

ARMY AIR FORCE ACES IN A DAY

By WILLIAM N. HESS

In the course of World War II thousands of U.S. Army Air Force fighter pilots flew the cold skies on myriad types of missions, eternally twisting their heads from side to side, squinting into the glaring sun and peering for those black specks that were the enemy. These were the hunters—aggressive, calculating and determined that they were going to blast the foe out of the blue. From the sun-drenched skies of the Southwest Pacific to the murky, gray fronts of Northern Europe, the search went on for seemingly endless months. For many pilots action came fast and furiously. For others it was a case of the "wrong time and the wrong place" as the enemy just never put in an appearance, and combat tours were finished without a single chance for a victory. On the other hand, there were occasions when a few pilots had the golden opportunity of pressing their attacks upon enemy aircraft in great numbers. From these combats emerged a select number of men who earned the title: "Ace in a Day."

MEDITERRANEAN THEATER - 1943

For several weeks in the Spring of 1943, Allied Intelligence had been reporting that the Germans were operating an aerial ferry out of Tunisia to their bases in Sicily and Italy in a last desperate attempt to evacuate key personnel of the Afrika Korps and to bring in what supplies they could to keep a rear guard action going. This was being accomplished by Junkers Ju 52 tri-motored transports escorted by Messerschmitt 109s and Italian Macchi 202 fighters. Constantly, a combat patrol had been kept over the Cape Bon area in an attempt to intercept the Germans when a ferry effort was being made.

At 1630 hours on Palm Sunday afternoon, 18 April 1943, the Curtiss P-40s of the 57th Fighter Group took to the sky along with the 34th Fighter Squadron of the 324th Fighter Group. Forty-eight Warhawks took up positions over the Gulf of Tunis, stepped up in flights of four from 4,000 feet to a summit of 15,000 feet, where a flight of Royal Air Force Spitfires maintained protective cover. Back and forth they slid between the islands of Zembra and Zembretta and the hills of Cape Bon until the sun was setting and only 15 minutes of patrol time remained.

Then the enemy was sighted! Two German fighters were spotted 1,000 feet below the leading and lowest element heading northwest and straight toward it. Apparently the Germans spotted them at the same moment, for both made steep diving turns. Watching them carefully, Captain James Curl suddenly straightened up in his cockpit at the sight which he beheld. Off to the right, flying parallel and on an opposite course in perfect Vee formations, were three formations of Junkers Ju 52s, each consisting of 30 aircraft. The transports were only a few hundred feet off the water, blending perfectly into the shadows now falling on the sea. Above them like an angry bunch of hornets flew 25 or 30 single and twin-engine fighters acting as protective escort.

"Juicy, juicy; let's go get them," Curl told his pilots and then someone let out a yelp and down went the P-40s to the attack, each flight splitting into pairs. The Palm Sunday Massacre was on!

To quote Captain Curl, "When I first saw the Jerry planes they were right under us, about 4,000 feet down.

Camouflaged as they were with green coloring, it was rather difficult to distinguish the transports against the sea. When they got nearer they looked like a huge flight of geese, for they were traveling in perfect Vee formation. The boys simply cut loose and shot the day-lights out of them. What concerned our pilots was the danger of hitting our own aircraft. The air was filled with whistling and maneuvering planes. There were cases of pilots missing the transport they aimed at and hitting the one behind. It was as fantastic as that—you just could not miss. There was no real fighter opposition. Spitfires, flying top cover, kept the Messerschmitts so busy that they could not interfere."

