid the same wires and claimed the hit in honor of Independence Day.<sup>53</sup>

The group received movement orders directing them to its new base on the Continent. Personnel, equipment, and supplies were divided into two groups: “A” Party

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., pp. 3-4.

<sup>53</sup> 510 FS, “Squadron History,” July 1944, pp. 1-2, IRIS No. 00060990, in USAF Collections, AFHRA.

and “B” Party, so that both could independently keep the group’s airplanes operational during the move. B Party stayed behind in England to service the planes and clear off the field when they left for France. A Party had gone ahead weeks before to set things up in France and ready the airstrip to receive the airplanes of B Party. When A Party arrived on 25 June 1944, the Ninth’s engineering section was still building the airstrip, which was typical and something the group got used to as they moved from base to base, but nevertheless caused enough of a delay in the move that B Party was left to carry out its operations with the limited supplies left in England for longer than anyone had estimated. The squadron’s three dozen pilots and their aircraft left behind completed four bombing missions and one escort mission during their last week in England.<sup>54</sup>

Once across the Channel, B Party was loaded onto smaller Landing Craft Infantry (LCI) boats while still a couple of miles off the Normandy shore. Most of the boats delivered the passengers to the shore, though an unlucky few had to wade to the beach carrying their full packs and gas masks, and holding their rifles above the water. Safely delivered to France, the men then faced a two-mile hike uphill. Once over the crest, they sat, exhausted and soaked, and waited two hours for the service trucks to arrive. As the vehicles pulled up, it was hard to tell who was happiest to see whom. The weary men were relieved to see the Army trucks arrive to take them to the base so they could catch a few hours sleep before the sun came up, while the truck drivers had just sped through miles of heavily shelled territory along the coastal roadways, under constant attack from enemy ground forces. The drivers insisted their weary passengers put on their helmets

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<sup>54</sup> 405 FG, “Group History,” June 1944, p. 4, IRIS No. 00090623, in USAF Collections, AFHRA.

for the ride back and the weary passengers followed suit as their drivers seemed to wear “their helmets as if they were glued to their heads.”<sup>55</sup>

At first glance, their new home bore no semblance to what the pilots remembered either back in the States or at their previous base in Christchurch. The Army had crudely carved the base out of an apple orchard near Sainte-Mère-Èglise and laid a 3,800-foot runway of pierced-steel planks over the rain-sodden earth to be shared by the group’s fighter squadrons and an RAF night fighter squadron.<sup>56</sup> Nearby, the rotting remains of dead German soldiers, and livestock caught in the crossfire, filled the air with an unbearably putrid stench, and even though the base had not yet been cleared of land mines, the men were ordered to dig foxholes for the night with just two shovels and three picks among them. As the men crawled into their holes, just two miles from the battlefield, the group came under attack. Eighty-eight millimeter shells whizzed in from the Germans’ nearby mobile artillery units. The group could only locate their attackers by the bursts of light rhythmically flashing from the guns firing on the camp in the pitch-black night. Remarkably, A Party suffered no casualties and, after their brief but nasty introduction to life on the Continent, the men settled in for the night. They may not have been enthused about their new base, but they were now in France.<sup>57</sup> When it was B Party’s turn to make the move, the men and their equipment and supplies were airlifted to the new base by C-47 to save on transport time after the new airstrip’s construction had

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<sup>55</sup> 510 FS, “Squadron History,” July 1944, pp.10-11.

<sup>56</sup> Memoir, Charles Mohrle, “General observations and random thoughts about the 405<sup>th</sup> Fighter Group at Strip A-8, Located near Picauville, France, from 29 June, 1944 to 11 September, 1944,” in author’s possession (undated), p. 1.

<sup>57</sup> 510 FS, “Squadron History,” July 1944, p. 11.

delayed their transfer to the Continent. After the pilots flew over in their P-47s the whole group was once again located on the same base.<sup>58</sup>

During their first four months in Europe, the men of the 510<sup>th</sup> honed their skills and developed into an efficient fighting unit. As tactical air power evolved within TAC in England, so did the 510<sup>th</sup>. The men experienced the adventure and excitement of combat flying, but they also experienced losing friends and fellow fliers. Their ability to balance the seriousness of their combat missions with amusing themselves in makeshift bars and softball games would serve the men well throughout the remainder of the war.

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<sup>58</sup> 405 FG, "Group History," July 1944, p. 6, IRIS No. 00090624, in USAF Collection , AFHRA.

## **Chapter Five:**

Picauville, France (A8A)  
June 29 – September 11, 1944

General Bradley's plan for a "breakout" offensive in late June was delayed briefly while the Cherbourg Peninsula was secured and divisions from the V, VII, VIII, and IX Corps, as well as the IX Tactical Air Command, moved south from England and the French beachheads. Much to Eisenhower's disappointment, Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery, commander-in-chief of all Allied ground forces, had not bridged the gap between his ground forces and the Normandy airfields by advancing farther south towards Caen, as consistent with his D-Day objective. Bad weather disrupted the offensive at every turn; rains drenched the terrain, clouds blinded both the ground troops looking up and the airmen looking down, and the cold, damp conditions seemed to wilt the dispositions of nearly every one of the new arrivals to the Continent. Nonetheless, Bradley's breakout eventually launched on 3 July and the First Army began fighting its way south from Cherbourg, neither at the pace, nor to the ends Eisenhower expected.

Bradley caved to pressure from his superiors, who were becoming increasingly impatient with the delays, and hastily ordered his divisions to begin the breakout, even as the Germans were regrouping with the extra time the weather delays allowed them. Three days later, the operation was failing miserably. Poor weather conditions sidelined air support within the first twenty-four hours and when the mud seriously slowed the tank

divisions, the Germans took advantage of the break and reinforced their front lines with panzer divisions.<sup>1</sup> By 10 July, the possibility of a World War I-type stalemate weighed heavily on Bradley's mind as the Germans tenaciously held on to every yard of their front lines per Hitler's orders, considerably bogging down Bradley's offensive. If the operation did not shift its direction soon, failure was almost certain. Bradley thus made the decision to refocus his army's attention on a thinner German front in the nearby St. Lô region. He introduced a new plan on 13 July that depended on a breakthrough of the enemy lines, thus making way for a fast, hard push all the way to Avaranches at the Cherbourg Peninsula's southern end, and relying heavily on "massive, paralyzing air attack" preceding an all-out ground assault on the German front. The plan was named Operation COBRA and slated for 21 July.<sup>2</sup> Quesada and his tactical air forces, the only air force able and willing to make the most out of ground support assignments, were to become ever more important in the coming weeks and months.

By mid-July, Quesada and the IX TAC had nineteen fighter-bomber and reconnaissance groups, a radar control system, and fifteen airbases with additional temporary fields in Normandy.<sup>3</sup> The command's engineers feverishly worked to make ready new bases capable of receiving a new flight group on the Continent every two days.<sup>4</sup> With the first two missions of the tactical forces complete—attaining and

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<sup>1</sup> Omar N. Bradley and Clay Blair, *A General's Life: An Autobiography by the General of the Army* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983), pp. 270-71.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 272, 276.

<sup>3</sup> James Jay Carafano, *After D-Day: Operation Cobra and the Normandy Breakout* (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2000), p. 214.

<sup>4</sup> Quesada, 13 May 1975, Tape 3-Side 1, pp. 10-11.



maintaining air superiority, and isolating the battlefield—the Ninth was gearing up for the third mission, on the Continent.

Accordingly, the operations of the 510<sup>th</sup> took a different form in July 1944, along with the rest of the American tactical units in Europe. The change was described as moving from “semi-strategic to tactical” and signified that the Ninth was shifting to its post-invasion mission—providing air support for ground forces.<sup>5</sup> Flying close air support required a shift in the Ninth’s operations section as well, which refined the system of requesting air support. When a situation arose suddenly, and the ground forces needed immediate air support, there were several methods in place for communicating and facilitating those requests. Army officers were informed early in the alliance that even with the airplanes at a state of readiness, the air units would need time to assemble and brief the pilots and crews, taxi the aircraft, form in the air, and fly to the objective. A certain number of squadrons within the command were kept at standby each day to answer these calls. The time to reach the target also varied depending on the size of the formation and distance to target, but in general the fighter-bombers were over the target area in half the time it took medium and heavy bombers.<sup>6</sup>

There was also a certain protocol for who could call in a request for air support request and how requests came in. Urgent requests could originate with any ground unit commander but had to follow the chain of command until reaching a command post, where a TAC representative—typically from a division headquarters—and the

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<sup>5</sup> 405 FG, “Group History,” July 1944, p. 3, IRIS No. 00090624, in USAF Collections, AFHRA.

<sup>6</sup> The Ninth Air Force, ETOUSA, “The Tactical Air Force in Operations,” p. 7, in Subject File No. 221: “Ninth Air Force,” World War II European Army Records, National Archives, [www.Fold3.com](http://www.Fold3.com) (accessed 8 June 2013).

commander there would initiate the request. All requests had to include the following information: 1) Type and designation of target; 2) Exact location of target; 3) Direction of movement, if any, of the target; 4) All particular distinguishing characteristics of the target; 5) Location of friendly troops with respect to target bomb line; and 6) Time limits of the requested support. The TAC representative then advised the ground commander as to the practicability of the mission and as to the advisability of requesting it. If the ground commander approved, the TAC representative transmitted the request to TAC headquarters. While the request could come from a subordinate ground officer, the requests were filtered at TAC headquarters in conjunction with ground force representatives. If the two jointly agreed on the necessity of air support given the situation, the air support request would be dispatched without delay to either Fighter Control or in some cases, directly to the group.<sup>7</sup>

Six weeks after D-Day, all tactical units were out of England and continued to move south alongside the army as fast as new airstrips could be built.<sup>8</sup> While the bocage country of northern France, with its miles of hedgerows, was contributing to a massive buildup of Allied ground forces on the peninsula and allowing the Germans to strengthen their defenses daily, Quesada continued to espouse the potential contribution of his tactical units. Despite both the air commanders' preference for strategic bombing using heavy bombers, Quesada argued that his tactical forces could bomb close to ground

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<sup>7</sup> Fighter Control was at the center of each command, ie: IX Tactical Air Command. Operational and tactical control came from Fighter Control outwards to the wing and group levels. Any mission assignment would have been delivered to the wings, groups, and indirectly to the squadrons, via Fighter Control. Accordingly, when TAC and ground commanders approved requests for air support, missions reflecting this approval would have gone through Fighter Control before reaching wing and group commanders; Headquarters, Ninth Air Force, "Early History of the Ninth Air Force," ANNEX B, "Request Missions," in Subject File No. 221: "Ninth Air Force," World War II European Army Records, National Archives, [www.Fold3.com](http://www.Fold3.com) (accessed 8 June 2013).

<sup>8</sup> Quesada, 13 May 1975, Tape 4-Side 1, p. 1.

troops—providing precise and effectual bombing that was more accurate and thus less dangerous to ground troops than strategic bombing. In addition to supporting the breakthrough, Quesada had a plan for helping Bradley's First Army make the most of the breakout and push into France.<sup>9</sup>

Unlike his counterparts in the Strategic Air Command, Quesada continued to appreciate, and advocate for, opportunities to aid ground forces with his tactical units. In Quesada, Bradley found a true visionary with regards to the use of air power and a man fortunately lacking the short-sightedness and ego inhibiting many of his contemporaries. Bradley's tank columns began to depend on Quesada's tactical air support, valuing its skillful coordination and dependable flexibility. If Bradley's forces could push the Germans back to Cherbourg, the First Army would be free to exploit the momentum of COBRA and continue to gain ground in the breakout.<sup>10</sup> Quesada developed an air plan that could offer Bradley's infantry and artillery columns close air support during the breakout, allowing the armies to move toward Brittany at a speed not yet witnessed in the battle of Normandy. The tactical air forces would defend the columns from above throughout the day, offering recon reports regarding the enemy's location and size, and responding to the ground forces' requests for offensive attacks on forward targets such as bridges or artillery emplacements. Most important, the tactical forces could do all of this at a moment's notice.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Quesada, 13 May 1975, Tape 3-Side 1, pp. 10-11.

<sup>10</sup> Blumenson, *The Battle of the Generals: The Untold Story of the Falaise Pocket-The Campaign That Should Have Won World War II* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1993), p. 145.

<sup>11</sup> Carafano, *After D-Day*, p. 213.

What the ground forces needed from his tactical air forces was clear to Quesada, but meeting those needs sometimes required that he exploit nontraditional, extramilitary resources in order to satisfy their requests. Working closely with Bradley during the planning stages of COBRA, Quesada devised several innovative solutions that enhanced the truly cooperative relationship between the tactical air and ground forces. Quesada suggested to Bradley that four to eight heavily armed Thunderbolts could fly out ahead of the armored columns and provide both recon and defense from enemy artillery units, rotating new P-47s in and out every half hour.<sup>12</sup>

Both men figured that if Bradley could concentrate his army in a small, narrow area, Quesada's IX TAC could provide twenty-four-hour coverage. To cut down on the time and personnel it took to process requests for air support, Quesada would put his pilots in the lead tanks of Bradley's armored columns and equip each of them with a very high frequency (VHF) radio to communicate with the squadron above. These officers were separate from the ALOs regularly assigned to facilitate requests between the Army and air units. Instead these were Quesada's own pilots from the IX TAC specially assigned by him to assist Bradley's First Army. Radio communication provided direct contact between the tanks and airplanes, and the airmen in the tanks immediately relayed their exact location and the ground forces' requests to their fellow aviators in terms understandable to the fliers. Whereas an infantryman might reference a tree or hedgerow as a landmark, an airman would refer to church steeples and in terms of east and west.<sup>13</sup>

The successful cooperation of air and ground forces in the ETO owed much of its initial development to the special relationship fostered between the AAF's Quesada and

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., pp. 214-15.

<sup>13</sup> Quesada, 13 May 1975, Tape 3-Side 1, pp. 34-35.

the Army's Bradley. As Quesada described it, "Bradley liked me, and I like him a hell of a lot. I, as a guy that doesn't know a damn thing about fighting on the ground, thought I could solve all of his problems, and no doubt Bradley, who knew nothing about fighting in the air, knew how he could solve all of my problems. And he was not reluctant to express himself nor was I. I don't take offense nor did he."<sup>14</sup> Despite decades of inculcated bitterness between the Army and the AAF regarding the chain of command when air units supported ground forces—bitterness that found its way into operational manuals dating back to TR 440-15 in 1929 and to the most recent FM 100-20 in 1943—Bradley understood that airmen were best suited for directing air operations. For his part, Quesada, unlike many of his fellow air generals, realized that cooperating with ground forces did not equal subordination to ground commanders. Without these early victories during the Battle of Normandy, culminating with the St. Lô breakout, the momentum of air-ground cooperation would likely have fizzled. As it was, their arrangement convinced army general after army general, including Generals Eisenhower and Patton, that their forces could benefit from the Bradley-Quesada style of air support.

While the leaders of IX TAC and the First Army readied plans for the planned offensive, the 405<sup>th</sup> and its three squadrons settled in at their new base. The airstrip was located where a Picauville apple orchard stood just weeks before, the hundreds of fruit trees cleared to make way for new runways. There was a constant hum from the thousands of hornets buzzing the base, and the horde swarmed anything standing still for more than a second.<sup>15</sup> The group spent its first week adjusting to the base, a large part of which meant figuring their way around the ramshackle facility. The new airstrip's

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., Tape 2-Side 2, p. 35

<sup>15</sup> Nolte, *Thunder Monsters Over Europe*, p. 11.

runway was built with Marston Mat, or pierced-steel planking, laid on top of the leveled orchard. For a short while after air units began to move into France, the AAF opted for Hessian Matting as a means of lightening the tonnage being transported between bases. The Hessian Matting was bituminous surfacing resembling heavy burlap that was laid down on top of a sticky, tar-like solvent. Unfortunately, while the materials were considerably lighter in weight when compared to pierced-steel planking weighing approximately 2,000 tons and requiring up 35,000 cubic feet of cargo space, the Hessian Matting had no load bearing capacity. After sustained heavy rains, these runways sank into the mud which therefore made Marston Mat the best option.<sup>16</sup> The fifteen-inches-by-ten-foot metal sheets were perforated with round holes every three inches from tip to tip, and snapped together with interlocking edges. A 150-by-150-foot runway took 60,000 pierced-steel sheets, 100 men, and 175 hours of assembly. The group's engineer section not only laid down the runways but also went back to pull up the pierced-steel planking once the group moved to the next base, repaired what was damaged and combined the used with new materials for the next runway.<sup>17</sup>

While the pierced-steel planking was better than the Hessian, the P-47s remained about as awful a fit for the airstrip's tiny runways as one could imagine. Under normal conditions, the fighter pilots typically struggled to see the runway over the airplane's large engine cowling, but this was not a major issue so long as they had long enough runway. The runways at A8A were about 1,200 feet short of what P-47 tech orders suggested was the ideal length for takeoff and landing. After a few days' practice, the

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<sup>16</sup> Ronald B. Hortzer, "Airfield Damage Repair: The Beginning," *Air Force Civil Engineer Magazine* 20/2 (2012): pp. 28-29.

<sup>17</sup> National Museum of the United States Air Force, 19 June 2006, "Pierced Steel Plank," <http://www.nationalmuseum.af.mil/factsheets/factsheet.asp?id=1996> (accessed 16 June 2013).

airmen developed a pattern for takeoff that made up for the shortened runway. Each pilot pointed the P-47 down the runway, locked the brakes, pushed the throttle until the engine screamed and the plane bucked like a wild horse, released the brakes, and sped down the runway until reaching the 120-miles-per-hour takeoff speed. Craning their necks to check their direction out the side of the plexiglas canopies, the pilots typically got their airplanes off the ground with just one hundred feet left of the runway.<sup>18</sup>

The squadron's first Continental base was not unlike most of the TAC airstrips being assembled at breakneck speed by the command's own engineering sections. Throughout the war, the section's engineers and enlisted men were charged with the giant task of keeping the TAC groups operational from fully functioning airstrips as close to the front lines as possible—typically no more than thirty miles from the fighting—while also building new advanced airbases. As the front lines moved east, the Ninth too moved east as fast as airstrips could be built, with the nineteen fighter groups leapfrogging one another as each advanced base was completed.

The 510<sup>th</sup> flew their first missions from their base on the Continent on 12 July. In addition to bombing missions, the squadron had begun regular armed reconnaissance missions after the Normandy invasion to seek out and destroy railroads the Germans were using to transport supplies, fuel, and troops, and pinpoint the most advantageous sections of the tracks to cut. Typical rail-cutting missions proved routine, even uneventful, unless an enemy train happened to be on the tracks and within range. After three days of patrol missions, the airmen were thrilled finally to catch a locomotive on the tracks below them during missions on 14 July. They took out the locomotive, twenty-four cars, and three

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<sup>18</sup> Mohrle, "General observations," (undated), p. 2.

gasoline tankers. Throughout the war, the 510<sup>th</sup> developed its reputation as an elite squadron yielding exceptional results on such train-busting missions. They flew three bombing missions over the next two days targeting and taking out motor transports, tanks, and artillery emplacements. All in all, the week had been an ideal introduction to missions on the Continent.<sup>19</sup>

The first mission on 17 July was a typical armed recon mission, but while flying out over the Cherbourg Peninsula, the squadron lost two pilots after 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Thomas Hamilton bailed out and parachuted down directly over the target, and 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. Paul Ellison bailed out six miles off the target after taking flak. The others watched as each landed safely on the ground, but beyond that their fate was unknown. When pilots bailed out and landed in enemy territory, one of two scenarios typically followed: the pilot was captured by the Germans; or the pilot found shelter and hid from the Germans long enough to join up with the Allies on the front lines. Squadrons would not know which occurred for weeks and so, even though pilots got to the ground safely, they were counted as losses nonetheless. The squadron considered the losses on the seventeenth “a hard blow to accept passively and consequently we did not take it passively at all.” Needing to direct their frustration and anger at something, the airmen returned to the same target twice more that day and, when “at 2015 that evening we left the bridge, nothing could cross it.”<sup>20</sup>

The mission for 19 July was what the squadron referred to as a “fighter pilot nightmare,” or an uneventful escort mission flying alongside the big bombers. That

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<sup>19</sup> 510 FS “Squadron History,” July 1944, pp. 2-3.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.



fighter pilots and their fighter-bombers could serve far greater purposes than escorting bombers had long been obvious to squadrons like the 510<sup>th</sup> and to tactical advocates like Quesada. Not to mention, escort missions stung the egos of fighter pilots. Nevertheless, they accepted such missions as an occasional, though painfully boring part of the job. After being grounded for several days by bad weather, one more Sunday afternoon escort mission alongside two B-26s closed out an uneventful weekend.<sup>21</sup>

The next week began with some welcome excitement. Flying in his newly decorated P-47, christened the “Tallahassee Lassie,” Capt. Ralph Jenkins was leading a group of twelve aircraft on an afternoon bombing mission when he received word that a twenty-plus enemy aircraft squadron was buzzing nearby. If the escort missions had dulled the pilots momentarily, chances to go plane-to-plane with the Luftwaffe recharged the squadron. Jenkins looked out the left side of his cockpit and spotted twelve to fifteen FW-190s through a hole in the overcast directly below the group. He zeroed in on the one to the far left, swung around, and came up on the enemy’s back end. Two short bursts of his guns later, all that remained of the German airplane was flaming bits of scrap raining over the French countryside. Jenkins climbed again and sighted four more FW-190s flying below. Jenkins chased one FW-190, firing again and striking once more. For the second time in under an hour, Jenkins sent a German airplane spiraling downward, trailing a line of white smoke behind it, exploding as it hit the ground below, and providing Jenkins with another “kill.”<sup>22</sup>

Lieutenant Curran, also along for the mission as one of the flight leaders, could not believe his luck. Curran was still smiling about his 4 July run-in with a Bf-109, and

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., pp. 3-4.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

as he followed Jenkins down and positioned his plane behind one of the 190s, firing just once from 150 yards back, and sending the airplane crashing to the ground. He headed back up and got right on the tail of another 190, fired three bursts, struck the plane, and watched out his cockpit as the 190 flipped on its back and nose-dived to the ground. Now on a tear, Curran went after another 190 and shot down what would be his fourth confirmed enemy aircraft destroyed in less than one month. When the day was done, Sergeant Trank painted five swastikas on the boys' planes that evening, two for Jenkins's "Tallahassee Lassie" and three for Curran's "Kansas Tornado."<sup>23</sup> Both Jenkins and Curran were awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross at the end of the month.<sup>24</sup>

Meanwhile, General Bradley met with his corps commanders in Normandy on 19 July to outline his new offensive and secure the support of the air forces that would help devise a bombardment plan tailored to the specific needs of his mission. With COBRA scheduled for 21 July, the Ninth had just one day to prepare before carrying out the air strikes Bradley claimed were essential to the operation's success.<sup>25</sup> He and Quesada then flew to England and met with Commander in Chief of the Allied Expeditionary Air Force Air Marshal Leigh-Mallory, who had a substantial amount of tactical experience coordinating ground support for the Ninth Air Force, the RAF's Second Tactical Air Force, and the Air Defense Command of Great Britain (ADGB). Leigh-Mallory adamantly believed tactical air forces were better suited than the strategic air forces for the new demands of COBRA. Commander of the U.S. Strategic Air Forces Lt. Gen. Carl

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>24</sup> 510 FS, "Squadron History," August 1944, IRIS No. 00060990, in USAF Collections, AFHRA, p. 4.