When the smoke of battle settled and the U.S. fighters returned to base, the claims of the Warhawks added up to the fantastic total of 59 Ju 52s, 14 Messerschmitt 109s and two Messerschmitt 110s destroyed; one Ju 52 and one 109 probably destroyed; 17 Ju 52s, nine 109s and two 110s damaged. The Americans had lost six P-40s and the top covering Spitfires had downed one German fighter while losing one of their own. From this colossal victory emerged the Army Air Force's first aces in a day --Lt Richard E. Duffey had five Ju 52s to this credit, Lt McArthur Powers shot down four Ju 52s and one Messerschmitt 109 and Lt Arthur B. Cleaveland downed five Ju 52s

October of 1943 found the Lockheed P-38s of the 14th Fighter Group still in North Africa based at Ste. Marie-du-Zit, Tunisia. From there they were flying escort missions for the bombers and sweeps over the Mediterranean in support of Allied shipping moving up to supply the ground forces fighting in Italy. On the 9th of that month, a patrol of seven aircraft led by Lt Col. William L. Leverette sighted a formation of 25 Junkers Ju 87 dive bombers, escorted by Junkers Ju 88s, heading for the convoy under their protection. Leaving three of his aircraft above for top cover, Leverette took his flight of four P-38s, including one flown by a young Lieutenant named Harry T. Hanna, down to the attack. The Stukas were just starting to drop their



Lt Harry T. Hanna with the P-38 in which he downed five Ju 87s in one afternoon. (Photo - Maj Harry T. Hanna)

bombs when the Lightnings fell in on the rear of their formation. In the air battle that followed, Leverette blasted seven of the dive bombers from the sky and Hanna got five plus one damaged. Hanna also chased several enemy aircraft off the tails of his comrades. The convoy steamed on, unscathed.

PACIFIC THEATER - 1943

Since the 7th of June when the Japanese commander on Rabaul had started his all-out attack on U.S. air bases on Guadalcanal, the 13th Air Force fighters had been in constant action in their defense. June 16th brought the campaign to a climax.

At 1232 hours and again at 1245 reports were received from coast watchers that two large formations, one of 38 planes and another of approximately 80 Japanese aircraft, were converging on the Russell Islands. At 1315 hours the U.S. fighters on the "Canal" started to scramble. Twelve Lockheed P-38s, 21 P-40s and 14 Bell P-39s all took to the skies to intercept the on-coming Nipponese.

One of the flight leaders of the 347th Fighter

Group's P-38s was Lt Murray J. Shubin. He was to have a day that he would never forget. Along with his flight composed of Lts Harris, Rake and Van Bibber, he spotted a formation of about 50 enemy planes 15 miles from the western end of Guadalcanal headed toward the South coast of the island--altitude about 23,000 feet. Lt Shubin was at 27,000. He attacked at once, breaking into the rear cover of 10 to 15 Zeros, opened fire, pulled up and sent a long burst into a Zero peeling up. He saw five or six planes going down, four of which were flamm-ers, and of these four he had destroyed two. During the melee Lt Rake had been hit and headed for home. The fight then worked over toward Esperance and the Savo area. Lt Harris had his guns jam after downing two Zeros and he and Lt Van Bibber, who had also downed a Zero, returned to base. For the next 40 minutes Lt Shubin was alone and in constant contact with five Zeros.

He first sent a good burst into the area behind the cockpit of the last Zero of the flight--it hung for a moment and then did the first half of a split S. He next fired a deflection shot at the fourth Zero in the flight and apparently hit its engine. It slowed noticeably, went into a steep turn and then



Lt Murray J. Shubin of the 347th Fighter Group, 13th Air Force, standing before his Lockheed P-38 in which he was credited with destroying six Japanese Zero fighters on 16 June 1943. (Photo - U.S. Air Force 24514)

peeled off and went down. Now Shubin had the remaining three Zeros on his tail! Three times he dove down and pulled back up into the sun and then dove back down to make passes on the enemy aircraft. The third time he scored with a good burst and ripped one of the Zeros all the way down its fuselage. It was smoking and on its back when he passed over it. He continued in his dive and managed to outdistance the remaining two Zeros of the flight.

Pulling out he climbed in the direction of Savo, and the two Zeros flew to Lulagi where they orbited over the island. Following them he fired at one from long range but missed. One then dove down and away, but the other Zero turned into him in a frontal attack. He gave it a burst, pulled up and racked the P-38 around and gave chase. A few miles east of Savo he finally came within range and fired, scoring all along the top of the fuselage. The Zero hung for a moment and then went down in a steep dive. Lt Shubin followed briefly then pulled out and headed for home.