<sup>25</sup> Blumenson, *Battle of the Generals*, pp. 137-38.

Spaatz and commander of the RAF strategic forces Sir Arthur “Bomber” Harris strongly disagreed with Leigh-Mallory’s assessment and instead argued strategic air forces were better suited for the offensive.<sup>26</sup>

According to Spaatz and Harris, the strategic air forces could deliver a deadly strike against German troops and actually leave little else for the Allied ground troops to do afterwards. Personally, both men considered any suggestion to the contrary as a direct insult to their air forces, and potentially compromised their ability to contribute decisive blows to the enemy’s war-making capabilities. Well before plans for even OVERLORD began, strategic advocates chafed under the possibility of Eisenhower ordering them to assist ground forces, and were never completely convinced he had the authority to do so.<sup>27</sup>

Weather again delayed Bradley’s plans until, finally, COBRA started off on the afternoon of 24 July. Bradley had been clear from the start that the air offensive was to come from behind the Allied ground forces and parallel to the battle zone. While this made the approaching aircraft more vulnerable to German antiaircraft artillery, Bradley believed the greater risk was dropping bombs on Allied troops, which he felt was more likely if the planes made the traditional perpendicular approach. He also needed the air strikes to take no more than one hour. When the battle began, Bradley never imagined there could be any misunderstanding about his specific instructions. Unfortunately, there was. Strategic air force leaders decided that a parallel approach in under an hour was impossible, insisting that only a perpendicular approach was possible given the one hour timetable. Without alerting Bradley, the strategic forces chose to adhere to the time

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 137; Quesada, 13 May 1975, Tape 3-Side 1, pp. 10-11.

<sup>27</sup> Blumenson, *Battle of the Generals*, pp. 137-38.

restrictions rather than the parallel approach Bradley ordered. To this end, heavy bombers flew across the front lines and dropped 550 tons of high explosives and 135 tons of fragmentation (frag) bombs, killing 25 and wounding 131 friendly troops.<sup>28</sup> Leigh-Mallory phoned a devastated Bradley that evening, and relayed that the strategic forces were ready to go the next morning, but only under the same conditions—a perpendicular approach in under an hour. The one consolation Leigh-Mallory could give was that additional fighter-bomber units, capable and willing to make a parallel approach, offered at least the possibility of fewer casualties on the ground.<sup>29</sup>

On the day of the “Big Push” the 405<sup>th</sup> assembled under one of the few remaining apple trees on base near the Group Operations area for a briefing in front of the two large maps showing routes and targets. The chaplain, Capt. Frank Landholt, began the briefing with a prayer and Delashaw took over from there. He explained that the Germans were holding a line along the road from St. Lô to Coutances and that General Bradley needed the section of this line just northwest of St. Lô covered with high-explosive bombs. The group’s fighter-bombers would go in with the heavy and medium bombers of the Eighth. The group’s ALO showed the positions of Bradley’s troops and the enemy troops and the ground tactics the U.S. ground forces planned to use once the breakthrough was

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<sup>28</sup> Fragmentation bombs used by the AAF in World War II consisted of steel cylinders with end caps and contained an explosive cone of TNT, and a spiral, iron coil wrapped around the outside. The bombs broke into 1,000 to 1,500 pieces of approximately .3 ounces with velocities of up to 4,000 feet per second. Parachutes were attached to the bombs to allow low-flying bombers enough time to clear the field of trajectory, in H. H. Arnold, “General Arnold Foresees New Air Power,” *Army Ordnance* (Washington, DC: publication of the U.S. Army Ordnance Association, 9 January 1943), in Subject File No. 9: “Air Forces,” World War II European Army Records, National Archives, [www.Fold3.com](http://www.Fold3.com) (accessed 17 June 2013).

<sup>29</sup> Blumenson, *Battle of the Generals*, p. 133.

underway. Delashaw concluded the briefing with order of “takeoff and assembly.”<sup>30</sup>

During the first strikes on the morning of 25 July, IX fighter-bombers made up less than a quarter of the 2,430 aircraft sent out over the German lines. They approached the battlefield flying parallel on east-to-west routes. In contrast, heavy bombers, once again flying perpendicular north-and-south routes, accounted for nearly two-thirds of the attacking aircraft and, as was becoming tragically obvious, the bombers’ propensity for precision was sorely lacking. In the first hour of the mission, 111 Allied troops were killed amid a shower of stray bombs that fell short of the target, wounding an additional 490.<sup>31</sup>

As the day came to an end, Bradley railed against every airman who had been involved. Along with Eisenhower and his staff, he felt betrayed and furiously questioned the motives of the air force leaders’ decision making, even suggesting the whole ordeal was rooted in their apathy towards ground support. Spaatz defended his decision, arguing that Bradley’s plan to saturate such a small area with such a large amount of ordnance was the real problem.<sup>32</sup> Either way, the bitterness between the strategic air forces and army ground officers expanded exponentially. While COBRA caused Bradley to weigh seriously the gains and consequences of aerial bombing, not only with regards to his operations but also considering the safety of his ground troops, he doubted strategic air forces had much to offer in the way of actual air support for his ground forces. In

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<sup>30</sup> 405 FG, “Group History,” July 1944, p. 4.

<sup>31</sup> Bradley and Blair, *A General’s Life*, pp. 280-82.

<sup>32</sup> Blumenson, *Battle of the Generals*, p. 140.

contrast, Quesada's tactical forces would make an undeniable impression on Bradley days after COBRA was underway and the breakout began.<sup>33</sup>

As Quesada had promised Bradley, the 405<sup>th</sup> was flying over its assigned armored columns pouring through the line opened up by COBRA. Each flight flew ahead of the ground forces, bombing and strafing enemy vehicles or installations in the path of the column and then radioing back to the ground forces that the path was clear for a specific number of miles, or from their position to such and such landmark, and so forth. There did reach a point when the radio frequencies became so overcrowded that air and ground forces' communications were shut down, each unable to get clear messages to the other.

The 405<sup>th</sup> thus improvised a system where the pilots circled over a column until they halted and started shelling a marshaling yard, artillery embankment, and so forth. At that point, even without radio contact, it was easy to see that the ground forces wanted that target dealt with. Pilots would then fly over and bomb and strafe until the target was destroyed. When the squadrons saw German artillery ahead of the ground forces, they would fly low over the ground forces and waggle their wings, diving towards the enemy guns and alerting them to the enemy's position. The squadrons attacked until the ground forces got within range of the enemy's guns and could fire on them themselves.<sup>34</sup> In a single day, the 405<sup>th</sup> made fighter-bomber history, destroying 660 German vehicles and damaging 114 more.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Carafano, *After D-Day*, pp. 212-13.

<sup>34</sup> 405 FG, "Group History," July 1944, p. 4.

<sup>35</sup> Headquarters, Ninth Air Force European Theater of Operations Public Relations Office, "An Advanced Fighter Base, Ninth Fighter Command, Normandy..." in *ibid*.

Ace Drummond led a third and final bombing run to wrap up the last mission of the very long day. One after the other, the airplanes dipped down, dropped their ordnance, and rejoined the group. As flight leader, Drummond watched as each of his three teammates pulled up, double-checking that each airplane successfully released its two underwing bombs. As his wingman, Lt. Edwin McGachan, came off the target Drummond saw that just the front bomb shackles on each wing of his wingman's plane had released, leaving the back ones hinged and the two bombs hung. He radioed the situation back to base and received instructions to lead the team across the English Channel and release the bombs over the water. While calling over different maneuvers that might help shake the bombs loose, the radio went dead and Drummond lost all radio communication with McGachan. After several attempts, the pilot made a sharp enough turn and managed to shake loose the bomb from under the right wing. Nothing he did helped the bomb on the left. Drummond circled above and watched as the pilot nervously maneuvered through a fighter pilot's bag of tricks, but to no avail.

Drummond started to worry that the airplane was running out of fuel in the process. Landing with the hung bomb was not an option, and bailing out over the Channel's icy water was a risky endeavor considering a pilot in the water, waiting for air or sea rescue had approximately thirty minutes before hypothermia set in. Moreover, there was no guarantee that a speedy rescue was even possible depending on where in the Channel he landed, how close the nearest Navy ship was to his location, and how fast they could find him once in the area.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> 510 FS, "Squadron History," July 1944, p. 5; Col. Arlie Blood, USAF (ret.), correspondence with the author, November 1, 2004.

Left with no radio contact, Drummond wagged his wings, signaling for his wingman to return to his side. The two pilots nervously signaled back and forth with hand gestures, communicating between the two cockpits as best they could. Finally, Drummond conveyed that he was going to tap the edge of the hung bomb with his own wing's tip.<sup>37</sup> McGachan's eyes widened as he grasped Drummond's plan, and Drummond gestured for him to look the other way while he got his aircraft as close as possible. While the two airplanes sped forward at upwards of 230 miles per hour, "Ace" guided his wing's tip toward the hung bomb. Remarkably, Drummond slid underneath with a surgeon's precision and tipped the bomb out from under the plane and down into the Channel. Both pilots peeled away, rolling their airplanes in celebration before returning safely to base.

Ready to tell the story they knew would be the talk of the base for weeks to come, the pilots jumped out of their airplanes as their squadron mates, who by now had learned what was happening over the Channel, ran out to meet them. Patting each other on the back, Drummond and McGachan immediately began giving their own version of the whole harrowing ordeal. As they went back and forth, each filling in details as the other told their part of the unbelievable story, Drummond stopped suddenly as McGachan lauded Drummond's bravery while tipping the *live* bomb from under his wing. Drummond had undertaken the daring task of freeing the hung bomb assuming that it was still attached to the safety wire and was not armed. A shaken Drummond had to be helped to a chair nearby and given a glass of cold water.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Mohrle, correspondence with author, 12 November 2004.

<sup>38</sup> 510 FS, "Squadron History," July 1944, pp. 5-6.



The next day Drummond bailed out of his P-47 when the engine failed during a strafing pass. Drummond had spotted a motorcycle with a sidecar in the vicinity of Tessy and flew down for a low-level strafing attack. Feeling the engine sputter, he radioed to the flight, "Red Three bailing out," at approximately 1855 hours, not having time to say much else. Starting to panic, he tried to stand up and pop off the aircraft's plexiglas canopy, but in his haste smashed his head and fell back in his seat. Fighting the slipstream while trying to open the canopy midflight, he finally managed and bailed out at approximately 800 feet. His chute opened and Drummond was seen to land safely.<sup>39</sup> When he hit the ground, Drummond immediately heard German machine guns popping and bullets whizzing all around. The typically cool "Ace" was so terrified while in the Germans' crosshairs that he dove towards a seven-inch muskrat hole and tried to dig in. His head covered in mud but no further underground or out of danger, he crawled on his stomach towards a hedgerow and pushed his way through the shrubbery only to meet the eyes of a German soldier waiting for him on the other side. Drummond was turned over to the soldier's superiors and spent the rest of the war in a POW camp.<sup>40</sup>

At month's end, the AEAFF produced report No. 1667, "July Operations of the Ninth Air Force Resulted in Much Damage to the Enemy and Helped Allied Offensive to Start," which described the effect of fighter-bombers like those of the 510<sup>th</sup>. In addition to attacking targets of opportunity, the fighter-bombers directly participated in the battle flying with the armored columns during the St. Lô offensive, essentially making enemy movements in the target area dangerous and costly for the Germans. The report quotes

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<sup>39</sup> "John Drummond," MACR, 26 July 1944, "Pilot's Statement," [www.Fold3.com](http://www.Fold3.com) (accessed 5 June 2013).

<sup>40</sup> Drummond, Documentary, "The 510<sup>th</sup> Was There," DVD, (undated).

Bradley as saying, “We could not have achieved what we have if it were not for the Ninth Air Force.” Of the 31,000 sorties flown by the Ninth during July, fighter-bombers and fighters flew 22,000 of them, or just over 70 percent, leading Quesada to deem the operation the “finest example of close air support anytime, anywhere.”<sup>41</sup>

Quesada also visited the 405<sup>th</sup> at the airstrip to thank the group personally for its contribution to the breakout. Delashaw gathered his men under the apple trees near the operations offices and they listened as Quesada, using a fifty-caliber ammunition box he had pulled over for a chair, shared his gratitude. He explained, “What you have done in the past few days—your successes are beyond imagination” and continued, “You have taken this German army and torn it to pieces. You have displayed initiative and courage. The Hun has no means of transport left. You have seen to that.” Quesada went on to tell the group about the aide to the German corps commander they had captured and how when Quesada asked him where his commanding general was, the aide replied that “The last time I saw him he was crawling through the bushes.” When a corps commander has to crawl through the bushes, Quesada explained, “you can see what condition the army is in.” Quesada concluded by turning to Delashaw and offering, “I am so grateful for what your group has been doing in this fight and for your leadership,” adding finally that “this work on the Peninsula may well be the greatest victory an American army has had in any war.”<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> AEF, “July Operations of the Ninth Air Force Resulted in Much Damage to the Enemy and Helped Allied Offensive to Start,” 1 August 1944, in Subject File No. 221: “Ninth Air Force,” World War II European Army Records, National Archives, [www.Fold3.com](http://www.Fold3.com) (accessed 8 June 1944).

<sup>42</sup> Headquarters, Ninth Air Force European Theater of Operations Public Relations Office, “An Advanced Fighter Base, Ninth Fighter Command, Normandy...” in 405 FG, “Group History,” July 1944.

Delashaw singled out the 510<sup>th</sup> in his own commendation stating, “The area support which your organization gave to the 1st Army was a magnificent job and the destruction wrought on the enemy armored vehicles was so great that his efforts to escape being trapped were seriously curtailed. The aggressive spirit and skillful manner in which these missions were accomplished is sufficient proof that the 510<sup>th</sup> is in there pitching every minute of the game.” He went on to relay the gratitude of TAC Commander Quesada and 84<sup>th</sup> Wing Commander Gen. Arthur G. Salisbury, who asked that Delashaw thank the squadron on their behalf for their “outstanding accomplishments” and “fine work.”<sup>43</sup>

On 27 July, squadron commander Col. Bruce Parcell was struck by flak on a low sweep during an armed recon mission. Enemy tanks had been sighted in the Coutances area and the squadron went into a bombing attack at 1,500 feet. Unaware of the extent to which the flak had damaged the aircraft during the low-level sortie, Parcell tried to pull up and away to rejoin the squadron, but the airplane failed to respond. Charlie Appel, flying on Parcell’s wing, and the rest of the flight watched helplessly as Parcell attempted to bail out, only clearing half his body from the cockpit before the airplane’s nose hit the ground and exploded. Appel reported, “I came over him, and at first thought the ship was empty, but then I noticed that he was still in it and the canopy was open, and he was standing up which allowed me to see him from the waist up. Then before he could get out, the ship nosed over into a shallow dive, hit the ground, and exploded.”<sup>44</sup> The official

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<sup>43</sup> 510 FS, “Squadron History,” July 1944, pp. 7-8.

<sup>44</sup> MACR, “Bruce Parcell” 31 July 1944, “Pilot’s Statement,” [www.Fold3.com](http://www.Fold3.com) (accessed 5 June 2013).

squadron report somberly concluded, “Colonel Parcell was not seen to leave the ship.”<sup>45</sup> Parcell’s death marked a shift in the squadron. The sorrowful airmen, brokenhearted over the loss of the leader who had shaped them into a fighter squadron, now hardened into bloodthirsty warriors determined to rain down hell from above. The blithely green fighter pilots Parcell brought with him to Europe were now veterans determined to forge ahead with grit born only of battle. Ralph Jenkins was named the new commanding officer, and the squadron would, throughout the remainder of World War II, be known as *Jenkins’ Jerry Junkers*.

Now commanding a squadron of battle-forged fighter pilots, Jenkins considered himself charged with solidifying the unit’s reputation as one of the best fighter squadrons in Europe, while also making sure his men had a good time when they got a chance. He explained that “I’d do everything I could to make things comfortable for the pilots, even to the point where it looked like it was discriminatory and my rationale on that was ‘Hey, these guys are the ones that are going to die, these are the guys that ARE dying, these are the guys that are prisoners of war or evaders.’”<sup>46</sup>

Having been in France for almost three weeks, and sensing the squadron needed something to pick up the men’s spirits after the loss of Parcell, Jenkins suggested they build a new officer’s club much like the Mercury Bar in Christchurch, but better. Lieutenant Gaughran wrote in 1944, “All we had to do was tear down a Jerry barracks, denude operations of their top cover, pull nails out of a couple thousand ammo boxes and be kind to the visiting nurses association.” Each had his own suggestion as how best to begin construction of the new recreation hall, but as Gaughran explained, “Only those

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<sup>45</sup> 510 FS, “Squadron History,” July 1944, p. 6.

<sup>46</sup> Ralph C. Jenkins, documentary, “The 510<sup>th</sup> Was There,” DVD (undated).

select few with a healthy set of tonsils had theirs accepted.”<sup>47</sup> Half a dozen men set about nailing up scrap lumber with their looted nails and lifted hammers before they realized the boards were too short to finish all four sides. Finally they raised the roof, or rather stretched a stolen tent over the structure described as “if Orson Wells (*sic*) ever had a nightmare.” The officers plastered the walls with Vargas pin-ups girls and “a little adept scavenging provided what we affectionately call furniture.”<sup>48</sup> Outside the new officers club hung a sign that read “THROUGH THESE PORTALS PASS THE BEST G’DAM STRAFERS WHO EVER DROVE A KRAUT GENERAL INTO A HEDGEROW.” The men named the bar *Flak Haven on Hornet’s Bog*, referencing both a refuge from their dangerous day jobs and the hornet-infested mudhole of a base they called home.<sup>49</sup>

Beyond their “3 squares a day,” the men had to rely on the cleverness of their cook, who occasionally enlisted the pilots for special culinary missions. One morning, with the pilots sitting in their planes, waiting around to hear their orders for the day, the group’s cook chose Captain Mohrle to help with dessert. He approached Mohrle’s P-47 holding both halves of one of the airplane’s papier-mâché droppable fuel tanks the he had cut in two. He had taken the baffles from inside and made a hinge so that the top half could open and shut. Then out came the supplies from the mess hall: fifty gallons of powdered milk, ten gallons of canned mixed fruit, ten pounds of sugar, and a jug of vanilla extract were all poured into the tank and stirred with a huge spoon and then hung under Mohrle’s wing. The cook instructed him to fly to about 30,000 feet—where the temperature dropped to about minus 30°F—zig-zag around for half an hour to keep the

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<sup>47</sup> 510 FS, “Squadron History,” July 1944, p. 10.

<sup>48</sup> “The Saga of Flack Haven,” in 510 FS, “Squadron History,” August 1944, p. 10.

<sup>49</sup> Nolte, *Thunder Monsters Over Europe*, p. 43.

ingredients mixing, and then land as quickly as possible. After Mohrle returned the resourceful cook stuck a big spoon into the tank and grinned with satisfaction as he scooped out delicious ice cream for the men to enjoy.<sup>50</sup>

Towards the end of that summer, the front lines moved farther and farther away from the group's base. The sound of shelling and bombing had altogether disappeared, and French civilians began to come out and visit the base. On Sundays, there was the atmosphere of an amusement park along the runway as the roar of the Thunderbolts' engines drew curious groups of locals to the airstrip.<sup>51</sup> Entire families gathered to watch the P-47s leave the runway, craning their necks and looking up as the planes took off fifty yards ahead of them. They cheered and applauded each oncoming airplane as the woosh from takeoff blew their hair back, huge smiles plastered across their faces. One Sunday nearly the whole village gathered at the end of the runway to watch—dozens of villagers throwing their heads back in unison as each plane passed over.

Captain Mohrle spotted the group as he was climbing into his P-47. After exchanging confused looks with another pilot climbing into his airplane nearby, both jumped down, ran out to the crowd, and tried to explain to the villagers that they were standing in a dangerous spot. Everyone turned to the priest who apparently was the only one in the group who spoke English. The pilots tried as best they could to explain to the priest, flailing their arms and over-exaggerating their hand motions to make up for the loss in translation, that should one of the aircraft's engines fail, those enormous airplanes would crash down and crush the entire village. The priest, for his part, tried his best to

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<sup>50</sup> Mohrle, "General Observations" (undated), pp. 4-5.

<sup>51</sup> 405 FG, "Group History," August 1944, p. 2, IRIS No. 00090625, in USAF Collections, AFHRA.

translate the pilots' warning. As he spoke, the townspeople began to nod, looking back and forth between the priest and the American pilots standing behind him. He and one of the men gathered exchanged a few words before the priest turned around, shrugged his shoulders, and explained, "They said to tell you they trust you."<sup>52</sup>

Providing close air support on 30 July, the squadron succeeded in destroying a bridge southwest of Saint-Gabriel-Brécy, thirteen artillery emplacements, four heavy tanks and seventy-six motor transport vehicles with Howie Curran leading the squadron. On their third and final pass over the target, Lt. Ben Savage suddenly broke right while the rest of the squadron broke left just as they had on the last two passes. When he did not return and meet the rest of the flight after their last bombing run, and attempts to radio Savage failed, his confused squadron mates feared the worst.<sup>53</sup>

Eventually, word reached the base that French villagers had recovered Savage's body, and somberly recounted his last minutes for several members of the squadron after traveling to retrieve his body. One of his airplane wings had snagged a high tension wire which flipped his plane before it smashed down. The debris from the crash spread for a hundred yards and Savage had surely died instantly. The French witnesses had wrapped his body in an American flag and buried him in a local cemetery.<sup>54</sup> Once the front lines had advanced past the crash site, Doc Milligan returned to the village graveyard, dug up Savage's corpse from the La Cambe Cemetery near La Marche, France and brought it

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<sup>52</sup> Mohrle, "General observations" (undated), p. 1.

<sup>53</sup> MACR, "Ben Savage," 30 July 1944, "Pilot's Statement," [www.Fold3.com](http://www.Fold3.com) (accessed 5 June 2013).