Captain F. P. Mueller, G Company, 35th Infantry, witnessed the Esperance-Savo part of the long battle through binoculars and definitely established the fact that Lt Shubin shot down three of the five Zeros. Lt Bill Harris confirmed two earlier victories, thus giving him a total of five destroyed and one probable for the combat. The probable was later confirmed, giving Lt Shubin a total of six Zeros which certainly constituted a good afternoon's work.

On 1 July 1943 the Japanese tried it again and this time were intercepted by P-40s of the 18th Fighter Group when they attempted to bomb Allied shipping at Rendova Harbor. At 0745 hours eight P-40s took off under the command of Captain R. B. Westbrook and orbited at about 16,500 feet until the enemy formation of some 30 Zekes and dive bombers was sighted just off the west coast of Rendova Island at about 21,000 feet. Lt Elmer L. Wheadon was leading the second flight, about 4,000 feet below Captain Westbrook, when he saw the dive bombers at approximately 7,000 feet start to peel off to make their run on the shipping.

He took his flight down along with four Navy Grumman F4Fs and Captain Westbrook from the flight above. As soon as the dive bombers sighted them they dropped their bombs, missing the shipping by a wide margin. Wheadon put a burst into the third Val in a string of nine and it immediately blew up. Making a continuous right turn, he blew up another Val just off the water. Pulling up to the left, he circled awhile and then joined with another P-40 and an F4F which were after the dive bombers. One Val pulled up at a 45 degree angle in front of Lt Wheadon and he fired a long burst into it. After turning right, he saw another dive bomber turning away with the F4F firing but out of range. Lt Wheadon put telling shots into the Val, raking it from the tail forward. The two Vals were verified as destroyed by the F4F pilot. Wheadon then received a call from Captain Westbrook to bring his flight upstairs to 7,000 feet where a big dogfight was going on. Wheadon immediately got on the tail of a Zeke and shot it down. After putting bursts into another Zeke but observing no results, and finding his ammo gone, he returned to base with the destruction of four Val dive bombers and a Zeke to his credit.

Ever since Colonel Neel Kearby had brought his Republic P-47s to the 5th Air Force, he had been quite determined that his 348th Fighter Group should really stand out in this theater of P-38s and P-40s. Colonel Kearby, through his extraordinary skill as a pilot and a combat leader, made all factions sit up and take notice on 11 October 1943, when his combat report claimed five fighters. It read as follows:

I was leading a flight of four P-47s on a fighter sweep. We arrived over Wewak at

28,000 feet, the weather was excellent with a few scattered clouds between 2,000 and 8,000 feet. We saw a number of aircraft parked on Boram strip and one aircraft taxiing on the runway. He did not take off! The fuel in our belly tanks had been consumed so we dropped them to increase our speed and conserve fuel. One Zeke was sighted at 8 o'clock below at 20,000 feet. I came in on him from 7 o'clock above and opened fire at 1500 feet. He took no evasive action, caught fire and dove into the sea. We climbed back to 26,000 feet, saw about 36 fighters; Zekes, Hamps and Tonys, at 10,000 to 15,000 feet and 12 bombers, type unidentified at 5,000 feet, approaching from the east. Our P-47s came in from above on a Zeke, opened fire at 1500 feet and closed as he burst into flame. He took no evasive action. I turned slightly and opened fire on a Hamp at 1500 feet from 7 o'clock. He burst into flame. No evasive action was taken. I looked up and another Hamp was turning slightly above and from about 8 o'clock. He burst into flames after he had passed beyond my sights in the turn. The Nips realized we were there so I pulled up sharply to about 20,000 feet and started for home.

Immediately at 2 o'clock below at about 20,000 feet I saw a P-47 with one Tony about 3,000 feet to the rear and another about 3,000 feet behind the first one. I turned and came in at 400 mph on the tail of the rear Tony, opening fire at 1500 feet. He took no evasive action and burst into flame. I closed for the other Tony but he must have seen me as he turned and dove down in front of me. I opened fire from about 2,000 feet closing in and saw tracers going into him and pieces of his wing and fuselage flying off. I did not see him catch fire nor did I see him crash. (This plane was confirmed by a member of the flight who saw him crash into the sea.) Tonys were all over the sky. I made another pass at a Tony from about 10 o'clock but deflection was wrong. I looked and saw a Tony closing in on my tail so I dived for the nearby clouds. When coming out of the clouds I could no longer see the Tony. I climbed to 15,000 feet and called the flight. They all checked and proceeded to Lae, where we peeled off to land.

MEDITERRANEAN THEATER - 1944

On 30 January 1944 the 15th Air Force flew one of the cleverest missions of the war in the Udine area near Austria to attack the Luftwaffe bases which were being built up to launch attacks on Allied ground forces fighting at Anzio. B-17s and B-24s were to fly at normal bombing altitude escorted by P-38s, while the P-47s of the 325th Fighter Group would precede them by some fifteen minutes. The P-47s would come in on the deck to catch the German fighters on the ground before they could get into the air to intercept the bomber formations.

Leading a section of the P-47s on the mission was Major Herschel H. Green. Shortly after arrival at the scheduled time, he leveled out and spotted approximately 15 Ju 52s flying at about 1,000 feet. His section of four fighters swung around to get the sun to their backs and then went into a dive toward the enemy. By the time he reached the level of the Junkers transports, they were strung out in such a manner that each fighter could fire at several individual aircraft as they passed through their very loose and long formation. Green was able to down four on his first pass. When he turned for



Major Herschel H. Green in cockpit of P-47 in which he destroyed 6 enemy aircraft over Udine, Italy. (58503)



Lt Herbert B. Hatch points to five swastikas denoting his five victories over Ploesti. (Photo - USAF 59914)

a second attack, all the transports were either down or in such close proximity to a couple of the airfields that the ground fire forced him away. He noted, however, that some of the Junkers were crash-landing on the fields to keep from being shot down. In the further melee at low altitude, Green managed to destroy a Dornier Do 217 and a Macchi 202 that were trying to escape the massacre. Major Green was high man on the list with six destroyed for the day, while the balance of the Group did away with a further 30 of the enemy's aircraft, while losing only two of their own.

The 15th Air Force continued to take the war into Germany and the Balkans in the Spring of 1944 and one of the targets always at the top of the priority list was the oil refinery complex at Ploesti, Roumania. Although these refineries were hit time and again by the bombers, there was one mission that only the fighters flew. On 10 June 1944 the 1st Fighter Group's P-38s escorted the Lightnings of the 82nd Fighter Group which carried one 1000-lb bomb each to be dropped on the Romano-American Oil Refinery. The mission was flown at low level with the original plan calling for the fighters of the 1st Group to precede the 82nd, turn and gain altitude at the initial point south of Bucharest, and go in and sweep the German and Roumanian interceptors before the 82nd began dive bombing the target.

Flying the Green 3 position in the 71st Fighter Squadron of the 1st Fighter Group that day was Lt Herbert B. Hatch who was destined to become an ace on the mission. No sooner had his squadron dropped their belly tanks at the initial point than they flew directly over a German airfield with six twin-engined bombers in the traffic pattern. Immediately they fell upon them and the first two flights shot down all six of the bombers.

The planes started reforming but before they could gain any altitude the bottom fell out on them. Someone called "break left" and Hatch looked up and saw a whole pack of FW 190s diving on the formation. All of the P-38s except Hatch and his wingman broke, and he glanced to the right just in time to see a similar number of 190s coming in from that side! He had no choice but to turn into this formation, but they were so close he did not have time to fire as they passed above. He and his wingman racked around in a steep bank to the left, and as he did so, one of the FW 190s passed right across his nose and Hatch sprayed him from stem to stern, literally cutting him in two. Turning his aircraft hard to the right, he saw a P-38 with a 190 on its tail, and by reefing in tight, he managed to get on the tail of the enemy and destroy it, but not before the fleeing P-38 had gone down, too.