<sup>54</sup> 510 FS, "Squadron History," August 1944, pp. 6-7.

back to the squadron, who then transported the body and buried it in the American cemetery at Normandy.<sup>55</sup>

The level at which the IX TAC operated during the last week of July was not typical, not even for TAC: even with weather delays, the command flew 9,840 sorties, only 655 (6.7 percent) of which were recon, unloaded more than 2,000 tons of ordnance, and destroyed 67 enemy aircraft in airborne encounters.<sup>56</sup> On the ground, Bradley and the armored units of his First Army had successfully turned the breakthrough into a breakout.<sup>57</sup> Operation COBRA effectively created an opening through which ground forces could advance into Brittany and consequently devastated the German forces to the east.

According to staff reports circulated on 1 August, the Allied forces figured the Germans could last only one to two months more, considering the near-complete dismantling of the typically cohesive German forces on the battlefield. They had only to keep the pressure on the enemy and finally finish them off in the coming weeks. While the German forces in no way considered themselves licked or on the verge of surrender, their position at Avranches left them undeniably vulnerable to attack. The gains accomplished during COBRA came so fast that there was no immediate plan for how to capitalize on them, so Bradley and Eisenhower had to rely on the preinvasion plans in OVERLORD that emphasized the importance of gaining control of Brittany.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Mohrle, correspondence with the author, 12 November 2004.

<sup>56</sup> Craven and Cate, *Army Air Forces in World War II*, vol. 3, p. 242.

<sup>57</sup> Martin Blumenson, *United States Army in World War II, The European Theater of Operations, BREAKOUT AND PURSUIT* (Washington, DC: Office of the Chief of Military History U.S. Department of the Army, 1961), p. 331.

<sup>58</sup> Blumenson, *Battle of the Generals*, pp. 143-44.



Gen. George S. Patton's Third Army, activated at 1200 hours on 1 August, took the torch from Bradley's First Army and was paired with Brig. Gen. Otto P. "Opie" Weyland's newly activated XIX TAC. The 405<sup>th</sup> Fighter Group was one of four fighter groups reassigned from IX Fighter Command to XIX TAC.<sup>59</sup> Though almost everyone in the Air Forces was familiar with Patton's notoriously harsh opinions about close air support, he landed in Europe with a new-found appreciation for its role in mechanized warfare, most likely inspired by the success of the Bradley-Quesada arrangement and driven by his competitive nature to improve on it with the new Patton-Weyland arrangement.<sup>60</sup> As he wrote in his memoir, *War As I Knew It*, "It was love at first sight between XIX Tactical Air Command and the Third Army."<sup>61</sup>

Weyland and Patton were both immediately committed to extensive joint planning. From their first meetings in England, Weyland was assured that Patton understood Weyland would have complete control over air operations, much to the airman's surprise. Patton knew he had in Weyland an air commander who would willingly sidestep the AAF's preference for strategic bombing doctrine and commit his efforts and airmen to whatever best served the Army. Weyland later recalled Patton's initial reaction upon seeing first hand just how effective tactical air power could be and the contribution to ground forces it could make:

We had no particular problem except for air superiority and that was fairly well established....Anyhow [Patton] was down [at Weyland's

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<sup>59</sup> The three fighter groups assigned to XIX TAC along with the 405<sup>th</sup> Fighter Group were the 406<sup>th</sup>, the 362d, and the 371<sup>st</sup> Fighter Groups.

<sup>60</sup> David N. Spires, *Air Power for Patton's Army: The XIX Tactical Air Command in the Second World War* (Washington, DC: Air Force History and Museums Program, 2002), p. 23.

<sup>61</sup> George S. Patton, Jr., *War As I Knew It* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1947), p. 99.

Headquarters] for one day, and his troops were moving like mad. Then he came back, and he said, “God,” he said, “They were just moving like anything. The only problem is that there are dead Germans and artillery and trucks and whatnot all over the roads.” They kept their bulldozer blades on their tanks, fortunately. Hadn’t had time to take them off. So they’d bulldoze the roads so they could get ahead. He said, “My people tell me your fighter-bombers did that.” I said, “Yes, that’s right. That’s part of our racket; that’s part of our business. Yes, that’s quite correct.” He says, “Hot damn.” He pulled out a full bottle of bourbon. He says, “How about a drink?” So we sat there. Well, he was enthused like hell and well wound up, and he said, “Oh, boy, what are we going to do.” He was then convinced that we could do anything!<sup>62</sup>

General Patton understood control over air activity was best left to the AAF, and control over the air forces supporting the Third Army was best left to Weyland.<sup>63</sup>

The needs specific to Patton’s Third Army paired beautifully with the tactical flexibility of the XIX TAC. Armed recon missions targeted anything within enemy territory below. The pilots and their P-47s cleared the area immediately behind the battle line and stopped any retreat or supporting army from leaving or entering the battlefield, and typically did so with such precision that the Third Army below operated with little fear of being caught in the crossfire. They flew missions covering the armored columns using the air-to-tank-communications developed by Quesada and Bradley, which allowed

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<sup>62</sup> Gen. O. P. Weyland, interviewed by Dr. James C. Hasdorff and Brig. Gen. Noel F. Parrish, transcript, 19 November 1974, United States Air Force Oral History Program, K239.0512-813, Albert F Simpson Historical Research Center, in USAF Collections, AFHRA, p. 75-76.

<sup>63</sup> Spires, *Air Power for Patton’s Army*, pp. 46-47.

lead tanks in contact with the pilot to set the course for each of Patton's rapidly advancing armored divisions. The pilots warned the infantry leaders of enemy opposition, hidden artillery emplacements, and could also fire on targets reported from the ground forces. Cooperation and coordination with ground forces, which so much of the AAF's leadership disdained and dismissed, was directly and unequivocally contributing to the success of Patton's ground forces.

The Third Army moved toward the towns of Le Mans, Aleçon, Sees, and Carouges. The XIX TAC flew more and more sorties each day, evidenced by the substantial damage and destruction to enemy locomotives, railcars, vehicles, and tanks. The Americans and British had formed the Falaise Pocket by pushing east and south, respectively, and left only a small break through which the Germans could flee. German transport and supply vehicles, Tiger and Panther tanks, and infantry clogged every road heading east from the front towards the gap between Falaise and Argentan. The 510<sup>th</sup> averaged six missions a day by mid-August and was assigned to the area on the southwest side of the peninsula, which appeared to be the last remaining route for the Germans to escape total encirclement by the Allies.<sup>64</sup>

The squadron was out on an armed recon mission when they discovered hundreds of German vehicles scrambling to make it east ahead of the Allied troops closing the gap in Falaise. They ripped through the convoy with their guns, only letting up and returning to base when they ran out of ammo. Ground crews worked quickly to refuel and rearm the planes and hurriedly made any needed repairs while the pilots jumped out long enough to hit the latrine and grab a sandwich and a drink of water before heading back

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<sup>64</sup> 510 FS, "Squadron History," August 1944, pp. 1-2.

out.<sup>65</sup> Fires ignited up and down the column, ammunition exploded, and German soldiers poured out of every vehicle to run for shelter in roadside ditches, hedgerows, or Falaise's old stone fences. For days after, the roads were still so littered with destroyed enemy tanks, vehicles, and guns that ground forces had a hard time passing through.<sup>66</sup>

On the squadron's third sweep over the convoy, Mohrle flew low towards a group of trucks the squadron had gunned down on their last run. Just as he passed over the wreckage, a German soldier popped out from behind one of the trucks and took aim at the P-47. Mohrle felt the bullet hit but as he patted around furiously trying to find the bullet hole, he realized that there was no blood and despite feeling the impact of the bullet, he did not hurt anywhere. He explained as much to his crew chief, who examined the cockpit and sure enough found a bullet hole in the side of the canopy. He spun Mohrle around, patting him up and down, before locating the bullet in his back-pack parachute. The German had missed by just one inch.<sup>67</sup>

The day ended as the 510<sup>th</sup> finally returned to base at 2200 hours, having reduced the Germans on the road to a ragged marching infantry. Each of the pilots had three sorties in five hours and, totally exhausted, had to be helped out of their planes. The squadron's official tallies for the day were as follows:<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Jenkins, correspondence with the author, 9 October 2004.

<sup>66</sup> Craven and Cate, *Army Air Forces in World War II*, vol. 3, p. 242.

<sup>67</sup> Mohrle, correspondence with the author, 12 November 2004.

<sup>68</sup> 510 FS, "Squadron History," July 1944, p. 7.

	<b>Tanks</b>	<b>Motor Transports</b>	<b>Motorcycles</b>	<b>Staff Cars</b>	<b>Field Gun Emplacements</b>
Damaged	5	24	1	0	0
Destroyed	12	150	2	10	2

The Germans managed to avoid complete encirclement by escaping through the Argentan-Falaise gap and the Allied forces missed the opportunity to secure victory by summer's end.<sup>69</sup> According to Patton, his army had moved faster than any army in history, but he was then forced by Bradley to cool his heels with less than twenty-five miles separating the Third Army, moving north through Argentan towards the Canadian forces moving south from Caen, from meeting in Falaise. While this infuriated Patton, the truth of the matter was that if the Canadian forces and the Third Army had met each other and closed the gap, the same air power that had allowed Patton to move his army with such speed would no longer have been possible, with close air support inhibited significantly and the risk of bombing error increased.<sup>70</sup> As it was, Falaise turned into a no-holds-barred clash that depended on the cooperation among the squadrons, artillery units, and accompanying infantry divisions. High losses in both pilots and aircraft resulted from air observation missions probing into enemy territory and over the few remaining artillery emplacements left in the area. The ground forces below were faring better, with the Germans losing ten men to every one man the Third Army lost.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Martin Blumenson, *Command Decisions: General Bradley's Decision at Argentan (13 August 1944)* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, United States Army, 1990), p. 401.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 410.

<sup>71</sup> Charles M. Province, *Patton's Third Army: A Chronology of the Third Army Advance, August, 1944-May 1945* (New York: Hippocrene Books, 1992), p.25.

After the gap was closed at Falaise, the Third Army moved about the Brittany peninsula with little threat from German aircraft or artillery outside of the few remaining ports the Germans still held. The one and only mission on 22 August proved thrilling enough for the 510<sup>th</sup> pilots who, after waiting out three days of bad weather, were champing at the bit to get back in the air and return to action. Mohrle led the squadron towards Laval that morning, about fifty miles west of Le Mans. He and his wingman, Lt. Ed Mossman, made the first dive over the target, and one after another each flight dove down, dropped its bombs, and rejoined the rest of the squadron. But as the last airplane passed over the target, antiaircraft fire ripped into the squadron.<sup>72</sup>

Mohrle looked down for the artillery emplacement and took aim at several trucks traveling on the road. Flak struck Mossman's aircraft and blew the door off the ammunition bay on his left wing. Belts of ammunition blew back, flapping and pelting the side of the airplane. Mossman wanted to bail out but Mohrle wanted to get a look at the damage to make sure that was necessary. He could see that the airplane was hit but also that, for the time being, it seemed like the Mossman had control of his airplane, managing to keep the wings relatively level despite the hit. Bailing out meant landing in enemy territory and he was not going to have his wingman suffer that unless there was no other option. He called over and suggested to Mossman that, at the very least they try climbing slightly and making his way behind Allied lines so that if he still wanted to bail out, he might avoid capture. The rest of the squadron was ordered to stay clear of the failing aircraft, while Mohrle stayed close to his wingman, coaching and advising as he and Mossman headed due north.

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<sup>72</sup> 510 FS, "Squadron History," August 1944, p. 4, IRIS No. 00060991, USAF Collections, AFHRA.

Both were at 5,000 feet when they reached the front lines and could see U.S. Army trucks below. Mossman was anxious to bail out, but Mohrle asked him to wait just a little longer until they were closer to the base so that the ground crews would not have so far to drive out to get him. As the Picauville airstrip came into view, the pilot once again radioed over that he was ready to bail out, but Mohrle again told him to hold off or else the abandoned aircraft would likely crash into friendly troops, and instead suggested that he try and land the aircraft on base. Even if Mossman was convinced, which he was not, by then his windshield was covered in oil and impossible to see through, so Mohrle told his wingman to pop his canopy and manually crank down the landing gear, letting the drag help slow the airplane to approximately 150 miles-per-hour. Mohrle flew next to Mossman, wingtip to wingtip, and led him over the airstrip, positioning him over the center of the runway. Mohrle called over, "Cut it!" and Mossman wrenched back on the throttle, dropped the P-47 onto the strip, eased on the brakes, and stopped just a hundred feet from the end of the runway.

Mohrle pulled up, came back around for his own landing, jumped out of his plane, and was looking across the taxi strip to find his crew and wingman when he spotted them all laughing hysterically. Mohrle asked his crew chief what the hell all the cackling was about because he was still pretty shaken over the whole ordeal. The chief smiled and said, "Go over and see for yourself, Captain." Fuming, he stormed over to the group, who all quieted down as he approached. Without looking up, one of the mechanics handed Mohrle Mossman's incident report, which read, "Severe damage to left wing.

Shrapnel holes in cowling. Oil leak covering top fuselage and all of canopy. Thin layer of shit in cockpit.”<sup>73</sup>

More bad weather kept the pilots on the ground for the last three days of August. The squadron managed two missions on 1 September before being rained out for another day and a half. The men split the time between playing mindless rounds of solitaire and sleeping. There was one armed recon mission late in the afternoon on the fifth before the strip was officially condemned on the sixth when the rain had so softened the ground underneath the runway that takeoffs and landings became too dangerous.<sup>74</sup>

The squadron was moving again. Advanced parties had already begun preparations, breaking down and packing up all the supplies and shelters going with them to the new base. Half the crewmen were already on their way to help set up the new base, and the other half would be split between Picauville (A8A )and a temporary strip nearby (A14). Tools and equipment were frustratingly spread between A8A and A14 with crews constantly shuttling between the two strips for supplies, food, and sleep. After pouring for nearly a week straight, the rain finally flooded the entire base. Water ran over the floors in the barracks, the airplanes sank into the muck, and the runway disappeared altogether. Crewmen used jeeps to haul the planes out of the mudholes but not before burning through the clutches in more than a few of them. On 11 September, the rest of the squadron finally made the big move to their new base at A36 in St. Dizier, France, halfway between Paris and Strasbourg.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Mohrle, “General observations” (undated).

<sup>74</sup> 510 FS, “Squadron History,” August 1944, p. 4.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5



The highs and lows the squadrons faced, both professionally and personally, were inevitably shaping their time in Europe. For the pilots, war seemed to bring out an hour of sorrow for every five minutes of serenity. But it was the five minutes of serenity that helped maintain sanity, and that kept the airmen determined to go on. The fighter pilots accepted that small pockets of joy during their time in Europe would get them through the overwhelming exhaustion and grief of war.

## Chapter Six:

St. Dizier, France (A64)  
11 September 1944 – 6 February 1945

With Patton's Third Army outpacing nearly everyone's expectations except his own, and Eisenhower now leading all Allied ground operations, the new hyper-aggressive advance towards Germany set the tone for what the Allies hoped would be the final push to end the war. The Third Army's speed—while in large part due to Patton himself and the cover Weyland's air units provided—also benefited from widespread German disorganization. Patton's men jumped onto tanks, trucks, armored personnel vehicles, jeeps, and seized enemy vehicles, hitching rides whenever possible as it became clear that despite their exposed flanks and the lack of control the frenzied speed often caused, they were moving into German territory, and doing so as fast as possible.<sup>1</sup>

Meanwhile, the Germans, some still using horse-drawn carts, bicycles, or traveling on foot, found it difficult to set up adequate defense positions and antiaircraft emplacements, or find shelter from American fighter-bombers.<sup>2</sup> The panzer divisions notwithstanding, the Germans seemed a generation behind in their military development where their ground forces were concerned. They traveled short distances by road and on foot. For long-distance troop transport and moving equipment and heavy supplies, they

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<sup>1</sup> John J. Sullivan, *Air Support for Patton's Third Army* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2003), p. 89.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 123.

relied on rail lines that were under constant attack from the Ninth Air Force. As a result, the devastating effect fighter-bombers had on the rail systems and bridges greatly limited the mobility of the German army, as was the goal of the Ninth's interdiction program.<sup>3</sup> Any retreat the Germans made was so fast and haphazard that they either failed to or decided not to bother with destroying their remaining airfields, bridges, communications systems, boats, and barges.<sup>4</sup>

Eisenhower and the Allied command were exploiting a "broad front" strategy, figuring that if the Allied front was stretched wide enough, the Germans would eventually overexert their troops and overextend their supplies attempting to keep up. The broad front also offered the opportunity to keep the Germans constantly guessing as to where the next thrust would come from. Not surprising, considering the size of this "broad front," supply problems began to hinder the Allied armies as well that fall.

The stunning Allied tear across France and Belgium came to a screeching halt when the armies reached the German border. From the beginning of the Third Army's run, a logistical crisis had been forming. The army was outrunning its supply lines and fuel, thus weakening the Allied effort at the precise moment they wanted to sound the death knell for the German forces. Only adding to the frustration, the German army had been crushed but not conquered as many thought; there was much more fight left in them than the Allies initially assumed.<sup>5</sup> XIX TAC began to devote the bulk of their sorties and resources to armed recon missions and providing close air support, and less on

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<sup>3</sup> Keegan, *Second World War*, p. 416.

<sup>4</sup> Sullivan, *Air Support for Patton's Third Army*, p. 123.

<sup>5</sup> Craven and Cate, *Army Air Forces in World War II*, vol. 3, p. 595.

interdiction missions isolating the battlefield as the Allies slowed their approach to the German border. Unlike the interdiction missions that sent the pilots towards specific targets and typically away from the front, these armed recon missions monitored a specific area around the ground forces, and thus saved time and fuel because the squadrons knew where the ground units were located before they took off.<sup>6</sup>

Both Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery and Patton lobbied Eisenhower for the opportunity to spearhead the impending thrust into Germany, knowing full well that whomever Eisenhower chose would have ample supplies bestowed upon him. Instead, Eisenhower ordered a principal offensive north of the Ardennes region in southern Belgium amid a simultaneous advance from the entire front. Allied planners considered the northern route through Holland more favorable for penetrating deep into Germany. It would lead them to the Ruhr, where most of Germany's industry was centralized and in an area that offered promising possibilities for airfield development along the way. With regards to supply relief, Montgomery's Twenty-First Army was given the lion's share and would continue to until his unit secured the port of Antwerp.<sup>7</sup>

Operation MARKET-GARDEN consisted of a two phases: MARKET was a planned airborne drop across the waterways and near the advancing ground troops designed to take vital rail lines, roads, as well as fixed and pontoon bridges between Eindhoven and Arnhem in the Netherlands; GARDEN was the ground phase of the campaign designed to flank the Siegfried Line and gain control of the area between Arnhem and the Zuiderzee to the northwest. XIX TAC was responsible for cutting eleven specific rail lines running west from crossings at Bingen, Mainz, Worms,

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<sup>6</sup> Sullivan, *Air Support for Patton's Third Army*, p. 124.

<sup>7</sup> Craven and Cate, *Army Air Forces in World War II*, vol. 3, p. 598.

Ludwigshafen, Speyer, Germersheim, and Karlsruhe, and then destroying eleven more lines lying east of the Rhine.<sup>8</sup> In addition, artillery emplacements on the ground had to be taken out in order for the airborne troops to get in safely, as enemy flak, not the Luftwaffe, was assumed to be the Germans' main mode of resistance.

While the command prepared for MARKET-GARDEN, the 405<sup>th</sup> once again employed the two-party plan for its move from Picauville to St. Dizier. The airfield had only recently been abandoned by the Germans, who had wired every inch of the runway with explosives before they left. Fortunately, the French Underground had cut the wires the night before the first moving party arrived. The large, concrete runways were a considerable upgrade from the small, pierced-steel planking runways in Picauville. Almost two miles from the town's center, the airstrip was located between the Marne River and the Marne Canal, with headquarters set up on the riverbank. The Germans had left several warehouses intact as they fled, which the supply sections filled with clothes lockers, stoves, flooring boards, trailers, and firewood, as well as most of the supplies needed to winterize the base. Supplies included crates of French champagne from the nearby Champagne region made suddenly affordable by wartime conditions.<sup>9</sup>

While the engineering crew put the finishing touches on the new base, the pilots responded to an operational order requesting air support for ground troops at Pont A'Mousson on 12 September. As the squadron spread out over the target and began a bombing run, twenty Bf-109s came out of nowhere and swarmed the team like an agitated hornet's nest. The pilots furiously broke formation, quickly targeting the nearest

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 600.

<sup>9</sup> 405 FG, "Group History," September 1944, p. 2, IRIS No. 00090626, in USAF Collections, AFHRA.

enemy aircraft. The 510<sup>th</sup> destroyed six of the German planes, eventually all reduced to balls of fire on the ground below. Six more were trailing smoke behind their damaged ships as they, and the remaining eight aircraft, retreated east as fast as possible. Howie Curran had been flying lead when the squadron was attacked and before he knew it, two Messerschmitts had ganged up on his tail and had him in their sights. Before Curran was shot down himself, he managed to bring down his fifth enemy aircraft.<sup>10</sup>

As far as he and the rest of the squadron were concerned this should have made Curran an ace. Sergeant Trank had already painted a series of tiny airplanes, bombs, and swastikas denoting Curran's aerial victories on the side of the "Kansas Tornado." Unfortunately, several of the tally marks represented ground kills rather than aerial kills, which the Ninth Air Force ruled could not be made official.<sup>11</sup> After bailing out of his damaged P-47, Curran made his way safely back to the base and was granted a trip back home after the incident. Curran left the squadron having clocked 231 combat hours and having flown ninety-one missions. With numbers like those, the squadron felt almost certain that when Curran returned to the ETO, he would be given his own squadron to command.<sup>12</sup>

With MARKET-GARDEN slated for 17 September, the 510<sup>th</sup>, along with most of the TAC's fighter-bomber units, attacked railways in an attempt to keep the Germans from reinforcing the Siegfried Line. Beyond these preparations, American tactical air

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<sup>10</sup> 510 FS, "Squadron History," September 1944, p. 3, IRIS No. 00060992, in USAF Collections, AFHRA.

<sup>11</sup> Jerry Scutts, *P-47 Thunderbolt Aces of the Ninth and Nineteenth Air Forces* (Oxford, England: Osprey Publishing, 1999), p. 24.

<sup>12</sup> 510 FS, "Squadron History," September 1944, p. 3.

units were largely underutilized during the actual operation.<sup>13</sup> Assignments for air operations during MARKET-GARDEN were hashed out during a series of meetings from 11 through 15 September. With Montgomery in charge and his Twenty-First Army taking the lead, it would be the British tactical units, not the Ninth, supporting the ground forces. Attacks on enemy aerodromes in the drop and landing zones were assigned to the RAF's bombers; attacks on enemy artillery emplacements and antiaircraft positions were assigned to the Eighth Air Force and the Air Defense of Great Britain (ADGB); escort duties and providing cover for airborne troop carriers were assigned to the ADGB and the Eighth's VIII Fighter Command; and finally, the RAF's Second Tactical Air Force (TAF) was to cover the drop and landing zones as well as provide support for ground forces. In short, the Ninth's tactical units were absent from the operation's air plan. In hindsight, the decision seems misguided considering the success of the Ninth when employed for exactly the interdiction and ground support missions MARKET-GARDEN planners envisioned.<sup>14</sup>

Two preoperational interdiction missions on 13 September, attacked marshaling yards, trains, and locomotives near the St. Die-Friburg-Basle-Belfort area and the Saarburg-Strasbourg area, both with excellent results. Weather kept everyone on the ground on 14 September, so the squadron was eager to take off on 15 September for an armed recon mission supporting ground troops, and returned to base excited about the nineteen motor transport vehicles and five locomotives they had left burning. And while the men were glad for the thrill, it failed to relieve their boredom for long when rain

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<sup>13</sup> Of the 13,338 total sorties devoted to air operations during MARKET-GARDEN, the Ninth accounted for only 3.7 percent, and missions were predominantly escort missions for the Eighth's bombers, in Craven and Cate, *The Army Air Forces in World War II*, vol. 3, p. 610.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 600-602.

grounded them for the next three days. Finally, after four days of bad weather and a decrease in assignments as MARKET-GARDEN jumped off, the squadron was finally assigned a sweep mission in the area around Nijmegen, attacking artillery emplacements right before the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne's drop. The squadron was also charged with destroying all nearby marshaling yards over the next two days.

The stretch of bad weather did allow the squadron enough time to start addressing the shortcomings of their drafty canvas shelters considering the impending winter at St. Dizier. The men also commandeered whatever jeep, two-and-a-half-ton truck, or bomb carrier was closest and ransacked abandoned German warehouses nearby for equipment. Officers and enlisted personnel alike stripped off and piled up wood of every shape and size, and pulled out windows, stoves, and closets for what they hoped would become suitable combat-zone shelters.

Bricks from the German warehouse provided officers with a new fireplace. The men found a picture of Nazi commander-in-chief of the Luftwaffe Hermann Goering, whom they nicknamed "Fat-Stuff" or "Ball-O-Fat" Goering, and decided to bring the photo back to the base and hang over the makeshift hearth. Not able to procure a suitable frame for the image, they scoured the base for the next best thing, a toilet seat. As one of the pilots wrote, "It was tried on for size and was found to fit like a glove...now, on the fireplace and glaring bewilderedly at the officers, sits Hermann the Vermin, symbolic in his new found setting of Germany's threat to the free peoples of the world."<sup>15</sup>

In the midst of all the construction, Arlie Blood returned. He had spent almost six months first, as a member of the French Underground, next as a POW, an escapee, again

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<sup>15</sup> 510 FS, "Squadron History," September 1944, p. 4.



as a member of the French Underground for a few weeks more, before finally getting back to the 510<sup>th</sup>. Amazingly, the German base the squadron now occupied was the same one Blood was taken to for interrogation when the Germans first captured him. At a party thrown in his honor, Blood did not recognize most in attendance, having been gone so long and so many replacement pilots brought in during his absence. After spending only a few days at the base, he was flown back to the States for rest and relaxation.<sup>16</sup>

While the Ninth's tactical units had been largely sidelined during MARKET-GARDEN, the units were no stranger to the frustration experienced by Second TAF when weather prevented them from providing continuous close air support for the paratroopers fighting behind enemy lines, as well as interdicting the Germans' reinforcement routes. But, the weather was, unfortunately, just one part of the disappointing showing by the tactical units, whose airbases were spread too far apart and whose fighters had been held back from engaging in attacks on ground targets during the resupply of paratroopers. The result was a small window during which the Second TAF could impact the operation.

After the Allied leadership acknowledged the operation's failure, Montgomery blamed the collapse on everything from inaccurate drops, to weather delays, to lack of air support. He did not acknowledge his failure to move his own ground forces into position to meet up with and resupply the besieged paratroopers from the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne. Perhaps in response to the British general's inculpable version of events, and the speed with which he doled criticism to others, Arnold ordered a comprehensive review of the whole affair, which ultimately showed that even in spite of the inhibiting weather and poor

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<sup>16</sup> Blood, *Only Angels Have Wings*, p. 92.

planning, the air operations of MARKET-GARDEN were the most successful of the entire doomed operation.<sup>17</sup>

On 23 September, the squadron provided close air support for the Third Army twenty miles southeast of Metz with attacks on the enemy's tanks and transport vehicles, killing ten gunners, destroying two artillery emplacements, ten horse-drawn carriages, and eventually turning the German forces back amidst light antiaircraft fire. As they headed back to base, the group's ALO warned that a counterattack was likely to come the next morning at Chateau Salins, five miles northwest of Laneuveville-en-Saulnois. Jenkins requested the 510<sup>th</sup> be given the return mission, but instead the squadron was assigned a different task entirely.<sup>18</sup>

Early the next morning, 24 September, before all three fighter squadrons took off, the missions were reassigned, and the 510<sup>th</sup> went out towards the Chateau after all. Bad weather created an extremely low ceiling, meaning the maximum altitude the planes could reach that morning was lower than what most pilots would consider suitable for flying. Capt. Ed Pawlak, along with his wingman, was in takeoff position just as a call came from the tower canceling the rest of the takeoffs. The pilots looked at each other, nodded and took off anyway, the final two planes to get airborne. Pawlak quickly found himself alone in the thick cloud cover. He checked his instruments and saw that the artificial horizon indicated one of his wings was down thirty degrees, he corrected that and then scanned the rest of his readings only to find the artificial horizon showing the wing off thirty degrees again. His airspeed was slowing, so he pushed the throttle

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<sup>17</sup> Craven and Cate, *Army Air Forces in World War II*, vol. 3, pp. 608-609.

<sup>18</sup> 510 FS, "Squadron History," September 1944, p. 5.

forward but the speed was decreasing instead of increasing. Pawlak then realized he was flying upside down and rolled over just clear of the overcast, only a hundred feet above the ground.<sup>19</sup>

Heavy rains were compounding the already risky mission and the squadron's flight to the target. Visibility was less than satisfactory at takeoff and even worse up in the air. Once over the target, the formation of eight aircraft, each of them now forced to fly by instruments in the cloudy haze, realized that the counterattack had already begun as they dove down out of the overcast.<sup>20</sup>

In what was known as the Battle of Arracourt, Patton's 4<sup>th</sup> Armored Division was under heavy attack, outnumbered fifty tanks to five, and all five were running low on fuel and ammunition. The situation had been relayed directly to Weyland by Patton's command. While the weather conditions should have grounded all XIX TAC, Weyland was determined not to leave the ground troops stranded and encircled by the German tanks. Pawlak remembered, "Our approach reminded me of the Wild West days when the U.S. Calvary came over the hill in time to save the wagon train."<sup>21</sup>

After driving the German tanks back, the 4<sup>th</sup> Armored Division expressed gratitude to the 510<sup>th</sup> and 509<sup>th</sup> through their ALOs and praised them for doing an extraordinary job in spite of the terrible flying conditions. Three hundred Germans were dead, 500 wounded, 194 captured, and twenty-one tanks destroyed while the squadron flew as low as 800 feet. The 510<sup>th</sup> had, by all accounts, rescued the 4<sup>th</sup> from what would

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<sup>19</sup> Nolte, *Thunder Monsters Over Europe*, p. 46.

<sup>20</sup> 510 FS, "Squadron History," September 1944, p. 5.

<sup>21</sup> Nolte, *Thunder Monsters Over Europe*, pp. 45-46.

have otherwise been annihilation.<sup>22</sup> As they flew away from the target area, the pilots turned their attention towards a new problem: finding a place to land. The weather was steadily worsening, making landing back at St. Dizier no longer a possibility. They were forced to land at Etain, where Patton waited to thank the pilots, personally.<sup>23</sup> Second Lt. Dick Parker remembered, “[Someone] said General Patton would like to talk to ya, and I thought he was going to give me hell, frankly, for landing in the middle of his artillery. But he was really—I of course was a second lieutenant and scared to death—but he was real nice and wondered what was going on and what I saw, and wanted to thank us for the job we were doing.”<sup>24</sup>

General Weyland also expressed his gratitude in a commendation letter dated 30 September, for air support he considered “responsible for breaking up tank and artillery counter attacks against US troops,” causing “the enemy heavy losses in armor, guns, transports, and skilled personnel, thus making an outstanding contribution to the success of Allied arms.” He thanked in particular the 510<sup>th</sup>, which “dropped its bombs at deck level, bombed and strafed fields and woods containing enemy tanks, artillery and troops, directly contributing to the repulse of a counter-attack near Laneuveville-en-Saulnois,” and also the 509<sup>th</sup>, for attacking “a convoy of 100 motor transports and armored vehicles” after weather kept them from Chateau Salins.<sup>25</sup> Weyland traveled to St. Dizier to present Air Medals to the three squadrons with Delashaw on 28 September.<sup>26</sup> General Arnold

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<sup>22</sup> Sullivan, *Air Support for Patton's Third Army*, p. 124.

<sup>23</sup> Province, *Patton's Third Army*, p. 54.

<sup>24</sup> Dick Parker, “The 510<sup>th</sup> Was There,” DVD (undated).

<sup>25</sup> Weyland to Commander of the 405<sup>th</sup> Fighter Group, 30 September 1944 in 405 FG, “Group History,” September 1944, IRIS No. 00090626, in USAF Collections, AFHRA.

also sent his commendations to Weyland for the “exceptionally fine job” pairing his command with advancing ground forces with extraordinary efficiency and effectiveness in so short a time. This, Arnold added, Weyland “could not have done without having complete coordination from the top of your command to the bottom.”<sup>27</sup>

The success of the 509<sup>th</sup> and the 510<sup>th</sup> that day earned the entire 405<sup>th</sup> fighter group the Distinguished Unit Citation medal.<sup>28</sup> The award went to those units displaying “gallantry, determination, and esprit de corps,” achieving their missions in such a manner so as to separate them from other units participating in the same campaign. Additionally, the award recognized the heroism displayed—equal to or greater than—that which would merit the Distinguished Service Cross for an individual.<sup>29</sup> The group earned the medal for the 510<sup>th</sup>’s “repeated attacks under an overcast of 800 feet and a driving rain” and the destruction of German tanks despite antiaircraft, mortars, and small arms fire, as well as the 509<sup>th</sup>’s attack on “a convoy of enemy reinforcements comprising 100 trucks and armored vehicles in the same general area” on 24 September. The 405<sup>th</sup> Fighter Group’s “magnificent cooperation of ground forces” during such a “critical juncture in operations” reflected “the highest credit on the entire organization.”<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>Gen. O. P. Weyland, *Weyland Diary: 15 September 1944 – 18 May 1945*, “28 Sept,” IRIS No. 000238252, in USAF Collections, AFHRA

<sup>27</sup> Arnold to Weyland, 13 November 1944, *Correspondence of Maj. Gen. O. P. Weyland*, IRIS No. 232383, in USAF Collection, AFHRA.

<sup>28</sup> Sullivan, *Air Support for Patton’s Third Army*, pp. 124-35, note: the Distinguished Unit Citation was redesignated the Presidential Unit Citation in 1957.

<sup>29</sup> United States Air Force Personnel Center, 5 August 2010, “Presidential Unit Citation,” <http://www.afpc.af.mil/library/factsheets/factsheet.asp?id=7780> (accessed 22 June 2013).

<sup>30</sup> Chief of Staff George C. Marshall, 7 April 1945, War Department Washington D.C., “Battle Honors, The 405<sup>th</sup> Fighter Group” in 405 FG, “Group History,” April 1945, IRIS No. 00090633, in USAF Collections, AFHRA.

Close air support characterized the month of September for the 405<sup>th</sup>. The group flew seventeen armed recon missions, twenty armored column and infantry support missions, and five dive bombing missions. The group also lost seven pilots while flying these kinds of mission, which became increasingly more dangerous as they neared the German border and flak emplacements increased in numbers. The group had participated in and directly contributed to the success of the war's largest tank battle on the Western front up to that point. For this, the Army awarded the group the highest honor bestowed on air units. After such a thrilling, yet deadly month, the pilots assumed that not only would this pace continue, but also that the Germans' defeat was near. The men were wrong on both accounts, as Patton was ordered to halt before crossing into Germany, the weather impeded severely the operations of air units, and the war carried on halfway into the next year.



The ability of the 510<sup>th</sup> to fly consistently sortie after sortie at such a fast pace depended on the expertise and hard work of enlisted personnel. In particular, the squadron's Flight Chief in Armament Ahrend "Bo" Boyarsky made a significant impact on the 510<sup>th</sup> during the war. Boyarsky was born in Brooklyn on 6 March 1915. When he was sixteen, he and his family moved to Weehawken, New Jersey. After finishing high school, Boyarsky was accepted at Columbia University and planned to enroll that fall. His father had other ideas and, after buying a stationery store, had Ahrend working behind the counter for the next eleven years until he enlisted the Army on 21 July 1942. He went through induction training at Fort Dix, Basic training in Miami, Armament School at Buckley Field, Colorado, and finally to Hunter Field, Georgia, where he

worked on the airplanes assigned to air support squadrons training on base. While there, he was one of the first privates selected to join the 510<sup>th</sup> Armament and Ordnance Sections.<sup>31</sup>

He was promoted to corporal, to buck sergeant three months later, and staff sergeant three months after that. After traveling with the squadron overseas to England and assessing a few recurring problems with the aircraft during their first few weeks in England, Boyarsky started to suspect that the bomb release on the P-47s needed some serious adjustment. The pilots often complained to him that pulling the release in the cramped cockpit sometimes interfered with their accuracy, and there were instances where the bombs failed to release at all. Boyarsky, now Flight Chief in Armament, was confident he could come up with something better. He presented his own prototype for a release that sat to the left and slightly forward of the pilot—later denoted the P-47's A-2 Release—and was nominated for a Bronze Star for his innovation.

Boyarsky often worked on squadron's aircraft for sixteen hours a day checking the guns, making sure the bombs were loaded correctly, checking the bomb fuzes, and repairing anything he found below his standards. He was usually the only man on the base seen sporting a two-day beard and he was also the only man never to be cited for such by senior officers. Everyone knew that if he looked like he had not slept for a few days, he probably had not and for good reason—usually to take care of something that made the pilots' jobs a lot easier and safer.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs BIRLS Death File, 1850-2010, 31 May 2013, "Ahrend Boyarsky," [http://www.fold3.com/page/624105919\\_ahrend\\_boyarsky/#a-facts](http://www.fold3.com/page/624105919_ahrend_boyarsky/#a-facts) (accessed 10 October 2013).

<sup>32</sup> 510 FS, "Squadron History," September 1944, pp. 7-9.

The mud was getting deeper, the temperatures lower, and fuel supplies shorter. The challenge of getting aviation fuel to the bases was part of the larger logistical problems plaguing both the Army's ground and air forces. Keeping the makeshift heaters going in their barracks became one of the airmen's chief responsibilities and so the 510<sup>th</sup> scrounged for wood like all the rest. They illegally downed trees from the nearby forest, swiped engine oil, and even used napalm to fight the freezing temperatures. The last sentence in the official squadron report for September read, "But the war has slowed down to almost a complete stand still and it looks like a cold hard winter."<sup>33</sup> Many of the original Walterboro pilots completed their tours of duty in September and rotated back home to the States, until only a few of the original pilots remained in the squadron.

Capt. Harry Sanders was one of the replacement pilots sent to fill the empty spots, as were 2<sup>nd</sup> Lts. Hugh "Hap" Miller and his best friend Gene Johns. Sanders came from northern California where he had made quite a name for himself as one of Santa Clara University's star football players. "Snake-hips" Sanders had twice led the Santa Clara Broncos to victory over LSU in the 1937 and 1938 Sugar Bowls. Before joining the 510<sup>th</sup>, he was an instructor in the Training Command.<sup>34</sup> Lieutenants Miller and Johns had spent much of September camped out in a personnel depot in Paris awaiting an assignment to a combat unit. Both airmen had requested they be assigned to the same unit, and the clerk told them that the 510<sup>th</sup> had put in requests for five replacement pilots. They walked back to their tents, thrilled with the new assignment and eager to share the news with their friends in camp. Their announcement was met with silence and sullen

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>34</sup> Col. Harry G. Sanders, USAF (Ret.), interviewed by author, Dallas, Texas, 30 November 2006.



faces, for despite the pair's ignorance, the aggressive reputation of the 510<sup>th</sup> was well known to most fighter pilots in Europe. "Why do you think they needed five replacements," they asked, "And why do you think they're still open?"<sup>35</sup>

Miller flew his first mission before Johns, and Johns waited for Miller to get back with details of what it had been like. Miller was shaken by what Johns remembered as "a very real and profound fear."<sup>36</sup> Miller immediately began questioning his decision to become a fighter pilot. He could have escaped military service altogether. His mother was a widow, and he was the sole supporter for her and his younger siblings. Directives at the time exempted men in such situations, but he had signed up anyway.<sup>37</sup>

Miller's airplane went down on 18 November 1944 in the St. Arnold area on just his third mission, when flak took off his right wing while flying low and fast on a strafing run.<sup>38</sup> He crashed seconds later. Johns wrote to Miller's mother and told her what a great pilot he had been and how all the men on base would miss him. He was never sure if Miller's mother was aware that he could have been excused from service, and decided not to include any mention of it in his letter for fear it would just make the loss more painful. Decades later, one of Miller's younger brothers told Johns that he had only been nine years old when his brother was killed and remembered not understanding a lot of what was going on when it happened. He did recall one time when Miller came home on

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<sup>35</sup> Maj. Milton E. Johns, correspondence with author, 8 November 2004.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Jenkins, correspondence with the author, 9 October 2004.

<sup>38</sup> MACR, "Hugh Miller," 18 November 1944, [www.Fold3.com](http://www.Fold3.com) (accessed 5 June 1944).

leave and took him for a walk in town, and how proud he was to be seen with his brother in his crisp pilot's uniform.<sup>39</sup>

Colonel Delashaw, who had been with the group since South Carolina, was reassigned to a desk job back in the U.S. due to a persistent sinus infection that ultimately began to affect his inner ear. At his going-away party at the end of the month, the group commander was given a scroll from the fighter group inscribed with:

We, the members of the 405<sup>th</sup> Fighter Group, wish to say goodbye to you, Sir, and good luck in your future life. We have admired you and are proud to have served under your command. As a Group, we have lived, worked, and fought together. There have been bad times. Some of us are gone.

Here in France now, the rain falls, the mud thickens, and the war goes on.

But we are strong, Sir, because you have led us well.

We will remember you as a man who did a good job, a man who was always fair, strong and just— a gentleman, and, above all, a good guy.

And so, Goodbye, Sir.<sup>40</sup>

During October, the weather permitted flying on only nineteen of the month's thirty-one days, and of those nineteen days there were, on average, only nine to ten hours of daylight. Additionally, the sick were outnumbering the wounded in the Third Army, which had already been seriously slowed by fuel and ammunition shortages. The few missions flown were uneventful sweeps along the Third Army's front in support of XII, XV, and XX Corps. But if October seemed routine, the squadron hit an all-time activity

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<sup>39</sup> Johns, correspondence with author, 8 November 2004.

<sup>40</sup> Nolte, *Thunder Monsters Over Europe*, pp. 55-56.

low in November with just twenty-one missions flown the entire month. The air units were so inhibited by weather that Weyland warned the ground generals relying on air support that with the bad weather conditions likely to last and days getting shorter—daylight hours down to eight to nine hours—the XIX TAC would be forced to reduce their effort substantially.<sup>41</sup>

With the weather bogging down every aspect of army life, Charlie Appel, the squadron's new commanding officer after Jenkins was rotated out for rest and relaxation stateside, had to keep the unit sharp despite the dreary conditions and sense of dullness overrunning the base. The squadron historian remarked in November's official report: "The 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, and 4<sup>th</sup> days of the month were just days...ordinary, monotonous days. Pilots awakened at 0630...reporting for briefing with raincoats on...returning to the sack for the remainder of the day to fight the war in a horizontal attack."<sup>42</sup>

On 5 November, the rain stopped long enough to get off one mission, though as one pilot recalled, the overcast was "thicker than G.I. coffee and just as much help."<sup>43</sup> The squadron had to be vectored to their targets from the ground troops and left after dropping their bomb loads with no indication as to how accurate they had been. Two more days of rain and boredom followed, seemingly unbearable for the pilots, until the rain turned to snow and the steam really went out of the group. Along with the 509<sup>th</sup> and the 511<sup>th</sup>, they bombed a Panzer division's command post, on November 8. The attack

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<sup>41</sup> Weyland, Weyland Diary: 15 September 1944 – 18 May 1945, "2 Nov.," in USAF Collections, AFHRA.

<sup>42</sup> 510 FS, "Squadron History," November 1944, p. 2, IRIS No. 00060994, in USAF Collections, AFHRA.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

caught the Germans crowded into their mess hall at mealtime, which was totally destroyed by the aerial assault.

Appel became the squadron's first loss of the month. As he was leading the group on an armed recon mission, he saw three German trucks through the trees. Shortly after he pulled up from a strafing run, antiaircraft fire came up from a flak nest below, blowing a hole nearly a foot and a half wide in the airplane's right wing. The blast ripped through the aileron control cable, causing the aircraft to shake violently as Appel struggled to maintain control.<sup>44</sup> After his wingman confirmed the state of his aircraft, Appel popped his canopy when the aircraft caught fire, loosened his harness, and stood up in his seat, but then considered that since the P-47 did not carry fuel in the wings and the wind was blowing out the fire, he might as well just stay with the aircraft. This, it turned out, was a mistake.<sup>45</sup>

The airplane had slowed to 130 miles per hour—Appel falling at a rate of 500 feet per minute—and he was only 800 to 1,000 feet from the ground. He quickly called over the radio that he was going to jump, grabbed the windshield, stepped up onto the canopy rail, and looked at the trailing edge of the wing right before the slipstream sent him flying. He scrambled for a moment as he and the aircraft continued to fall towards the ground when he remembered a saying he picked up in flight training, “It don't mean a thing, if you don't pull that string.” He tugged the rip cord and the chute opened, yanking his feet over his head and then spinning him around like a rag doll before finally he landed in a bog, only to be dragged another thirty feet through the mud behind his

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<sup>44</sup> MACR, “Charlie Appel,” 17 November 1944, “Pilot's Statement,” [www.Fold3.com](http://www.Fold3.com) (accessed 5 June 2013).