By this time Hatch was right on the deck and as he racked his Lightning around he met another FW coming at him head on. Holding down hard on the gun tit he watched his cannon and machine gun fire pour into the big radial engine until it broke completely out of its mount. Hatch popped the wheel forward and ducked as the German passed over him, but even so, the enemy plane left oil all over his left boom and took away four inches of his left rudder tip.

Hatch then built up a bit of flying speed, put his plane into a tight turn and shot down another Focke Wulf that crossed his nose. Now, desperately trying to gain some altitude, he found himself flying parallel to his fifth 190 which he promptly slid behind and sent crashing into the trees.

During this time Hatch lost his wingman, but he then saw a P-38 in distress flying on one engine and with two FW 190s after it. He turned into the 190s, scored a few hits on one and drove the other away before

he expended the last of his ammunition.

He then teamed up with several other P-38s and although they had to bluff an attack over Yugoslavia which cost them another aircraft, they managed to bring the cripple home. Even though he had become an ace that day by downing five FW 190s, there was nothing to cheer "Stub" Hatch when he got back to Italy. His was the only P-38 out of the 71st Squadron to return to home base after the mission.

EUROPEAN THEATER - 1944

In Northern Europe the 8th Air Force was taking the fight deeper and deeper into Germany as the strategic bombing campaign sought not only to destroy the industrial might of the Third Reich, but to draw the Luftwaffe into the air so that it might be further neutralized before the coming invasion of the Continent. It was on such a mission that the 8th Air Force gained its first ace in a day.

On the morning of 8 May 1944 the 352nd Fighter Group was escorting the "Big Friends" when just short of Brunswick whole packs of Luftwaffe fighters showed up to intercept. They were in formations of 15 and 20 plus headed straight for the bombers. Lt Carl Luksic picked out a flight and chased it down to 3,000 feet where he lost it in the clouds. In the chase he had become separated from his flight, but still had his wingman, Lt O'Nan with him. As they leveled out, Lt O'Nan called out a Messerschmitt 109 ahead. Luksic didn't see this one, so he told O'Nan to get the bandit while he covered him. They were hot after the German fighter when Luksic saw a flight of six 190s on his left. Feeling that Lt O'Nan had the 109 well in hand, he turned into the sextet of fighters:

I fired very short bursts from about 300 yards on the nearest 190, the tail end Charlie. I saw many strikes on the canopy and fuselage. The pilot stopped short, rolled his ship over, and bailed out. A moment later I saw the pilot of the plane that Lt O'Nan hit bail out, too. The leader of those 190s evidently saw what had happened. He whipped his formation around and one of them started shooting at me. It became a rat race, with all of us going in circles. Somewhere in this merry-go-round I managed to get on the tail of one of them. I again fired a couple of short bursts but I'm sure none of them went home. The Nazi must have gotten scared, for the next thing I knew he went into a spin. I saw him crash into the ground and explode. I shopped around a while, thinking I could find some more targets to shoot at. I saw a lone plane at a distance which I couldn't quite make out. It might have been a friendly one, but I wasn't sure, so I decided to investigate. I gained on it rapidly. When I was 25 yards back of it, I realized it was a bandit. I fired once, but he kept riding along. Next thing I knew, I was flying his wing, right beside him. He looked at me, I looked back. I must have scared the hell out of him, for the next thing I knew, he jettisoned his canopy and jumped.

All this action had taken place below 3,000 feet. As a matter of fact, the third combat wound up at 200 feet. I went for altitude. As I climbed, Captain Davis and Lt O'Nan joined me. Just where they came from I'll never know. The three of us started back for the bombers which were dropping their loads over Brunswick. We reached no more than 2,000 feet when off to my left were about 25 bandits in close formation, going down through the clouds. The three of us immediately went into attack and followed them through the clouds. I found myself directly

astern of a 190 which had a 109 right next to it. I evidently was unseen as I got a very successful burst at the 109, observing numerous hits on wings, fuselage and tail. The 109 caught fire and went straight into the ground.