<sup>45</sup> Appel, *Written by an Old Country Boy*, p. 252.

parachute. He wound up in a tiny field, with woods to his right and a small village to his left. He had been trained to seek the cover of the woods, so he ditched his parachute as fast as he could and headed for the trees. He could hear small arms fire nearby as he sprinted for cover. Ten feet short of the tree line three German soldiers stepped out with rifles aimed at him and said, “Hends Oop!” After having been the squadron commander for only nineteen days, Appel spent the next six months in Stalag #1 in Barth, Germany.<sup>46</sup>

He passed the first night in a civilian jail in Saarbrücken. The next morning he and a German guard boarded a civilian train that took him to an interrogation center near Frankfurt. When he refused to answer questions about which squadron he came from and its location, he spent nineteen days in solitary confinement while the Germans tried to figure it out. Considering where he had been shot down and the plane he flew, the Germans eventually narrowed it down to six fighter groups. Appel was served a daily black bread sandwich and “ersatz coffee” that had been poured into an old wine bottle and left inside his cell. “Ersatz” was a German word for “replacement” and usually referred to an inferior alternative for an ingredient that was unavailable. For example, “ersatz coffee” amounted to hot water poured over crushed acorns, an “ersatz sandwich” was moldy bread with a pat of margarine, but Appel admitted, “If I had to be a Prisoner of War, I thank God, that I was a prisoner of the Germans, who were signers of the Rules of the Geneva Convention. I never saw anyone mistreated, except for the shortage of food...and the German people suffered from this same condition.”<sup>47</sup> He was moved to

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 253.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., pp. 254-55.

the prison camp only after the interrogation center became too crowded. Appel did not know it at the time, but he had been promoted to major the day after his crash.<sup>48</sup>

The Red Cross was allowed to hand out Parcels to the POWs on their way to the camps. Each Parcel was a paper pouch holding knitted winter gloves, a knitted beanie cap, two pairs of long underwear, pajamas, socks, a bath towel, a Gillette razor, a tooth brush, and a pumice stone to rub the toothbrush on before brushing in lieu of toothpaste or powder. Once at the camp, the men used the bath towels to cover the broken windows in the barracks to keep the winter cold out. The camp's 2,500 prisoners were packed into barracks, twenty-four to a room with bunk beds triple-stacked against each wall, a small table in the center of the room, and a small heater that the men to cooked on when possible.

The prisoners continued to receive food parcels from the Red Cross in December and January. Each of these contained a can of Spam, salt and pepper packets, a can of margarine, a can of evaporated milk, a package of crackers, some dried fruit, and two packs of cigarettes. Appel and some of the other prisoners found the salt and pepper packets especially useful when dealing with the Germans' guard dogs. When one of the dogs ran after a prisoner or poked its nose into the barracks windows, the men threw a mix of salt and pepper in the dog's nose, and the dog immediately fled. Once the Germans discovered this, the salt and pepper packets were afterwards confiscated from each Red Cross Parcel. After January, word made it to the camp that German civilians

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<sup>48</sup> 510 FS, "Squadron History," November 1944, p. 4.

had taken over the relief train and stolen the soldiers' Parcels, and that they should not expect to receive more.<sup>49</sup>

The fall's dearth of missions left the squadron hopeful that a more action-packed winter would follow, if only to give the men something to do besides sit and shiver in their tents, but that first week of the December showed little promise. The first sorties were escort missions for B-26 bombers, and to add insult to injury, they were also assigned propaganda missions dropping thousands of leaflets over France and Germany. On 6 December, they got a little action with a run to a German marshaling yard at Lebach near Eppelborn. When they flew over the yard at 1610 it was bustling with activity; twenty minutes later, after the attack, nothing was moving on the ground.<sup>50</sup>

A week and a half later, the Germans' Fifth and Sixth Panzer Armies overran the American 28<sup>th</sup> Division on 16 December in the center of the Ardennes region, and surrounded the 106<sup>th</sup> Division to the north. Despite being held by the 4<sup>th</sup> Division in the south with the support of the 9<sup>th</sup> Armored Division, the German offensive had broken through and caused the Allied front lines to fold inwards, causing a bulging salient—the bloody reduction of which became known as the Battle of the Bulge. As Weyland remarked in his diary that day, “German attacks have materialized in VIII Corps (First Army) front. 1<sup>st</sup> Army & VII very surprised!!”<sup>51</sup> Due to the worst winter weather in more than eighty years, air reconnaissance in the area had been inhibited, and the Allies had not intercepted any German radio messages indicating an impending offensive.

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<sup>49</sup> Appel, *Written by an Old Country Boy*, p. 256 and *Written by an Old Country Boy*, vol. 2 (Marietta, GA: Appel, 2004), p. 104.

<sup>50</sup> 510 FS, “Squadron History” December 1944, p. 2, IRIS No. 00060995, in USAF Collections, AFHRA.

<sup>51</sup> Weyland Diary, 15 September 1944 – 15 May 1945, “17 Dec.”

Neither of these was a coincidence. The Germans had planned the offensive based on strict radio security and set the target date by taking into account forecasts of poor flying weather. Left without proper intelligence, Bradley was first caught unaware, and next, underestimated the severity of the situation.<sup>52</sup>

Eisenhower, on the other hand, knew by 17 December that the situation warranted the shift of one armored division each from Patton's Third Army and Lt. Gen. William Simpson's Ninth Army to shore up the break in the Allied front and help Bradley's Twelfth Army head off a full-blown attack. That same day, the 405<sup>th</sup>, which had been busy preparing for a move to a new airbase in Metz while the weather permitted, was assigned missions in the St. Vith area and flew eighty sorties in support of the besieged 106<sup>th</sup> Division from the First Army's VIII Corps. The group's missions that day were marked by a sharp increase in enemy aircraft and almost every mission included aerial combat with Bf-109s and FW-190s, though they suffered zero losses and the 510<sup>th</sup> claimed four enemy aircraft destroyed and one damaged.<sup>53</sup> A high-pressure system from the Atlantic moved in on 18 December and collided with a competing weather system coming from Russia bringing with it snow, blizzard conditions, fog, and freezing rain that would last through 22 December. Both bad weather and enemy aircraft plagued air forces in the area throughout the entire battle and well into January.<sup>54</sup>

The key to the German offensive was the capture of Bastogne, where the network of highways extending in every direction converged. The 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne raced towards

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<sup>52</sup> Keegan, *Second World War*, pp. 442-45.

<sup>53</sup> 510 FS, "Squadron History," December 1944.

<sup>54</sup> Hugh M. Cole, *United States Army in World War II, the European Theater of Operations, The Ardennes: Battle of the Bulge* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, United States Army, 1994), p. 649.



Bastogne overnight on 19 December and arrived just ahead of the Panzer Lehr Division less than two miles from town. It was thus the responsibility of the 101<sup>st</sup> to defend Bastogne, which the unit attempted for at least the next three days without any air support or supply, as weather grounded all flights and Patton was held up in Luxembourg by the Seventh Panzer Army. The 405<sup>th</sup> was scheduled to fly a mission in support of the XII Corps, Third Army on 21 December but was recalled as bad weather moved in.<sup>55</sup>

When the weather finally cleared on 23 December, the skies were open to waves of fighter-bombers that had been held back for three days. German transport jammed up the roads to the west of the Rhine as their horse-drawn snow plows slowly cleared away the giant snowdrifts that had formed ahead. The stalled, canvas-covered supply vehicles backed up along the winding roads leading to the battle zone presented the fighter-bombers with easy targets. By the time the Germans' power snow plows reached Eifel, outside St. Vith, the airmen were strafing and bombing the trapped German forces on roads leading to and from the front.<sup>56</sup>

The weather favored the Allies for the next five days, during which air attacks hindered German daylight operations and their ability to keep up with combat demands, as fighter-bombers continuously attacked supply lines coming into the battle area.<sup>57</sup> The clear weather also allowed the 509<sup>th</sup> and 510<sup>th</sup> to escort C-47s to Bastogne for an air drop to resupply the encircled 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne. Continued clear skies on 24 December allowed for the first full day of air operations since the battle began, and even with enemy aircraft

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<sup>55</sup> Keegan, *Second World War*, p. 445.

<sup>56</sup> Cole, *The Ardennes: Battle of the Bulge*, p. 649

<sup>57</sup> Kim H. Campbell, "Holding Patton: Seventh Panzer Army and the Battle of Luxembourg" in ed. Peter G. Tsouras, *Battle of the Bulge: Hitler's Alternate Scenarios* (London: Greenhill Books, 2004), p. 225.

challenging the Allies, the TAC flew 1,138 sorties, 738 (64.9 percent) of which were ground support sorties directly over the battlefield.<sup>58</sup>

The Germans had Bastogne completely surrounded by Christmas day, but with another full day of clear skies the 405<sup>th</sup> attacked the trenches, gun installations, bridges, and motor transport vehicles along the roads surrounding St. Vith and Bastogne. The squadrons were once again attacked by enemy aircraft, claiming one Bf-109 destroyed by the 509<sup>th</sup>, and four FW-190s destroyed and one damaged by the 510<sup>th</sup> in addition to the group's 147 motor transport destroyed. More bright skies the day after afforded the group another 100 sorties in the Echterneck-Bitburg-Mausinger area supporting XII Corps. For these, the group employed napalm, fragmentation (frag), and general purpose bombs against the Germans' motor transport, supply convoys, bridges, and armored vehicles, helping to facilitate Patton's breakthrough from the south to relieve Bastogne.<sup>59</sup>

Security was increased around the Ninth's airstrips, alert crews were permanently posted around the perimeters, and new defense plans were drafted to protect the P-47s in the wake of widespread fears of a German paratrooper attack on the airbase. In the midst of the security hike, Captain Sanders took one of the squadron's jeeps and headed out to the front lines on a quick assignment. With the jeep's engine loudly chugging along, Sanders must have missed a guard calling "Halt!" because suddenly machine-gun fire blasted from the trees and across the front of his vehicle. He slammed on the brakes and jumped out of the jeep, frantically trying to identify himself over the machine gun's chatter, "Captain Sanders of the 5---0---10<sup>th</sup> squadron!" he stuttered, with his hands up and head ducked. As the spooked guard walked over, Sanders quickly understood why

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<sup>58</sup> Cole, *The Ardennes: Battle of the Bulge*, p. 660-61.

<sup>59</sup> Nolte, *Thunder Monsters Over Europe*, pp. 66-68.

he had nearly been killed by a fellow American while wearing his American uniform and driving in an American Army jeep: the man with the gun was wearing the thickest glasses Sanders had ever seen. He glared at the guard as he climbed back into his jeep and headed towards the line.<sup>60</sup>

Weather deteriorated significantly in last four days of December with clouds and overcast returning over the battlefield on 28 December, followed the next day by arctic air from Scandinavia that led to another round of heavy snow, blizzard conditions, and greatly reduced visibility all the way down to ground level.<sup>61</sup> Despite these conditions, the 405<sup>th</sup> managed seventy-four sorties on 29 December in support of the XII Corps near Bitburg and fifty-seven on 30 December supporting the XII again, near Luxembourg. This was likely made possible by the Ninth's innovative use of the SCR-584 antiaircraft microwave radar. The SCR-584 had a fine, narrow beam that, when directing antiaircraft fire, provided superb radar accuracy.<sup>62</sup>

The Ninth had six of the SCR-584s and used them to guide air operations, even in unflyable weather conditions. Radar, paired with a modified Norden bombsight, tracked the fighter and vectored the aircraft over the precise position of the target, even when the pilot himself could not see the ground. Once over the exact position, the controllers would tell the pilots to drop their bombs and then guide them back to base, at which point a significant amount of skill was required to land safely despite limited visibility. The Ninth also employed the SCR-584s to protect friendly ground forces from fighter-bomber attack after the snow erased all distinguishing markings designating tanks, vehicles, and

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<sup>60</sup> 510 FS, "Squadron History," January 1945, pp. 2, 9, IRIS No. 00060996, in USAF Collections, AFHRA.

<sup>61</sup> Cole, *The Ardennes: Battle of the Bulge*, p. 649.

<sup>62</sup> Nolte, *Thunder Monsters Over Europe*, p. 69.

transport as Allied or German. To this end, two of the six radars were placed along the northern boundary of the Bulge. When the weather was clear, and the fighter-bombers were out in full force, the pilots called controllers and reported enemy targets such as a road with masses of troops and armored vehicles. Then, by reading the aircraft's location with the SCR-584, the controllers reported back to the pilot whether he was on top of enemy or friendly forces, and therefore whether to bomb or not.<sup>63</sup>

The weather conditions during the Battle of the Bulge limited the fighter-bombers' ability to isolate the battlefield—one of the major responsibilities of tactical air units—allowing German reinforcements to flood into the combat zone unhindered by Allied aircraft. In contrast, the sustained air attack from 23 through 28 December significantly affected the Germans' ability to keep up with the demands of the battle. Had the weather allowed the attack on supply lines to continue for several days more, the Germans likely would have suffered shortages severe enough to cost them the battle. As it was, the weather offered a reprieve, and the Third Army, dependent on air support from the XIX TAC, suffered greatly.

Initial estimates of Allied losses for the Battle of the Bulge were 8,607 dead, 21,144 missing, and 47,139 wounded, with the First Army suffering 56 percent of the losses, the Third Army 42 percent, and the British XXX Corps the remaining 2 percent. In that time, the First and Third Armies also lost approximately 471 Sherman tanks and 262 light tanks. The losses appeared similar on the German side as well. In the end, the

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<sup>63</sup> Quesada, 13 May 1975, Tape 4-Side 1, p. 3.

difference was that the Allies could recover from these losses and the Germans could not.<sup>64</sup>

Ironically, the squadrons' constant battles with enemy aircraft dealt the Germans the biggest blow. The Luftwaffe had made their last stand and lost—significantly. The largest offensive by the Luftwaffe during the battle, which came on 18 December before the weather system reached the battlefield, amounted to only 849 sorties, and of those few offered any ground support. Instead they were held back by Allied air forces on the far eastern edge of the battlefield. The most interaction between the two air forces since D-Day came on Christmas Eve in the Ardennes, and even then the Third Army, which was mounting its counterattack and therefore assumed to be a likely target for the Luftwaffe, reported seeing only one enemy squadron.

The Germans were never able to mount a sustained air attack on Allied forces in the small windows of good weather as had the Allied air forces. This weakness is evidenced by the widely varied number of sorties flown by the Luftwaffe, ranging from as few as 6 on one day to as many as 800 sorties per day on another during the first ten days of the battle. During the last six days of the battle, the Luftwaffe was restricted to German airspace and only averaged between 60 and 80 sorties a day, almost all of which were carried out at night. Not only had the Luftwaffe not managed anything resembling the devastating air attacks planners had hoped for, the air force also failed to defend the Germans' supply lines across the Rhine. The Luftwaffe's only contributions during the

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<sup>64</sup> Jean Paul Pallud, *Battle of the Bulge, Then and Now* (London: Battle of Britain Prints International Limited, 1984), pp. 481-82.

battle were attacks on unescorted B-26s striking railroads, marshaling yards, and bridges.<sup>65</sup>

When snow grounded all missions from 3 through 9 January, the squadron's unfortunately designated snow removal officer must have felt like Sisyphus, because every day he cleared the runway of snow only to have it covered by the time he made it from one end to the other.<sup>66</sup> At this time, the squadron welcomed back Maj. Ralph Jenkins after his furlough in the States. With nearly all of the original members rotated out, he hardly knew anyone, but as the commanding officer he quickly set about getting acquainted. Jenkins took the squadron out on several successful missions supporting ground troops throughout the next week before the activity for the month ended on the thirtieth.<sup>67</sup> As was typical, just as the base was running smoothly, orders came at the end of the month to move the squadron 300 miles to the northeast to Ophoven, Belgium and so the squadron again began the laborious task of relocating the base, the airplanes, the ground personnel, and the pilots to the new facility.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Cole, *The Ardennes: Battle of the Bulge*, p. 660.

<sup>66</sup> 510 FS, "Squadron History," January 1945, p. 3.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 5-6.

<sup>68</sup> 510 FS, "Squadron History," February 1945, p. 2, IRIS No. 00060997, in USAF Collections, AFHRA.

## Chapter Seven:

Ophoven, Belgium (Y32)  
6 February – 24 April 1945

For the 510<sup>th</sup>, picking up and moving from one base to the next was becoming old hat. As Lieutenant Gleeson explained at the time, “a courier arrives at the office of the Commanding Officer and presents our C.O. with a letter containing a reasonable facsimile of the following: “The 405<sup>th</sup> Fighter Group will depart from station [number] so and so on the 5<sup>th</sup> of such and such and will commence operations at a field 300 miles away on the 7<sup>th</sup> of so and so. If the C.O. of the 405<sup>th</sup> feels that too much time has been allotted the unit for the move, he may grant his men time to eat.”<sup>1</sup> What set this move apart from the rest is that no one got wind of it ahead of time. Absent were the typical rumors and speculation that preceded all the other orders to pack up. The squadron, caught completely by surprise, was all the more stunned to find that the advanced echelon was expected at the new location the next evening, and left St. Dizier at 1930 hours, 5 February 1945, for Ophoven.

Just like the moves before, the group carried out the transfer in waves, although this time the endeavor was described as “the slow convoy...the slower convoy...and the slowest damn convoy imaginable.”<sup>2</sup> The least slow of the three got lost in the dark and stuck in the mud before the night was through, and directions from cantankerous British

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<sup>1</sup> 510 FS, “Squadron History,” February 1945, p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

Military Police along the way only made things worse, as one officer remarked, “in comparison with the M.P. a mute jackass was a fountain of information.” Wandering around in circles and finally breaking down in the middle of a field covered in mud, the squadron knew it was home when another equally helpful British MP drove up screaming “Keep moving! This is a taxi strip!” The last convoy arrived at Y32 Ophoven or “The Mudhole” as it was known from that night on, at 1330 the next afternoon.<sup>3</sup>

While the move farther east was fraught with many of the same exasperating complications as prior moves and the typical wretched weather that had followed them across the continent continued to make both relocating and flying nearly impossible, the squadron’s time in Belgium was markedly different than its previous experiences. While, the enlisted men were billeted in tents on base, the officers were put up in local homes throughout the town. Even though the slightly warmer weather made the mud a tad more bearable, the Belgian girls nearby seemed to pale in comparison to the mademoiselles the men had enjoyed mingling with in France. The move to Belgium signaled a significant change in the squadron’s missions as well after the 405<sup>th</sup> and its three squadrons was removed from the operational control of XIX TAC.<sup>4</sup>

The Allies carried out a series of offensive operations inflicting maximum destruction on all German forces west of the Rhine in order to make way for the establishment of strong bridgeheads across the river. Accordingly, the Allies launched an aggressive campaign named Operation GRENADE to hunt down and defeat any Germans left in the Ardennes, eliminate German resistance west of the Rhine on the Alsace-Lorraine front, and finally destroy the ground forces standing between the Allies

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>4</sup> Nolte, *Thunder Monsters Over Europe*, p. 82.



and the Rhine north of Düsseldorf. Following these offensives, a final, fatal push into the heart of Germany would unite the Allied army with the Russians as they pushed in from the east. With the impending operation in mind, Weyland and the other TAC senior officers met the first week in February at Ninth Air Force headquarters to reshuffle the air support assignments and match Army corps to new air squadrons as needed for the planned offensive. Consequently, the 405<sup>th</sup> was reassigned to Gen. Richard E. Nugent's XXIX TAC.<sup>5</sup> The fighter groups were given predominantly interdiction missions destroying the German rail and road networks west and east of the Rhine before the ground operations began.<sup>6</sup>

Weather wrecked most of the February missions save for a couple of days in the middle of the month when the skies cleared long enough to hammer the German transportation systems. The 510<sup>th</sup> made an immediate impression on its new command. All fifteen fighter squadrons combined, the XXIX destroyed 819 railcars and 132 locomotives in the two weeks since the offensive began on 8 February.<sup>7</sup> The 510<sup>th</sup> managed to claim 13 percent of all the rolling stock destroyed and 38 percent of all locomotives, all in one day: 16 February.<sup>8</sup>

A new XXIX TAC record was set on the 23 February, flying more than 613 sorties, with the 405<sup>th</sup> and the 373<sup>rd</sup> supporting the XIII and XIX corps, respectively during GRENADE. According to reports from XIII corps, the 405<sup>th</sup> lived up to their reputation and made an undeniable contribution to the day's success:

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<sup>5</sup> Spires, *Air Power for Patton's Arm*, pp. 248-49.

<sup>6</sup> Craven and Cate, *Army Air Forces in World War II*, vol. 3, pp. 756, 760.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 759, 762.

<sup>8</sup> 510 FS, "Squadron History," February 1945, p. 8.

On the afternoon of 23 Feb, elements of the 84<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division were advancing from Rurich to Baal. No adequate anti-tank weapons had as yet crossed the Roer. Enemy tanks were seen in Baal. Flying conditions were poor with low ceiling and limited visibility. A squadron of the 405 Group attacked these tanks. Ground reports that two of these tanks were destroyed, two were damaged. Baal was occupied that night.

During the night of the 23-24 Feb, XIII Corps bridges in the vicinity of Linnich were attacked by the GAF [German Air Force] planes and two bridges were destroyed....Cover for the bridges was requested. Squadrons of the 405 Group kept cover over the bridges despite a ceiling of only 1500 feet. No further attacks were made. Critical equipment, tanks, artillery, and anti-tank guns passed safely over the remaining bridges. Air superiority, temporarily lost, was restored and with it freedom of movement behind our own lines.<sup>9</sup>

The squadron got off missions on 24 February and three missions the next day, all supporting General Simpson's Ninth Army XIII Corps, all with "results ranging from good to excellent," and despite flak being "thick as blood." Weather grounded the squadron for the last three days of February.<sup>10</sup>

The sun seemed to shine more in March than it had the whole winter. Other than one week in mid-month, the good weather set the fighter-bombers free, leading to "records of sorties flown and claims of destruction transport...established one day, only

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<sup>9</sup> XXIX TAC, Operation AIR GRENADE in Craven and Cate, *Army Air Forces In World War II*, vol. 3, p. 762.