The 190 kept right on going as if nothing had happened to his wingman. He was a perfect duck to shoot at. I registered hits on his left wing, fuselage and tail. The 190 went into a tight turn spiral and crashed.

Lt Carl Luksic, now low on fuel, headed his plane back toward home base at Bodney, England with a total of five victories for the day.

Four days later, on 12 May, "A" and "B" Groups of the 56th Fighter Group tangled with a whole bevy of Luftwaffe fighters in the Giessen-Coblenz-Frankfurt triangle. When the smoke of battle settled Capt. Robert J. Rankin of the 61st Squadron had sent five of the enemy crashing to earth.

The 56th produced another ace in a day on 7 July 1944 when Capt. Frederick J. Christensen caught a flight of Junkers Ju 52s in the landing pattern of their airfield. In less time than it takes to tell he sent all six of them crashing into the ground.

Major George Preddy was leading the 352nd Fighter Group escorting the heavies to Berlin on 6 August 1944 when a formation of 30-plus Messerschmitt 109s headed into the third box from the rear of the bomber stream. Immediately Preddy took his flight of four into the fray. Jockeying his P-51 onto the tail of the nearest enemy fighter he opened fire getting good strikes, and the 109 went over on its back and spun down in flames.

Left with only his wingman, Lt Heyer, Preddy quickly lined up on another 109, set him on fire and followed him down to 20,000 feet where the pilot bailed



Major George W. Preddy (left) and his one-time wingman Capt William T. Whisner. Both were to become aces in a day in 1944. (Photo - Lt Col William T. Whisner)

out. The enemy formation stayed together taking practically no evasive action and this allowed Preddey to line up on a third 109 which he promptly shot down.

At this time four more P-51s roared in to help in the destruction. The formation of Jerries was still holding together tightly so another burst from directly astern flamed number four which spiralled off to the right heading down. The formation now went into a left turn going down, but Preddey hung with them, hitting and burning number five. The enemy descended to 5,000 feet where one of them pulled off to the left. Preddey was now alone, so he took off after this plane to keep it from slipping in behind him. Round and round they went in tight turns until Preddey managed to turn inside of him and come up on his tail. As he put a burst into the other plane the German pilot bailed out.

George Preddey then headed back for base where he was met by his fellow pilots who were jubilant over his feat. When told he was credited with six enemy aircraft he could hardly believe it himself. "All I know is that they sat and I just kept blasting," he told them.

The battle of the Luftwaffe gaggles was now well under way. Huge formations of German fighters took to the skies on occasion to attack the bomber stream, and it was not at all unusual to find mixed formations of Messerschmitt 109s and Focke Wulf 190s flying to intercept. These formations were quite often filled with young, inexperienced pilots who were being led by the remaining "old hands." When such formations were encountered it was not unusual for them to stay together in their gaggles rather than take evasive action. This, more often than not, had disastrous results for them as can be witnessed in the combat above.

Much the opposite thing happened, however, when Lt William R. Beyer of the 361st Fighter Group was on an escort mission to Kassel on 27 September 1944. He and his flight dropped onto a gaggle of FW 190s and he immediately knocked one of them out of the sky, and the balance headed down through the clouds and split up. It was then a game of chasing singles and shooting them as they tried to flee. In the next 30 minutes he had caught and destroyed four more enemy fighters. Beyer found that "the enemy wasn't any too eager when he found that his attacker could stay on his tail, so most of them bailed out." This fight had taken place in the vicinity of Eisenach.

In a combat on 12 October, Capt. Charles E. Yeager also had trouble getting the enemy pilots to stay in their cockpits. He and his flight of P-51s from the 357th Fighter Group fell on a gaggle of about 25 Messerschmitt 109s over Steinhuder Lake in Germany. They dived down from out of the sun and quickly positioned themselves on the tail of the gaggle. Just as Yeager lined up on the first victim, the pilot rolled his 109 over and bailed out. Skidding over behind the second he again saw the pilot go over the side. Two 109s down and not a shot fired! Two more of the 109s were quickly disposed of and a fifth was shot down as he tried to chop throttle and break in behind the P-51s.