<sup>10</sup> 510 FS, "Squadron History," February 1945, p. 9.

to be surpassed within a few days.”<sup>11</sup> In total, the 510<sup>th</sup> expended 742 500-pound bombs, 476 of the 260-pound frag bombs, 80 white phosphorous incendiary bombs, and 321,670 rounds of .50-caliber bullets.<sup>12</sup>

Three days into March the squadron returned from an interdiction mission that claimed 19 locomotives, more than 80 railcars, 9 rail cuts, 5 road cuts, 5 flak emplacements, and substantial damage to a freight train coming into the area as the squadron headed back to base. On 7 March, opposition in Borth, Germany—five miles northeast of Alpen and less than a mile west of the Rhine—pinned down the XVI Corps’ 35<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. The 35<sup>th</sup> was on its way to meet up with the Ninth Army, which had just arrived in Remagen, almost a hundred miles south, and captured the last remaining bridge over the Rhine, the Ludendorff Bridge. Attempting to free the pinned down 35<sup>th</sup>, the 510<sup>th</sup> scrambled two flights led by Jenkins. The squadron broke up German artillery and infantry strongholds in town while the infantry attacked below and continued marching south.<sup>13</sup>

The group’s first mission on 9 March was over the Rhine, taking out ten of the Germans’ river barges and three barrage balloons that, ironically, the Germans used to keep away fighter-bombers. The squadron was just returning from its second mission of the day over Borth when one of the controllers from the tower called out, “Bandits!” Sanders, now a major, was leading the mission and looked back to see a band of more than twenty Bf-109s and FW-190s about to jump his squadron from behind. Sanders and

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<sup>11</sup> Craven and Cate, *Army Air Forces in World War II*, vol. 3, p. 767.

<sup>12</sup> 510 FS, “Squadron History,” March 1945, p. 2, IRIS No. 00660988, in USAF Collections, AFHRA,

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

his flight swung around and rose up to meet the enemy fighters, and while Sanders's P-47 took the brunt of the enemy's machine-gun fire, the other three airmen in his flight took home the glory: two Bf-109s and one FW-190.<sup>14</sup>

Young lieutenants new to the squadron were the only airmen in the squadron still enticed by the forty-eight-hour shifts on the front lines, observing operations on the ground and helping to designate targets. They returned with stories of the “horizontal flak” the infantry endured, which, as one young pilot described, was “to all practical purposes, equally effective as vertical flak!” The practice of sending airmen to the ground forces in order to communicate more efficiently during close air support—airman to airman—had begun with Quesada and Bradley in Normandy but was still in practice that spring, though the demand for such arrangements had certainly decreased with the German Army putting up less and less of a fight. Thus, the pilots' forty-eight-hour shifts more resembled a dangerous field trip than an infantry assignment.<sup>15</sup>

The squadron acquired one of the Germans' forty-passenger diesel buses near Munchen-Gladbach, after one of the pilots spotted the heap and later directed a couple of his squadron mates back to retrieve it, the group barely managing to get the bus back to base intact. Over the next several weeks, the officers added motorcycles, cars, bicycles, among other multifarious acquisitions that they came across on their way to and from base, until finally the grounds began to look as much like a small-scale junkyard as an airbase.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>16</sup> Nolte, *Thunder Monsters Over Europe*, p. 87.

While half the squadron flew an escort mission for B-26 bombers en route to Berlin on 19 March, Sanders and his flight followed up on a call from a nearby P-51, which during a recon mission had spotted more than fifteen enemy aircraft grounded near the woods below.<sup>17</sup> Following the P-51 directions, Sanders and his flight flew east in search of the enemy aircraft. Indeed, the planes were right where the P-51 pilot reported, and once over the target area Sanders could hardly contain himself before rolling into a split-s maneuver over the target and releasing his bombs. The team pressed the attack until the little aerodrome near the woods looked like a woodchip pile. Proud of themselves and eager to get home with a great story and more claims of enemy aircraft destroyed, Sanders led the team over the damage on their way back west. Flying low enough to get a better look, Sanders instantly recognized that the planes were actually wooden decoys. He and the others cursed the P-51 pilot who could not tell the difference, ignoring for a moment that the “Jerry ersatz aircraft” had fooled them as well. Downcast and discomfited, they all headed back to base cursing themselves for expending ordnance on decoys.<sup>18</sup>

The next day the squadron attacked several real aerodromes near Borkenborge, Munster, and Paderborn, Germany, destroying rail lines, freight cars, tankers, locomotives, and six German fighter-bombers on the ground, including two Messerschmitt Me-262 Swallow jet fighters on the first mission and four Messerschmitt Me-410 Hornets on the second, along with the hangar and runway. After their third run

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<sup>17</sup> While the squadron historian described the escort mission as “noneventful,” the mission to Berlin was actually part of a 1,200-plane assault. Planners were understandably nervous about Me-262 jets in the area considering the damage these enemy squadrons had done the day before, in Craven and Cate, *Army Air Forces In World War II*, vol. 3, p. 744

<sup>18</sup> 510 FS, “Squadron History,” March 1945, pp. 7-9; The Germans introduced the Me-262 in 1944, but did not use it in tactical squadrons cooperating with ground troops until late into the winter of 1945.

at an aerodrome that day, Sanders led the squadron toward a long freight train stopped at a station in Willingen. One after another, each plane went down in a strafing pass and then, according to one witness, “all hell broke loose as every box-car exploded into a thousand pieces.” Most of the squadron felt the blasts from the ammunition train, some as high as 7,000 feet, though one pilot mistook the rattle for flak and started into evasive maneuvers as the rest of the squadron looked on wondering what the young captain was trying to get away from. The explosion had sent up enough shrapnel to send a few planes back “looking more like a soup strainer than a P-47” and had been powerful enough to destroy half the village surrounding the station.<sup>19</sup>

The squadron flew right over a flak emplacement and took heavy fire coming back from Lippe Canal. Lt. Herschel Ponder, a green replacement pilot, was hit in sight of the Germans below whom, sensing that the crippled aircraft was on its way down, directed all their firepower at Ponder and “knocked everything out of the ship but the pilot.” His more seasoned flight leader, Lt. Lloyd Costenmoyer, saw the hit as well and instead of heading back to base and out of harm’s way with the rest of the squadron, turned around and attacked the flak position, buying his young wingman enough time to gather himself and follow his leader behind friendly lines where they found a field to make a belly landing.<sup>20</sup>

A day later, the squadron received the field order they had been waiting for all month. In the final push against Nazi Germany, the Allies were in position to cross the Rhine on a wide front and meet up with the Russian armies bottlenecked in Vienna and waiting for the green light to flood into Berlin, the German capital. The strategic air

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<sup>19</sup> 510 FS, “Squadron History,” March 1945, p. 7.

<sup>20</sup> Nolte, *Thunder Monsters Over Europe*, p. 89.

forces closed off the Ruhr and successfully carried out a debilitating assault on the German transportation system while the tactical air forces destroyed fourteen of the eighteen bridges targeted, wrecked the remaining four, and dismantled twenty out of twenty-four marshaling yards. The Germans could no longer move personnel, let alone military transport and supply vehicles, in and out of the Ruhr valley.<sup>21</sup>

Operation PLUNDER was the Allied plan to get Montgomery's Twenty-First Army over the Rhine and into northern Germany. Britain's Second Army crossed between Wesel and Rees and attacked north and northeast for roughly seventy-five miles toward Rheine while the U.S. Ninth Army crossed south of Wesel and attacked east towards Paderborn. Operation VARSITY was the subsequent Allied plan for an airborne drop to assist Montgomery's forces as they penetrated deeper into Germany. Determined to avoid the mistakes of MARKET-GARDEN, Allied planners decided that this time the drops would be made after the first assault forces cleared the Rhine but before the last artillery forces crossed. Two British airborne divisions would land after the Twenty-first Army had crossed the Rhine but before the Ninth Army met all of them near Münster. Covering the VARSITY drop and "softening up" the battlefield became the primary objectives of nearly all the Allied air forces, tactical and strategic alike. An interdiction line was drawn from Bremen south to Neuwied. Along and to the west of this line, communication, transportation, and industrial targets were assigned to the air forces in preparation for PLUNDER.<sup>22</sup>

The 510<sup>th</sup> supported the 30<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division from the Ninth Army's XVI Corps as they crossed the Rhine below Wesel on D-Day, on 24 March. That morning, Major

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<sup>21</sup> Craven and Cate, *Army Air Forces in World War II*, vol. 3, pp. 745-46.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 771-72.

Sanders led the attacks on several communication installations approximately twenty miles past the Rhine at Göhlen in western Mecklenburg. They dropped both general purpose and incendiary bombs over the target and then took out every single motor transport vehicle and a radar station on the way back. For the next couple days, right in the thick of the final push, the 510<sup>th</sup> flew missions supporting the XVI Corps, searching for anything moving below and pummeling the dwindling remains of the Germans' communication and transport systems. According to Lieutenant Gleeson, "after tallying results for the day, the doughboys won't have much battling to do in the area we worked over."<sup>23</sup> During D-Day in June 1944, the squadron had been relegated to patrol and now, during a second D-Day in the theater, the 510<sup>th</sup> meant to make the most of their assignments, taking every opportunity to live up to its reputation.<sup>24</sup>

The squadron experienced something in that last week of March which, up to that point, it had been lucky enough to avoid. First, while there were plenty of targets, the entire group found itself short on bombs. It was unclear whether the shortage was due to the group's position so far east, possibly outpacing its supply lines or because it had been expending its bomb supply so quickly given the increase in targets. In the two weeks between 11 and 24 March, the Ninth Air Force had destroyed and damaged 896 tanks and armored vehicles, 969 locomotives, 19,019 railcars, and 10,220 motor transports. In any case, the situation seemed to signal that the finish line was not too much farther.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> 510 FS, "Squadron History," March 1945, p. 8.

<sup>24</sup> Nolte, *Thunder Monsters Over Europe*, p. 89.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 90.



An ammunition shortage followed the bomb shortage. Considering the caliber of targets now littering the path that had been forged into the heart of Germany, the pilots jumped into any vehicle they could find and started out towards town. The men pinched 18,000 rounds from two B-17s and a B-25 downed nearby, called in a few favors from nearby antiaircraft units who donated 10,000 rounds, stripped all of the aircraft in the repair shop, finally scraping, stealing, and sponging enough rounds for one day's worth.<sup>26</sup> Thankfully, resupply arrived the next day and the squadron ended the month with an attack on an active enemy aerodrome in Rheda, Germany, between Münster and Paderborn, destroying or damaging nearly a dozen Ju-88s, Bf-109s, and Me-110s.<sup>27</sup>

Bad weather grounded the squadron for most of the first week in April or, as one lieutenant wrote in overly flowery prose, "Such were the prevailing conditions as old Sol tried for the fourth consecutive day to rid the Continent of the grey pallor covering its bombed-out complexion." Even when the clouds broke over the base, and more than one impatient pilot marched in and out of the Intelligence and Combat Operations tents demanding to know exactly what was holding up the take-off orders, the dreary weather over the targets kept the squadron grounded and made for stir-crazy pilots. When the squadron was finally in the air on the fourth, the first target the men found was a locomotive pulling a boxcar carrying an antiaircraft unit, or "flak-car," moving between towns depending on where the fighting was the heaviest. The squadron promptly attacked the boxcar and the locomotive, flying low enough to report confidently that the locomotive's engineer met his end as well.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> 510 FS, "Squadron History," March 1945, p. 9.

While the other three flights dropped their bombs over Unna, Germany, west of Dortmund in the Ruhr valley, Lt. Howard Price led the flight providing top cover. Last in line, his flight dove down and started its own bombing run. On his pass, Price spotted a tank and went on the attack. But when only one of his bombs dropped, leaving the left one hung up in its shackles, Price maneuvered for a few minutes, trying frantically to shake it loose, succeeding only in drawing the attention of the Germans below who hurriedly turned their flak guns on his crippled ship. The plane's engine caught fire, the belly and wing were badly damaged, and the electrical system was shorting out.

After assessing both the damage and his chances, Price decided to jettison the canopy and bail out. The exterior damage to the plane had jammed the canopy shut and the electrical failure made it impossible to open it any other way but manually. Frantically pushing up on the plexiglass, he managed to separate the canopy from the windshield by only a few inches. Realizing he could not squeeze through, he considered belly-landing the plane only to remember the hung bomb on his left side. He sank back down, thought of his wife and the new baby he had yet to meet, and said a prayer. At that moment, the canopy ripped from the plane and with it tore Price from the dying aircraft. He pulled his rip cord and the chute yanked him away from the wreckage just 500 feet from the ground.<sup>29</sup>

Once on the ground, Price spotted a German civilian running at him with a hoe and bolted for the barn nearby. As he stumbled into the shelter, a German soldier stood over him and pointed his rifle into Price's face. He was marched out the way he came in

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<sup>28</sup> 510 FS, "Squadron History," April 1945, pp. 2-3, IRIS No. 00060998, in USAF Collections, AFHRA.

<sup>29</sup> Price, correspondence with author, October 9, 2004.

and yanked through a fiery mob of Germans who had gathered for a personal confrontation the enemy. The civilian with the garden hoe stepped from the crowd and struck Price, knocking him to the ground. As two German soldiers pulled him from the bloodthirsty swarm, Price narrowly avoided being pulled apart by the war-weary farmers.<sup>30</sup>

Three days later, Major Sanders and the rest of the squadron were deep into eastern Germany on a mission to bail out the XVI Corps' Second Armored Division encircled in Elbenau, Germany, about seventy-five miles west of Berlin and ten miles southeast of Magdeburg. As flight leader, Sanders led his men over an artillery position at Elbenau in tight patterns from approximately 1,000 to 1,500 feet and strafed the installation. On the flight's second pass over the target, Sanders went down to attack and was hit by flak.<sup>31</sup> His P-47 crashed into a wooded area at 250 miles per hour. Both wings were torn from the plane as it screamed through the forest and the engine was thrown almost a hundred yards ahead of where the airplane slammed into the trees. The airplane finally skidded along the forest floor and out the other end of the woods. The squadron circled above hoping to see him emerge from the forest or crawl from the cockpit, but after a few minutes of searching, even the most hopeful among them realized Sanders was gone. In his monthly report, Lieutenant Gleeson wrote,

It is difficult to describe the feeling of the men in the outfit on learning of the news. Men like Sanders just weren't supposed to die. He was assumed dead, for it isn't often that a man survives a crash at 250 per even

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<sup>30</sup> Charles D. Mohrle, ed., "Howard I. Price," in *Jenkins' Jerry Junkers: The WWII 510<sup>th</sup> Fighter Squadron* (unpublished, 1983).

<sup>31</sup> MACR, "Harry Sanders," 14 April 1945, "Pilot's Statement," [www.Fold3.com](http://www.Fold3.com) (accessed 5 June 2013).

in the sturdiness of a Thunderbolt. For days afterwards we found it almost incredible to think that Sanders was gone. His quick smile...the way he gave you his undivided attention when you spoke with him...he couldn't be gone. But it seemed that he was and for weeks afterwards the topic of almost all conversations was Sanders. There were those who believed that in view of the fact that the fuselage had been intact when the dust of the crash had settled, Sanders was still alive, though badly hurt. But they weren't many and it was probably more wishful thinking than anything else which prompted such thought.<sup>32</sup>

Like the other officers, Jenkins and Sanders had been paired up and boarded with a local family in Zwartburg, Belgium. Their host, an engineer at the local plant, and his wife had treated Sanders and Jenkins like their own sons. When he returned home alone the night of the crash, it was Jenkins's responsibility to tell the family that Sanders had been killed in action earlier that day. Jenkins likened their reaction to that of a mother and father. The hostess changed into all black mourning clothes and wore them every day until Jenkins and the squadron moved bases, possibly longer.<sup>33</sup>

The squadron set out on April 16 towards Magdeburg to support the XIX Corps' attack on the city. Magdeburg was barely recognizable after the squadron's bomb runs that morning. The city went up in flames quickly and most of the older buildings were completely destroyed by the afternoon. Their second mission of the day was an assault on a nearby airfield where the group claimed more than one hundred enemy aircraft

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<sup>32</sup> 510 FS, "Squadron History," April 1945, p. 4.

<sup>33</sup> Jenkins, correspondence with author, 9 October 2004.

destroyed or damaged on the ground.<sup>34</sup> The squadron got off two missions the next day before a haze settled in and grounded the fliers for the rest of that day and the next. Most on base spent their day off in bed, racking up as much sleep as possible while they could.<sup>35</sup>

Price made his triumphant return to the quiet base on 18 April. After the German soldiers had saved him from the mob of Germans, he was first interrogated and then transported out of the area over the course of three nights by the same anti-aircraft unit that had shot him down. Daylight transport was now impossible for the Germans. The Germans placed Price on the third floor of an old stone-walled school where he was joined the first night by three more Americans. The four stayed in the school two more nights until everybody was moved to an abandoned apartment building and stashed in the beauty salon on the ground floor. Four more men from nearby communication and infantry units were added, the group totaling eight altogether.<sup>36</sup>

The Americans were marched to another interrogation before finally being handed over to a Luftwaffe unit that kept them in an underground shelter while P-47s bombed the town above. Their captors took advantage of a break in the assault and moved all eight to a railroad tunnel already crowded with French and Russian prisoners, who by the look of them, had been used for some time as a slave-labor force. A tall German sauntered up to the group later that night and introduced himself as the oberleutnant in charge. He informed Price and the other Americans that they were now his prisoners. Price then informed the officer that he was willing to accept the Germans' surrender and the sooner

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<sup>34</sup> Nolte, *Thunder Monsters Over Europe*, pp. 92-93.

<sup>35</sup> 510 FS, "Squadron History," April 1945, p. 5.

<sup>36</sup> Price, correspondence with author, 9 October 2004.

the better. The oberleutnant scoffed at his offer but agreed to Price's request that the group be sheltered safely underground for the night while the town above was shelled.

The officer's messenger woke the Americans the next morning and notified Price that the oberleutnant was ready to discuss surrender, most likely preferring an American capture over surrendering to the approaching Russians. Price devised a plan to move the officer, his men, and the group of American POWs safely across the American lines. He ordered the German to gather his men and have them destroy all of their guns and ammunition. Next the Germans and the Americans scrounged all the bed sheets they could find and began making white flags out of the scraps. After nine days as the Germans' prisoner, Price marched 282 German soldiers and seven American POWs over the rubble, across the battlefield, and into the Americans' camp in Wupertal, delivering the captives to C Company, 121 Battalion, 8<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division on 18 April 1945.<sup>37</sup>

Cloud cover allowed for just one mission on 19 April, east of the Elbe River, and then that afternoon the unit received orders for another move. They flew their last mission from Y-32 and from Belgium on 20 April before moving into Germany. The base was stripped down to the nuts and bolts and the first section of the squadron pulled out the morning of the 23 April, reaching the new base in Kitzingen the next morning. C-47s came in, one after another, carrying men and supplies until finally the only piece of the convoy missing was the old "Jerry bus" the men had commandeered a few weeks back. As one corporal described it, "If it had averaged 10 miles an hour it would have arrived here two days before it did" and after its arrival it was determined "that wreck had moved its last inch under its own power!" Whether or not it was worth the trouble to transport the lemon was up for debate among the men. On one side were the men who

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<sup>37</sup> Mohrle, ed., *Jenkins' Jerry Junkers*, "Howard I. Price."

had moved the bus and on the other side were the men who did not—otherwise known as those who had not had to yank the manual brake barreling down a hill, the engine coughing and growling so loudly that people a hundred yards up the road jumped out of the way, only to be thrown into the windshield when the brake finally worked.<sup>38</sup> When the pilots and aircraft arrived, they and the rest of the squadron helped get offices set up and the barracks situated. They were now in Germany and the prospects of ending the war sooner than later looked promising.

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<sup>38</sup> 510 FS, “Squadron History,” April 1945, p. 6.





## Chapter Eight:

Kitzingen, Germany (R-6) and Straubing, Germany (R-68)  
24 April 1945 – 14 May 1945  
and  
14 May 1945 – 2 July 1945

The squadron spent its first week in Germany sitting around guessing when word would come that it was all over, but the move to from Belgium to Germany was to signal more than just a move farther east. A portion of the squadron was already headed for Lippstadt with the rest of XXIX TAC when orders came redirecting the 405<sup>th</sup> to Kitzingen and reassigning them to the XIX TAC and pairing them once again with Patton and the Third Army. Days before, Patton had announced his plans to drive into Germany and the occupied countries. He pushed the Third Army towards the Czechoslovakian border, then swung east and pushed across the Danube, Isar, and Inn Rivers and into Austria.<sup>1</sup> Weyland considered safeguarding Patton's armored spearhead the highest priority of his fighter-bomber groups that first week in May. Although the Allies had all but crushed the Luftwaffe, the remaining German air force aimed what fight it could muster at Patton's forces in the south. As nearly every other Allied army and their respective air support slowly wound down offensive operations, the 405<sup>th</sup> flew armed recon missions for Patton from its new base at Kitzingen in support of his drive southward.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Province, *Patton's Third Army*, p. 275.

The group's new base (R-6) was near the ancient city of Wurzburg about sixty-two miles southeast of Frankfurt. The nearby University of Wurzburg dated back to the sixteenth century as did several of the churches and walls, now left crumbling after the RAF concentrated several attacks in the town. The British forces had wrongly assumed the Germans' Wurzburg radar factory was actually located in Wurzburg, which it turned out was not. R-6 had, at various points in the war, served as a German training base, Hermann Goering's headquarters, and an airstrip for a Luftwaffe night fighter unit.<sup>3</sup>

The group did not fly a mission from its new base for an entire week, partly because it had to wait until the recalled planes, equipment, and personnel that had left Belgium as part of the advanced moving party headed for Lippstadt, and partly because as the Reich fell in on itself from Italy to Holland, targets became increasingly difficult to identify. With the squadron scattered between the two bases, the breakdown and loading at Ophoven had failed to run as smoothly as previous moves.<sup>4</sup> Finally, on the fourth, XII Corps called in a request for the squadron's support. Responding to army reports of several thousand enemy vehicles headed eastward away from the battlefield and rumors of a national redoubt buzzing about, the 510<sup>th</sup> flew towards Linz in northern Austria. Reich Minister of Propaganda Joseph Goebbels had so splendidly concocted the myth of a planned rendezvous point for Germans fleeing their homeland as invading Allied forces poured into the capital that Hitler himself still considered the redoubt a viable option in late April for those evacuated from Berlin. During the mission, both a Ju-88 and an

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<sup>2</sup> Spiers, *Air Power for Patton's Army*, pp. 284-87.

<sup>3</sup> Nolte, *Thunder Monsters Over Europe*, p. 95.

<sup>4</sup> 510 FS, "Squadron History," May 1945, p. 2, IRIS No. 00061090, in USAF Collections, AFHRA.