The 9th Air Force joined the act when Capt. Laurence E. Blumer downed five FW 190s in one combat on 25 August 1944. "Scrappy" Blumer and his squadron of P-38s from the 367th Fighter Group had just finished a dive bombing attack in the Saint-Quentin area of France when they received a call from another outfit which was being attacked by some 50 FW 190s.

Immediately the 367th went to assist, and Blumer pulled in on the tail of one of the Jerries who was busy pumping lead into another P-38. One good burst and the 190 flamed and rolled over. The pilot bailed out. Blumer caught another 190 flying alone; when hit, it started to half-roll, then spiralled to the ground.

"Scrappy" then gained a bit of altitude and dove down to destroy his third victim. This one just disintegrated and Blumer's wingman feared that his leader had crashed into the German until the P-38 emerged from the smoke and debris. The 190s were now fleeing singly, and it didn't take Blumer more than a moment to line up on his fourth 190. It went in after being well hit in the cockpit. Diving down again, he peppered his fifth enemy aircraft, and its pilot went into a roll and bailed out. All that Blumer suffered from the combat was a good soaking in perspiration from the terrific flying workout.

On 2 November 1944, Capt. Donald S. Bryan of the 352nd Fighter Group destroyed five Messerschmitt 109s in the vicinity of Merseburg, Germany. He blasted four of them from astern, but one of his victims was apparently a veteran for this one mixed it up with Captain Bryan and another pilot until Bryan finally hit him with a 90-degree deflection shot.

Two more aces in a day emerged on 21 November. Ironically both of them were Louisiana pilots but from different fighter groups, and one of them shot a German FW 190 off the other's tail in the combat! Lt Claude J. Crenshaw of the 359th Fighter Group had become separated from his squadron in a layer of haze while escorting the bombers to Merseburg, Germany, so he and his wingman attacked a gaggle of German fighters alone. At about the same time the gaggle was attacked by eight blue-nosed P-51s of the 352nd Fighter Group, one of whose flights was being led by Capt. William T. Whisner.

Crenshaw immediately destroyed two of the 190s with both of the pilots bailing out. The gaggle now turned to hit the bomber formation and Crenshaw followed one of them down through the bombers, peppering him all the way. As they broke through the heavies the 190 rolled over on its back and went down flaming.

Claude then recovered from his dive, climbed back up and encountered another gaggle of 190s. From this formation he claimed a fourth victim before he had to break off the fight as a number of the Focke Wulfs got on his tail.

In the meantime, Bill Whisner had been having his field day against the FW 190s. He fell in on the rear of a gaggle and hanging and skidding right in behind them, sent four down in flames. The fourth had gone into a steep right turn, and in cutting him off and destroying him Whisner had been pulled away from the main German formation.

Pushing his throttle to the fire wall, he came back and caught another 190 in the layer of haze that seemed to hang at about 29,000 feet. Whisner gave him a good burst, but couldn't see any results due to the haze. Then the Jerry snapped into a tight spin and went down, being recorded as a probable. He then picked up another and blew him up, for his fifth victory, with strikes on his belly tank. Amazingly enough the German pilots had never bothered to jettison their belly tanks.

Crenshaw broke when the Germans got on his tail, and he managed to elude them. He then sighted two 190s off to his right and attacked, rolling down in a spiral with one of them, firing all the way. The second Focke Wulf used this opportunity to get on Claude's tail. This aircraft was sighted by Bill Whisner and he closed on it giving it a deflection shot and then pulled through until he was slightly above the 190. Although he scored strikes all over the cockpit and engine, sending the Jerry down smoking and burning, Bill had to settle for another probable on this one as his gun camera had run out of film. Crenshaw intent on his fifth victim, stuck with his 190 until it quit rolling at 9,000 feet, got in a good burst and watched it crash near an airfield.