Arado-96 clumsily happened on the squadron but were easily shot down, representing well the dilapidated state of the Luftwaffe. Following three earlier dogfights involving XIX TAC fighter groups that day, the squadron's encounter amounted to the last aerial combat for any unit in the ETO.<sup>5</sup> The men returned to the same location later that afternoon for an armed recon mission with excellent results.<sup>6</sup>

On the fifth, the 511<sup>th</sup> and the 510<sup>th</sup> battled one another on the softball field the men carved out on base. The 510<sup>th</sup> defended their "invincible" record and ran away with the win. Chatter regarding whether or not the next mission would be the last preceded nearly every mission in May, but the chatter proved true on 8 May and the squadron participated in a V-E Day review and flew demonstration flights in anticipation of the official announcement.<sup>7</sup>

The war in Europe officially ended according to the surrender document signed in the early hours of May 7. Tactical assignments dried up when the army corps to which each squadron was paired accomplished its objectives or were slowed to a stop by orders from headquarters. Officially, assignments for XIX TAC lasted until May 7 as the Third Army continued to engage the enemy on the battlefield until the final surrender. Unofficially, poor weather conditions and sharp decreases in viable targets grounded most operations before the surrender was announced.<sup>8</sup>

While everyone was in parade formation during the V-E celebration on base, a group of seven German airmen flew three Ju-87s and four FW-190s to the Kitzingen base

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<sup>5</sup> Spires, *Air Power for Patton's Army*, p. 289.

<sup>6</sup> 510 FS, "Squadron History," May 1945, p. 2.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>8</sup> Craven and Cate, *Army Air Forces in World War II*, vol. 3, p. 778.

to surrender to the Americans and avoid capture by the Russians.<sup>9</sup> Thinking they were under attack, men scattered everywhere, and pilots jumped into their airplanes, ready to defend the base from a rogue German attack. The Germans' intention to surrender, not attack, became clear as each pilot methodically brought down his aircraft with a controlled crash. The Germans lowered their landing gear and then ripped it off while speeding down the runway and braking hard to one side.<sup>10</sup> This not only disabled the planes permanently, but also blocked the runway, making it impossible for the Americans to take off as long as the wreckage remained. All but one of the pilots successfully disabled his aircraft, the remaining pilot opting out of a crash landing because his girlfriend was stowed away in the tail of his FW-190.<sup>11</sup>

The one-legged, ill-tempered, albeit impressively decorated, pilot who climbed out of his Stuka to meet the officers was *Oberst* (Colonel) Hans-Ulrich Rudel, Germany's most celebrated airman. In addition to Rudel's dozens of other medals and accomplishments on the Eastern Front, Adolf Hitler had personally awarded Rudel the Knight's Cross with Golden Oak Leaves, Swords, and Diamonds at the Führer's Headquarters West at Taunus. Rudel was the first and only man in the entire Third Reich to receive the honor. During his 2,530 missions, he destroyed 519 Russian tanks, a Russian battleship, destroyer, and cruiser, 70 landing craft, more than 800 motor and horse-drawn transport vehicles, more than 150 artillery, anti-aircraft, and flak

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<sup>9</sup> Hans-Ulrich Rudel, *Stuka Pilot* (Costa Mesa, CA: The Noontide Press, 1987), p. 224.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 224

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

emplacements, as well as nine air victories against the Soviet Air Force. At one point, Joseph Stalin placed a 100,000-ruble bounty on the ace's head.<sup>12</sup>

Rudel lost his right leg a month earlier when a Russian antiaircraft unit hit his Stuka during an antitank pass over a Soviet artillery group headed for Berlin.<sup>13</sup> Doctors replaced his “stump,” as he referred to it, with a wooden leg for walking and an “ingenious contrivance like a devil’s hoof” for flying. Similar to his wooden prosthetic, he attached the apparatus beneath the knee and with it was able to move the rudder as he had before the accident, though any maneuver with the still-healing limb proved extremely painful.<sup>14</sup>

By May 8, with a full retreat underway, Rudel helped oversee a column of air and ground forces marching west, the Germans aiming to put as many miles as possible between them and the advancing Russian forces. Once the move began, Rudel gave the pilots permission to break from the column and land near their homes as a possible means of evading capture. For himself, Rudel needed immediate medical attention for his leg and so chose to land at an American-occupied airfield. Six of his fellow pilots insisted on flying to the airfield with him.<sup>15</sup> Rudel favored the Kitzingen base because its large size suggested the American air force, not the Russians, had already taken over the area.

When he and his cohort landed, a jeep full of officers from the 405<sup>th</sup> met him at his

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<sup>12</sup> Günther Just, *Stuka Pilot Hans-Ulrich Rudel: His Life Story in Words and Photographs*, translated from the German by David Johnston (West Chester, PA: Schiffer Publishing, 1990), pp. 32, 38-39.

<sup>13</sup> Rudel, *Stuka Pilot*, pp. 197-201.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 215.

<sup>15</sup> The accompanying pilots included Oberleutnants Karl Bierman and Hans Schwirblat, Hauptmanns Kurt Lau and Ernst-August Niermann, and Maj. Karl Kennel.

airplane and took him to the first aid station for a fresh dressing and then to the officer's mess inside the hangar.

In the midst of the victory celebration, the phone inside the intelligence section's offices rang and a familiar voice came over the line. Major Sanders was calling from a German airbase in Helmstedt, nearly 250 miles northeast of Kitzingen, and needed a lift back to base. One of the lieutenants took one of the two piggyback P-47s the squadron had modified to include a second seat for transporting personnel and picked up Sanders.<sup>16</sup>

When Sanders's plane went into the trees a month back, even the most hopeful among his mates could not imagine anyone surviving the wreckage they witnessed that afternoon. When he crashed, Sanders was thrown face first into the gun sight as the plane came to a violent stop wedged between two trees. The sight nearly sheared off his nose but for a flap of skin tethering the cartilage to his face. Small branches punctured his arms and body, the snapped twigs still embedded in his skin when still in shock, he climbed from the cockpit and dropped from the airplane. Sanders fell into a swamp where he sank and nearly drowned, unaware of the amount of blood he was losing. Trying to establish his bearings, he remembered having flown over the Elbe River before he crashed and knew that the front lines were not far from the river. He figured he was five miles from the nearest Allied infantry unit and set off towards the river.

Swerving and stumbling, Sanders precariously wandered into an open field where German soldiers, watching from a nearby farmhouse, waited for the American pilot to stagger closer to their position. His capture and subsequent imprisonment proved more serendipitous than most prisoners in his position, for if the Germans had not picked him

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<sup>16</sup> 405 FG, "Group History," January 1945, p. 3, IRIS No. 00090630, in USAF Collections, AFHRA.

up, he would have most certainly succumbed to his injuries while searching for the river. Instead, one of the German soldiers took out a bandage from his pack, crudely secured Sanders's nose to his face, and laid him down on the floor of a barn while they waited for the sun to go down.<sup>17</sup>

The Germans waited until nighttime, when the darkness provided some protection from Allied fighter squadrons, before they put him on top of a tank, instructed him to "hold on," and sent him on to the nearest first aid station. Sanders managed to stay atop the tank despite feeling weak from blood loss and aching from head to toe. Once the caravan stopped, a German soldier led him to a small room with two beds and a young German nurse who, while redressing Sanders's face, kept muttering over and over how baffling it seemed that the Americans were fighting the Germans instead of the Russians. From there, the Germans sent Sanders on to a small town where dozens of other prisoners on the way to their respective POW camps stopped for medical attention. With only a few doctors and a dwindling stock of medical supplies in the makeshift hospital, a bottleneck of wounded captives formed in the town as the staff patched up each of them just sufficiently enough to move them on. German soldiers crammed all of the injured, no matter their condition, into a twenty-five-by-twenty-five-foot room with no beds, chairs, or space to do more than stand with arms at their sides. One German soldier served each of the wounded a small helping of warm potato salad prepared by a German woman in the courtyard outside.

When it was Sanders's turn, the doctor clamped and re-clamped his nose to his face nearly two dozen times, all without anesthetic. He knew the doctor was doing this on purpose, just like the doctors sadistically yanking out shrapnel from the soldiers to his

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<sup>17</sup> Sanders, interview with author, 4 October 2004.

left and right. From there, he traveled to Hamburg with three other prisoners in the back of a horse-drawn wagon padded with hay. There, another doctor, this one Hungarian, sprayed his nose with sulfur powder, redressed his face, and put him into a railcar. At that moment, Sanders realized he would travel the rest of the way to the prison camp along the very rail lines and in the very same type of railcars that he and his squadron loved to target and destroy. If the 510<sup>th</sup> or any other P-47 squadrons came upon the train, Sanders knew the pilots could take out the entire line in a matter of minutes.<sup>18</sup>

Fortunately, the train made it safely to Stalag XI-A (*Truppenübungsplatz Altengrabow*), almost sixty miles southwest of Berlin. The camp held between 50,000 and 60,000 French, Russian, Polish, and American prisoners, the bulk of whom came from Russia and France. Prisoners were grouped in separate camps according to country.<sup>19</sup> The American camp was sandwiched between the Polish and Russian camps, and the number of Americans swelled as the Germans tried to stave off defeat even as the Allies closed in on the capital. When Sanders arrived, the American camp held roughly 1,500 to 2,000 prisoners, several of whom died from their injuries shortly after arriving, and whom the men had to bury on their own inside the camp. Even as a major, he was the highest-ranking officer in the American camp at the time, and so the devoutly Catholic Sanders presided over the men's funerals and burials.<sup>20</sup>

He and his fellow American prisoners shared the same filthy bathing water the entire time and subsisted on what few Red Cross Parcels they could get their hands on.

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<sup>18</sup> Sanders, interview with author, 30 November 2006.

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.lexikon-der-wehrmacht.de/Karte/Truppenubungsplatze/Altengrabow.htm> (German, translated by Google Translate) and <http://www.moosburg.org/info/stalag/laglist.html>.

<sup>20</sup> Sanders, interview with author, 4 October 2004.



When available, camp cooks prepared ersatz soup with whatever animal they could find, usually horse meat they boiled down to a broth, serving the starving captives and captors better as dinner than transportation. In the beginning, the Germans enjoyed throwing eyeballs and the like into the Americans' bowls. Hunger eventually overrode the Americans' understandable aversion to such things, and once the Germans' own food supplies began to dwindle drastically, practical jokes involving food scraps came to a halt.

When, even in the camps, it became clear the Germans had all but surrendered, Sanders convinced the Germans in charge to let him and a few others out of the camp to find transportation, return, and take the remaining American prisoners through the lines and into Allied territory. Sanders returned with American army trucks and got his people out as quickly as possible, leaving the Russians and Poles behind. From there he and the others made their way back to Helmstedt, where he called R-6 and asked for a ride back to his base.<sup>21</sup>

Sanders had been back for only a few hours when he encountered Rudel. Upon his return, Sanders reported to the wing commander's office on the second floor of the hangar while Rudel was causing a big commotion in the officers' mess down the hall. Several German airmen brought to the base had saluted Rudel as the Allied officers escorted him to the mess for lunch. The following confrontation, as described by Rudel himself, ensued after an American interpreter asked first if Rudel could speak English, and the second relayed the objections of his commanding officer to the Germans' open salute while on base:

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<sup>21</sup> Sanders, interview with author, 30 November 2006.

Even if I can speak English, I reply, “we are in Germany and speak only German. As far as the salute is concerned, we are ordered to salute in this way and being soldiers we carry out our orders. Besides we do not care whether you object not. Tell your C.O. that we are the ‘Immelmann’ Wing and as the war is now over and no one has defeated us in the air we do not consider ourselves prisoners. The German soldier,” I point out, “has not been beaten on his merits, but has simply been crushed by overwhelming masses of material. We have landed here because we did not wish to stay in the Soviet zone. We should all prefer not to discuss the matter any further, but would like to get cleaned up and have something to eat.”<sup>22</sup>

Rudel and the others then got up from the table, went into the bathroom in the mess hall, and washed themselves at the basins, making such a mess that pools of water were left on the floor as the group walked back to their table and waited to be served.

Dissatisfied with the meal, Rudel again caused a scene while waving a tray of food in the face of 405<sup>th</sup> Group Commander, Col. J. Garrett Jackson.<sup>23</sup> This was about all Sanders could stand. He had spent the last month bathing in the same water as 2,000 other men, eating what could barely be called food, and enduring what resembled sadism much more than it did medical attention. Now he watched his former enemy act like he was doing the Americans a favor by paying their base a visit and then complaining about

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<sup>22</sup> Rudel, *Stuka Pilot*, pp. 224-26.

<sup>23</sup> Nolte, *Thunder Monsters Over Europe*, pp. 98-99.

sharing the same conditions every Allied soldier on base experienced. Sanders snapped.<sup>24</sup>

He marched over to the Germans' table, took Rudel's tray of food, threw it out the hangar's second-story window, and stood over Rudel with rage in his typically jovial eyes. Colonel Jackson just stared, stunned, and let the opportunity to reprimand Sanders pass with out a word from anyone.<sup>25</sup> When asked about his reaction to Rudel decades later, Sanders explained, "I just told him that I didn't appreciate the way I was treated and he wasn't going to get treated any better if I had anything to say about it."<sup>26</sup> Later that same day, Rudel met with General Weyland at headquarters in nearby Erlangen. Following his interrogation, he first complained about his treatment at Kitzingen and second, volunteered himself and his band of fighter pilots should Weyland and the Americans rightly decide to turn on the Russians.<sup>27</sup>

For days after the surrender the squadron participated in an exhibition, or exercise, unique to the XIX TAC. General Weyland interviewed personally as many of the returned POWs as possible. His reasoning was two-fold: first, face-time with such a high-ranking airman did wonders for the mentally and physically battered POWs; and second, the intelligence garnered regarding the locations of both POW camps and current POWs helped in Weyland's quest to locate and free each of the captured Americans. Weyland followed up on every lead and every rumor concerning his POWs' whereabouts and had his fighter groups buzz the known POW camps to assure the prisoners below that

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<sup>24</sup> Sanders, interview with author, 4 October 2006.

<sup>25</sup> Nolte, *Thunder Monsters Over Europe*, p. 99.

<sup>26</sup> Sanders, interview with author, 4 October 2006.

<sup>27</sup> Gen. O. P. Weyland, 19 November 1974, p. 148.

their position was known by the Allies.<sup>28</sup> When the 510<sup>th</sup> flew over the camps, they came in so low that it was said the guards in the tower had to look down to see them.<sup>29</sup>

Another exhibition flight on the 9 May was the squadron's last mission for a couple of weeks. In the meantime, the squadron moved bases yet again on 13 May, this time to Straubing in southeast Germany, about fifty miles from the Czechoslovakian border. Continuing to move bases seemed futile to many once the war in Europe ended. If the squadron was going to the Far East, most wondered if they could have not just flown out from Kitzingen, or even Straubing. Indeed, they could have left for the Pacific from any one of those bases, but that was not the point of the moves. Weyland and other forward-thinking, high-ranking air officials set on obtaining deployment bases for a postwar occupational air force deemed the American bases farther east optimal locations, and therefore kept deploying their groups forward.<sup>30</sup> Upon arrival, the much improved accommodations silenced any of the squadron's grumbling about another move as the airmen looked across craterless green fields and admired the minimally battered hangars and barracks. Straubing was another German base the AAF claimed as the fighting moved farther into Germany, and it featured swimming pools, a gymnasium, and volleyball courts.<sup>31</sup>

Speculation became the pastime of choice as an abundance of free time combined with a frustrating scarcity of information regarding the squadron's future assignment tested even the most patient pilots. As new rumors sprang up daily, everybody seemed to

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<sup>28</sup> Spires, *Air Power for Patton's Army*, p. 288.

<sup>29</sup> 510 FS, "Squadron History," May 1945, p. 2.

<sup>30</sup> Spires, *Air Power for Patton's Army*, p. 287.

<sup>31</sup> Nolte, *Thunder Monsters Over Europe*, p. 102.

have his own inside source privy to top-secret details. Lieutenant Gleeson described the atmosphere, “A sewing circle confab looked like a good will session compared to the gossip dished out by the men in the squadron.” Jenkins, promoted to lieutenant colonel that month, gathered the men in his room one evening to share what he had learned from the two other squadron commanders in the group. “We,” he said, [are] to be part of the disarmament program in Germany. It [will] be our duty to send groups of men to various parts of Germany and its territories to inspect the Luftwaffe factories, destroying anything we [can] not make use of and confiscating the rest...We [will] **not** go the way of all flesh to the CBI [China-Burma-India] or Pacific.”<sup>32</sup> The Air Disarmament Command was established six months before VE Day and assigned to the Ninth Air Force. Headquarters consisted of five Control Wing Headquarters, each with its own Disarmament Groups, each of group with its own squadrons, and each squadron with its own working parties and disarmament teams.<sup>33</sup> Whether incorrect or not up to date, Jenkins’s inside information proved useless within days. Several men were sent to Klatovey, Czechoslovakia, participating in the disarmament program, but for less than two weeks before receiving orders for an abrupt return to their squadron in Germany, leading most to conclude the squadron was headed for the CBI after all.

The men busied themselves building three softball diamonds for each of the three squadrons on the new base. Officers versus enlisted men kicked off the softball season at

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<sup>32</sup> 510 FS, “Squadron History,” May 1945, p. 2, bold and underlined emphasis in original document.

<sup>33</sup> Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force, “Handbook, Governing Policy and Procedure for the Military Occupation of Germany, December 1944, in Subject File No. 151: “Germany,” pp. 277-280, World War II European Army Records, National Archives, www.Fold3.com (accessed 8 June 2013).

Straubing. For the month of May at least, the men were more softball players than pilots as all tried to keep busy while waiting out the uncertainty.<sup>34</sup>

While the future of the 510<sup>th</sup> remained undecided, the war in the ETO was over and almost everyone agreed that their time on the Continent was coming to an end. Accordingly, the squadron began preparations for a big move, still unsure whether the future meant back home or to the Far East. With both the officers and enlisted men billeted in actual barracks, the tents the squadron had hauled across Europe the past year were repaired and stored away. Each man turned in his trench knife, trench shovel, and gas mask. Clothing and personal equipment were inspected and necessary repairs and replacements were made.<sup>35</sup>

The frequency with which news of their next assignment changed finally caused most men in the unit to lose interest in conjecture and instead concentrate on the days' tasks as they came. The softball games continued, arts and crafts activities were organized, each man learned to distract himself enough hours of each day to ease the anxiety bred from weeks of uncertainty. And anyhow, few men could find the room to complain once the refugees started to travel back into Germany. Civilians returning to their war-ravaged homes and farms clotted the highways, orphans roamed the roadside, sleeping in the open fields when the long walk wore out their feet, German soldiers with no one and no unit to report to shuffled along the road, empty knapsacks slung over their shoulders, pleading for food and cigarettes—the remnants of the once-mighty Wehrmacht reduced to a routed horde of beggars.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> 510 FS, "Squadron History," May 1945, p. 3.

<sup>35</sup> Nolte, *Thunder Monsters Over Europe*, p. 102.

The squadron moved from the base in Straubing to Camp Detroit near Laon, France, on 2 July 1945. Continued preparation for possible assignment in the Far East included daily lectures on the Japanese order of battle and aircraft recognition classes. The supplies needed to set up a base in Asia were packed up. Those who thought that the move to Camp Detroit meant a pick up in action found out quickly that while the men were in a new place the days looked pretty much the same as the days in Straubing. All of the group's P-47s were still parked in their hangars in Germany, leaving the squadron only a North American T-6 Texan trainer and a Piper L-4 Cub liaison aircraft to fly, and even those were on an adjacent base. An increasingly lax policy regarding leaves sometimes amounted to a week spent in beautiful Italy, Switzerland, the French Riviera, or England.

When, on 6 and 9 August, the United States dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, respectively, and Japan sued for peace on the tenth, all group training came to an immediate halt. The 405<sup>th</sup> made its way to its last base on the Continent by train, crammed into "40 by 8" boxcars named for their capacity to hold either forty men or eight horses—none comfortably. Camp Calais was an Army staging area processing units on their way back to the United States set on a plateau in the hills above Marseilles. Temporary offices, shelters, and tents littered the landscape as the Army churned the constant flow of men coming and going from the staging area. Units poured in from all over Europe for processing and then waited for their turn to make the final trip back to the States. The 510<sup>th</sup>, along with the rest of the 405<sup>th</sup>, left Europe on the troop ship *James Jackson* on 15 October 1945 and arrived in Hampton Roads, Virginia, two weeks later

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 103.

and reported to Camp Patrick Henry just east of Charlottesville, Virginia. The group was inactivated three days later, on 29 October 1945.<sup>37</sup>

The 510<sup>th</sup> left Europe one year, seven months, one week, and one day after it had arrived at Christchurch in the spring of 1944. In that time, the squadron, as a part of the elite 405<sup>th</sup> Fighter Group, made an impression on the XIX TAC. The following table shows the contribution of the 405<sup>th</sup> to the broader accomplishments of the XIX TAC, and the contributions of the 510<sup>th</sup> to the group's well-deserved reputation.

<b>Targets</b>	<b>XIX TAC Total<sup>38</sup></b>	<b>405th FG % of XIX total<sup>39</sup></b>	<b>510th FS % of 405 total<sup>40</sup></b>
Motor Transport	38,541	16.36%	38.45%
Tanks	3,833	9.34%	55.59%
Locomotives	4,337	19.37%	54.17%
Bridges	285	9.47%	44.44%
Factories/Buildings	3664	21.78%	56.27%
Marshaling Yards	974	24.02%	n/a
Railroad lines cut	2,585	28.94%	n/a
Total Missions flown in the ETO	7,326	18.54%	n/a
Total Tons of Bombs Dropped	17,486	26.49%	n/a

The success of the 405<sup>th</sup> places this group among the most elite fighting units in World War II. The 510<sup>th</sup> share of that success makes them a fighter squadron to be both remembered and revered. Now, many years later, the men proudly maintain that their effectiveness as a striking force against the Germans and as a more-than-dependable partner in Patton's success on the Continent, merits the reputation the squadron still

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., pp. 103-104.

<sup>38</sup> Province, *Patton's Third Army*, p. 296.

<sup>39</sup> Nolte, *Thunder Monsters Over Europe*, p. 105.

<sup>40</sup> 510 FS, "Squadron History," May 1945, p. 6.



garners today. While the 405<sup>th</sup> flew only 18.54 percent of the total missions flown by the XIX TAC, they accounted for more substantial portions of the damage inflicted by the command. The 510<sup>th</sup> comprised 33 percent of the 405<sup>th</sup> and yet the squadron routinely showed an ability to perform above what its share of the damage should have equaled.<sup>41</sup>

Howard Price presumed, “the Group thought very highly of the Squadron,” for the simple reason that “we did everything that was asked, plus more.”<sup>42</sup> Arlie Blood confidently asserted that “we were always number one. The morale was outstanding and we were bless[ed] with some very eager pilots who took the fight to the enemy.”<sup>43</sup> As one would expect, their leader Ralph Jenkins had a more humble take on the squadron’s rank among the three squadrons: “All three squadrons of the 405<sup>th</sup> performed superbly” he recalled. “Commendations were received from such famous military leaders as O. N. Bradley, G. S. Patton, Hoyt S. Vandenberg, M.S. Eddy, O. P. Weyland. Their congratulations were directed specifically to the combat squadrons.” But Jenkins does end with, “It is to be noted that only the 510<sup>th</sup> is still on active duty, based in Aviano, Italy, and involved in the current war.”<sup>44</sup>

When interviewed in the first decade of the twenty-first century, the men took special pride in the fact that the 510<sup>th</sup> was still active and supporting operations in Afghanistan. They consider it an indication that the 510<sup>th</sup> was a uniquely talented, if not superior, fighter squadron, as it is the only squadron of the three in the 405<sup>th</sup> still flying.

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<sup>41</sup> Johns, correspondence with author, 8 November 2004

<sup>42</sup> Price, correspondence with author, 9 October 2004.

<sup>43</sup> Blood, correspondence with author, 1 November 2004.

<sup>44</sup> Jenkins, correspondence with author, 9 October 2004, Jenkins’s mention of the “current war” most likely refers to the Gulf War, based on the author’s assumption that the DVD was produced in the early 1990s. It should also be noted that the 510<sup>th</sup> participated in the Global War on Terror as well.

Stan Davis, crew chief to Harry Sanders, echoed Jenkins's sentiments, "I believe [we] were ranked the best squadron for the fact the 510<sup>th</sup> is still in existence."<sup>45</sup> Likewise, the men of the current 510<sup>th</sup> take pride in the legacy the World War II squadron started. Each year, current members make the long trip back to the States to attend the yearly World War II 510<sup>th</sup> reunions organized by the original members and their families.

The squadron, both past and present, enjoys a special standing among AAF fighter squadrons, reserved for those units whose origins reach back to the infancy of tactical warfare and whose initial successes were accumulated during some of the most intense fighting in American history. A few months after his famous rescue on 8 June 1995, Air Force Capt. Scott O'Grady of the 355<sup>th</sup> Fighter Squadron met John Drummond in the governor's box at the South Carolina-Florida football game.<sup>46</sup> Capt. Scott O'Grady had survived and evaded capture for six days in the mountains of northern Bosnia after his aircraft was shot down by a surface-to-air missile during Operation Deny Flight. O'Grady and eight of the Marines that aided in his rescue were at the game for the Veterans' Day festivities during the halftime presentation.<sup>47</sup> After he was introduced to Drummond, O'Grady noticed the senator was holding an original 510<sup>th</sup> Fighter Squadron patch, the insignia recognizable to, and revered among, Air Force pilots. Evidence of the squadron's bravado, the design featured a wolf dressed in a tuxedo, holding up two Colt .45 pistols, straddling a P-47. That particular generation of the patch denoted that the person wearing it flew with the original World War II 510<sup>th</sup> Fighter Squadron.

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<sup>45</sup> Stanley Davis, correspondence with author, 9 October 2004.

<sup>46</sup> Ross W. Simpson, "The Rescue of "Basher 52," *Leatherneck Magazine*, (September 1995) <http://www.mca-marines.org/leatherneck/rescue-basher-52> (accessed 16 June 2013).

<sup>47</sup> Associated Press, "Marines, O'Grady Meet on Field," Lewiston (ME) *Sun-Journal*, November 1995.

Drummond recalled that O'Grady approached for a closer look and asked "Where did you get THAT?" to which he replied, "Son, I was there when we designed it."<sup>48</sup>

While the men admittedly enjoy the reputation still afforded them and their squadron, they also somberly acknowledge the cost of that status. Every time the squadron lost a pilot, Sanders claimed, "It taught me to respect life, that's for darn sure. We lost a lot of good people and it breaks your heart that they had to give up their lives for their country, but they had to."<sup>49</sup> Similarly, Drummond maintained, "It taught me a lot. It taught me a lot about this country, what young people would do, DID do, to keep this country together in war."<sup>50</sup> In total, the squadron lost eighteen pilots, including their commanding officer, Bruce Parcell.<sup>51</sup> Flak from German ground units and gun emplacements shot down thirty-two of their aircraft. Half of the pilots flying them became POWs, with the remainder evading the Germans long enough to rejoin their squadron or transfer back to the United States. All totaled, fifty of the squadron's Thunderbolts went down behind enemy lines and an additional twenty-five were abandoned in friendly territory after either crash landings or the aircraft was deemed beyond repair.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Drummond, "The 510<sup>th</sup> Was There," DVD.

<sup>49</sup> Harry Sanders, "The 510<sup>th</sup> Was There," DVD (undated).

<sup>50</sup> Drummond, "The 510<sup>th</sup> Was There," DVD (undated).

<sup>51</sup> The eighteen KIAs include: 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. George L. Feucht, 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. William E. James, Maj. Clyde V. Knisley, 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. Boleslaw Kocienski, 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Robert D. Kunz, 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Marvin Leinweber, 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. John A. McNeely, Jr., 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. Hugh R. Miller, 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Edward T. Mossman, Jr., Lt. Col. Bruce Parcell, 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. James A. Pelletier, 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Merle J. Roth, 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. Clifford B. Russell, Capt. Anton Sadowski, 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Benjamin F. Savage, 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. Charles W. Stark, 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Alton O. Swanson, 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. Arthur F. Williams.

<sup>52</sup> Jenkins, "The 'Jug' Best for the Job" (undated).

The losses compounded the fear each pilot dealt with, each in his own way, each time he climbed into his aircraft. Veteran 510<sup>th</sup> pilot Jim Gilson explained, “I sweat a lot and I cried a lot. Fear is something that goes along with being a pilot, and I think you are afraid every time you go up until you taxi in and turn the engine off. How do you deal with it? The best you can.”<sup>53</sup> Larry Gaughran remembered helping out a fellow pilot who had his own way of dealing with fear, “They gave us two shots of whiskey after every mission, and you could save those things or you could drink them. And I never drank any because we had one fella that wouldn’t fly—couldn’t fly—as well sober as he flew drunk.” Sanders had a different take on fear recalling, “You couldn’t think about it really. Didn’t do you any good to think about it. I flew 85 missions over there and I got hit on 55 of them.” Dick Parker agreed with Sanders, claiming, “You aren’t afraid to fly....You got the world by the tail and you think you're invincible and it’s like being in an automobile accident, you aren’t afraid of the accident until it’s over with. And it all happens so quickly...after about a half hour I guess you begin to wonder why they DIDN’T get ya?”<sup>54</sup> The performance of the 510<sup>th</sup> in the face of such fear is hard to comprehend but, as John Drummond explained, “We were proud of the 510<sup>th</sup> and when you’re proud of something, you really go the extra mile.”<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Jim Gilson, “The 510<sup>th</sup> Was There,” DVD (undated).

<sup>54</sup> Sanders and Dick Parker, “The 510<sup>th</sup> Was There,” DVD (undated).

<sup>55</sup> Drummond, “The 510<sup>th</sup> Was There,” DVD (undated).

## Conclusion

Civilian and military leaders widely accepted the need for major restructuring within the United States military following World War II. In a sense, the capabilities of the military had outgrown the prewar organizational structure and, in order to exploit fully the new developments of land, sea, and air forces, a new approach to war and defense would have to be applied. Predictably, there existed several competing approaches to reforming to the existing organizational structure. While the Army Air Forces leaders' fight for autonomy predated the war, their experiences during the war only strengthened the airmen's resolve. Following the war, air leaders were convinced that airpower was the future of warfare. Modern wars would begin and end with air offensives and counteroffensives and a standing air force would serve as the new first line of defense in the postwar world. They believed the only way to ensure the most advantageous use of air power was to leave the planning, development, and execution of air power to the airmen.<sup>56</sup>

These were not new assertions from the AAF, these were not even new voices making the assertions as Arnold, Eaker, and Spaatz remained at the forefront of the fight for independence. The difference after the war was that the fight for independence was not met with the same prewar resistance from Army leaders. In fact, many within the Army had been wholly convinced of the merits of air power and of the importance of

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<sup>56</sup> Herman S. Wolk, *The Struggle for Air Force Independence, 1943-1947* (Washington, DC: Air Force History and Museums Program, 1997), pp. 102-105.

airmen, not ground commanders, directing airpower. Ironically, these men were not won over by the strategic bombing campaign that air leaders assumed would leave no military man unconvinced of the air forces' might and agitation for equal place among the branches of land and sea.

The AAF had gone to war with doctrine rooted in their obsession with strategic bombing and heavy bombers. Therefore, the air force the AAC/AAF developed in the 1920s and 1930s, and took to war in the 1940s was ill-equipped to provide close air support. Yet, it was the cooperative efforts of tactical airpower that convinced men like Eisenhower and Bradley of the importance of the “three-legged stool,” or the services of air, sea, and land each complementing the other with no single service independently considered. The air force had arrived as an unquestioned and crucial element in the nation's military, and enough Army leaders agreed that the existing air leaders were best suited to command it.

In a memorandum to Secretary of Defense James Forrestal, dated 3 November 1947, General of the Army Dwight D. Eisenhower wrote that he, as well as his Army, accepted completely the concept of complementary roles—air, ground, and sea—and the mutual dependence of all three. Eisenhower explained that “the experiences of this war have indicated that in many operations, if not the majority, the task was of necessity accomplished by contributions from two or three services acting under the principle of unified command.” The concept of unified command was represented in the arrangement tactical air leaders and ground commanders depended upon during the war: cooperation between equals—each understanding that they knew best how to employ their own arm, while also acknowledging that their services had equal stake in the same offensive. In

reference to unified command, Eisenhower went on to claim that “Employment of tactical air in World War II is an outstanding illustration of the application of this concept to a specific problem.”<sup>57</sup>

Battle experience, Eisenhower explained “proved that control of the air, the prerequisite to the conduct of ground operations in any given area, was gained most economically by the employment of air forces operating under a single [air] command.” The Allies’ organizational structure that allowed for, and came to depend on, a practically independent air force permitted the “maximum concentration of combat airpower at the decisive point at the decisive time.” An independent air force, it turned out, was not defined by its lack of ground support responsibilities, but instead defined by air leaders’ ability to make the most of each mission by using the air arm in the most advantageous manner.

Addressing those Army generals’ claim that cooperative tactical air units belonged with the Army and not with new independent air force, Eisenhower argued, “Basically, the Army does not belong in the air—it belongs on the ground.” He explained that any development of air units by the Army would be an uneconomical and ineffective duplication of what the air force had proven it was better suited to manage.<sup>58</sup> Eisenhower believed in air power and in an independent air force because he had witnessed first hand the contribution the tactical units made to the Allied victory.

General Quesada and the Ninth Air Force were instrumental to Eisenhower's appreciation of air power. Late in 1944, the often outspoken and ever-confident Quesada

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<sup>57</sup> General of the Army Dwight D. Eisenhower to Secretary of Defense James Forrestal, 3 November 1947, “Tactical Air Support,” in Futrell, *Ideas, Concepts, Doctrine*, pp. 176-77.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

had warned that the AAF and the Army had failed to realize fully the potential of his fighters and that, given the chance, their low-altitude attacks over German targets could win the war by winter. It was perhaps his characteristic confidence, as well as his unwavering faith in his fighters that led Quesada to view air-to-ground support not as the subordinated duty of a secondary military arm, but instead as an underappreciated means of providing the decisive element of a successful offensive. Quesada had advocated for an independent air force that included tactical air units throughout the war. Postwar, he continued to insist that the most successful instances of close air support resulted from ground commanders allowing airmen to control the airpower. Quesada found that “the best way to make this concept a success was by doing it well, so that the Army would be the first to admit that tactical air forces under the jurisdiction of the United States Air Force (USAF) was to their benefit,” explaining further that this only worked if “the Air Force did their job with extreme diligence and extreme enthusiasm and extreme efficiency.”<sup>59</sup>

Quesada’s efforts paid off, because, as historian Thomas Hughes explained in *Over Lord: General Pete Quesada and the Triumph of Tactical Air Power in World War II*, “The Air Force had won its independence from the Army in 1948 (*sic*) only after its leaders had promised to keep tactical aviation a high priority.”<sup>60</sup> According to historian Herman Wolk, author of *The Struggle for Air Force Independence 1943-1947*, “Tactical air support of Army Ground Forces was one of the most important and pressing postwar issues facing the Army Air Forces.”<sup>61</sup> As General Quesada explained, “Bradley and

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<sup>59</sup> Quesada, 23 May 1975, Tape 5-Side 1, p. 1.

<sup>60</sup> Hughes, *Over Lord*, pp. 304-306.



Eisenhower were assured by Spaatz that the Air Force would always honor and always meet its commitments to the Army and provide strong tactical forces...[Spaatz] made strong promises to Eisenhower to the effect that the tactical air forces would remain intact....It was to a large extent that that commitment by Spaatz permitted Eisenhower to support a separate air force. I think without it he wouldn't have."<sup>62</sup>

Tactical air power made the case for an independent air force and for that air force's place in the new, postwar, multiservice, combined arms definition of warfare. Fighter-bombers helped the tactical air force make that case. Whereas medium, heavy, and very heavy bombers could not be counted on to carry out operations safely within close range to friendly ground troops—as evidenced during COBRA—the P-47s had repeatedly contributed to the ground effort using 500-pound general purpose and 260-pound fragmentation bombs against enemy forces within 300 to 500 yards of friendly troops—and with accuracy that rivaled long-range heavy artillery.<sup>63</sup> Omar Bradley's sentiments in a letter to O. P. Weyland dated 26 May 1945, accurately conveyed the gratitude ground commanders felt for their supporting air units. "No one," Bradley claimed "questions the effectiveness of our air-ground team...we destroyed our greatest testimonial when we buried the Wehrmacht west of the Rhine."<sup>64</sup>

In contrast, strategic bombing did not show an unquestionable propensity for achieving the prewar objectives set forth by strategic advocates. In the European theater,

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<sup>61</sup> Wolk, *Struggle for Air force Independence*, pp. 138-141; Gen. Spaatz acted officially as Arnold's deputy until his retirement, spearheading the AAF drive for independence. Spaatz was given, by Arnold, the "job of determining the permanent status of the Army Air Forces."

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 141.

<sup>63</sup> Hallion, *Strike from the Sky*, pp. 223-24.

<sup>64</sup> Bradley to Weyland, 26 May 1945, Correspondence of Maj. Gen. O. P. Weyland, IRIS No. 232383, in USAF Collections, AFHRA.

the two objectives of strategic bombardment—destroying, or significantly damaging, the enemy nation’s ability to make war and the civilians’ determination to support the war effort—were never achieved, but amassed a body count that many considered at best negligent, and at worst depraved. As per the late President Roosevelt’s request, Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson established the U. S. Strategic Bombing Survey on 3 November 1944. The resulting report, produced on 30 September 1945, was based on “a close examination and inspection of several hundred German plants, cities and areas, amassed volumes of statistical and documentary material, including top German government documents,” and on the “interviews and interrogations of thousands of Germans, including virtually all of the surviving political and military leaders.”<sup>65</sup>

The authors of the survey found that the bombing of strategic civilian targets in Germany had resulted in the destruction of 3,600,000 German homes (approximately 20 percent of the total number of homes in Germany), the death of approximately 300,000 civilians with an additional 780,000 wounded, roughly 7,500,000 homeless, and the nation’s cities, including cultural and historic sites, reduced to rubble. Remarkably, these attacks never resulted in the demoralized populace bombing advocates promised. While civilian morale was affected by strategic bombing, the German response was passive endurance, not the active opposition to the regime strategic advocates had promised. Furthermore, the bombing did not lead to any crippling breakdown of social orders. In fact, the report shows that “civilian consumption was high during the early years of the war and inventories both in trade channels and consumers' possession were also high,” figuring that this must have “helped cushion the people of the German cities from the

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<sup>65</sup> United States Strategic Bombing Survey Summary Report (European War), 30 September 1945, <http://www.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/AAF/USSBS/ETO-Summary.html#c%22> (accessed 22 June 2013), pp. 1-3.

effects of bombing.” Attacks of strategic industrial targets did not fare much better as the German industry, the report claimed, had only been “bruised,” “temporarily paralyzed,” and actually found that armament production increased threefold after 1942. The report attributed this increase to the Germans’ prior industrial “undermobilization.”<sup>66</sup>

The strategic bombardment bombing campaign had not achieved its objectives with the overwhelming success promised by strategic advocates. But, as the Strategic Bombing Survey attests, the Ninth Air Force, “developed with the primary mission of securing the sky in the theatre of combat and clearing the way for ground operations,” had achieved the three missions set forth by the AAF in FM 100-20. Air superiority had been attained and maintained. The tactical unit’s second mission, isolating the battlefield through interdiction missions—characterized, in large part, by the Ninth’s attacks on the enemy’s railways, was equally successful. As the report states, “The attack on transportation was the decisive blow that completely disorganized the German economy. It reduced war production in all categories and made it difficult to move what was produced to the front. The attack also limited the tactical mobility of the German army.” In performing its third mission, providing air support for ground forces, the report shows that “the increased tempo of tactical air action was having an effect on military casualty rates, and is reflected in the fact that, according to German reports, war casualties from aerial weapons moved from third place in 1942 to first place in late 1943, 1944, and 1945, followed in order by artillery fire and infantry weapons.”<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., pp. 3, 12, 15, note: “The casualty effects of air action are shown by the fact that the proportion of wounded to killed shifted from a ratio of eight to one in 1940 and 1941 to a ratio of three to one in 1944 and 1945. Personnel wounded by air action suffered as a rule multiple wounds and shock, resulting in longer periods of hospitalization and convalescence, and in a decided reduction in the number of patients who could be returned to either full or limited military duty.”

Tactical air operations had shown the vast capabilities of airpower during World War II. Tactical commanders had done so through cooperation with the Army instead of alienating ground commanders with a short-sighted tendency to equate support with subordination, and without the moral implications of the strategic bombing campaign. The continued relevance of strategic bombardment theory after the war endured because of the technological gap between the dawn of atomic weaponry and the eventual development of ballistic missiles, which left the military with only big bombers to carry the load. Why then, did the USAF continue to reflect AAF leaders' prewar penchant for strategic bombing and their aversion to tactical air operations? The answer is tragically familiar.

Air leaders had contended after World War I that the airplane was the future of warfare, rendering ground forces unnecessary once an equipped air force could attack the enemy's homeland quickly and decisively. Likewise, AAF leaders insisted that atomic bombing was the future of warfare after World War II. Furthermore, they argued, existing strategic bombing doctrine made the AAF the obvious choice among the military branches to take command of the new weapons system. According to Col. Dennis M. Drew, in his article "Two Decades in the Air Power Wilderness: Do We Know Where We Are," the atomic bomb's "destructive capacity seemed to offer airmen the ultimate tool for strategic bombardment," and that, "mated with long-range bombers to form "atomic air power," airmen believed atomic weapons would bring the ideas of Mitchell to complete fruition."<sup>68</sup> The atomic age thus represented a new opportunity to espouse old

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<sup>68</sup> Col. Dennis M. Drew, USAF, "Two Decades of Air Power Wilderness: Do We Know Where We Are?" *Air University Review* 37 (September-October): pp. 2-13.

ideas with regards to independent air operations and to eschew tactical operations despite vowing to maintain those forces.

With the Army, Navy, and Air Force all competing for funding amid postwar retrenchment, convincing those divvying up military appropriations that the Air Force represented the best option as custodian of the nation's new atomic weapons equaled billions of dollars in funding for the new branch. The Air Force would once more appeal to the sensibilities of those looking for the most efficient and cost-effective means of achieving the greatest impact—or getting the most bang for the buck. According to historian John Schlight, author of *Help from Above: Air Force Close Air Support of the Army 1946-1973*, the Air Force was convinced by 1948 that the “protracted war of local campaigns” of World War II, in which tactical air units played such an integral part, were no longer likely. Instead, with the advent of the atomic bomb, “ground forces, no longer needed to fight enemy armies, [and] would only have the missions of mopping up after the atomic devastation and of keeping the peace, neither of which tasks required a tactical air organization in being or a close air support capability.”<sup>69</sup> Thus as Colonel Drew claims, “the entire national defense structure relied more and more on nuclear weapons and air power to deter not only major wars but also limited assaults on American vital interests.”<sup>70</sup>

Tactical air power once again did not mesh with the political agenda underwriting the Air Force's doctrine, which was once again based almost entirely on conjecture. As Schlight explains, “the Air Force would readily sacrifice its tactical resources on the altar of strategic bombing” and “tactical aviation would bear the brunt of any reductions [in

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p. 84.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p. 4

funding].”<sup>71</sup> Accordingly, Air Force Chief of Staff, Gen. Hoyt Vandenberg stripped Quesada and his Tactical Air Command (TAC) of most of its resources and personnel with his reorganization of the Air Force in 1949, essentially dismantling the only entity within the Air Force capable of training tactical air units for future air operations. Thus, the Strategic Air Command (SAC) dominated the Air Force, and the tactical air forces were made into “ministrategic commands” outfitted with fighter-bombers modified to deliver nuclear weapons.<sup>72</sup> Air Force leaders had broken their promises to Army leaders and to tactical advocates within the Air Force.

For his part, Quesada—long the Air Force’s loudest proponent of tactical air power—had had enough, and requested retirement in 1949 following Vandenberg’s cuts. Vandenberg denied the request, knowing full well what Quesada’s retirement would signal to those who feared a decline in tactical forces within an Air Force headed by strategic advocates. When Quesada’s retirement request was eventually approved by the Air Force two years later, the news was met, as had been feared, with much concern from military leaders and high-ranking members of the House Armed Services Committee. As Hughes includes in *Over Lord*, Rep. Carl Vinson (Democrat of Georgia) demanded to know “why the forty-seven-year-old three-star general with the best tactical-aviation credentials in the country would want to, and why we are letting him, retire in the middle of new war in Korea?”<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> John Schlight, *Help from Above: Air Force Close Air Support of the Army, 1943-1973* (Washington, DC: Air Force History and Museums Program, 2003), p. 86.

<sup>72</sup> Drew, “Two Decades in the Air Power Wilderness,” p. 6.

<sup>73</sup> Hughes, *Over Lord*, pp. 304-306.

The unspoken answer to Vinson's question was that, as the new Air Force stood, it had little use for Quesada or the air operations he advocated for. The lessons of World War II were no more reflected in the structure and doctrine of the Air Force than the lessons of World War I had been in the structure and doctrine of the Army Air Corps. The remarkable success of Quesada and the Ninth Air Force in World War II could not deter a strategic takeover, even though the efforts of both had helped secure for the Air Force its independence. When Quesada finally retired in 1951, more Army officers than Air force officers attended Quesada's retirement ceremony.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

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