Perhaps another very important factor in the sizeable success of these Army Air Force fighter pilots is exemplified in a statement that Crenshaw entered on his Combat Encounter Report, "The success of my

encounter is attributable to the presence of Jerries as well as the superlative working of my K-14 gunsight and G-suit. The G-suit enabled me to make all the violent maneuvers necessary to protect myself and still be an efficient fighting force. The sight allowed me to fire short bursts with astonishing accuracy. I missed on only two bursts, one while firing at 90 degree deflection and the other while rolling with the enemy aircraft."

Four more pilots of the 8th Air Force were to join the select circle of aces in a day before the end of the year. Capt. J. S. Daniel of the 339th Fighter Group downed five Germans in 17 minutes in the vicinity of Misburg on 26 November, and Capt. L. K. "Kit" Carson of the 357th Fighter Group destroyed five on the 27th. To quote Carson, "It was easier than a shooting gallery! The stunned Krauts cooperated by keeping their bat-like formation intact as we sat on their tails and sawed them off." Capt. William J. Hovde of the 355th Fighter Group scored four FW 190s and one Messerschmitt 109 in much the same manner on 5 December in the vicinity of Berlin as he destroyed the 190s from astern and got the 109 when it tried to turn in to the attack. A sixth FW 190 he shared with his wingman. Colonel Dave Shilling of the 56th Fighter Group pulled a smooth ruse on the Germans in the vicinity of Bonn on 23 December and slipped his squadron in behind a gaggle of A-0-plus, pretending to be another gaggle joining up. The deception worked perfectly and the German fighters were attacked before they knew what was going on. Shilling downed three 190s in rapid succession and later scored two more FW 190s to give himself a bag of five for the day.



Capt William J. Hovde, of the 355th Fighter Group, who destroyed four FW 190s and one 109 over Berlin. (USAF)

CHINA-BURMA-INDIA THEATER - 1944

On the morning of 21 December 1944, 16 P-51s of the 118th Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron under the command of Lt Col Edward O. McComas were airborne from their base at Suichwan, China. The mission was to be a skip bombing attack on the Wuchang-Hankow ferry terminals. Arrival at the target was at 1222 hours and two flights broke off to go down and bomb and strafe the piers and tracks leading to them. Both attacks met with great success and the pier on the Hankow side was wrecked and left burning.

McComas had stayed above with one "flight covering the fighter-bombers, and when their work was done he took his Mustangs down to the deck to do a bit of strafing. A number of enemy planes were sighted on the ground at Wuchang airdrome, and in the course of several strafing passes McComas managed to shoot up a Lily and an Oscar quite effectively.

As he pulled up from his final pass he observed six Oscar fighters above him. One of the enemy aircraft tailed him and managed to put some hits into his wing, but McComas dove away and lost him. Climbing to 7,000 feet, he sighted another Oscar which he attacked from astern, getting good hits at the wing root. The Japanese pilot jettisoned his canopy and bailed out.

Two more Oscars jumped McComas so he headed southeast toward Kiukiang and managed to get away from them. As he passed over Ehur Tao Kow airfield he saw nine Oscars preparing to take off. He circled the field and made a west to east pass on two of the enemy planes just as they cleared the runway on takeoff. He fired into the closest Oscar which flipped over and hit its mate and both crashed just east of the field. McComas then slid up behind two other Oscars just after they took off abreast. Closing to within 50 feet of them, he fired a long burst into each. Both were seen to crash near the airfield.

The destruction of these five Oscars two days before Christmas in 1944 made Lt Col Edward O. McComas the only ace in a day in the CBI during World War II.

MEDITERRANEAN & EUROPEAN THEATERS - 1945

The lack of tactics of many of the German fighters which made them virtually sitting ducks in late 1944 did not run to form for Capt. Felix D. "Willie" Williamson of the 56th Fighter Group on a 14 January sweep to Magdeburg. His first kill occurred when two Messerschmitt 109s out of a gaggle came down in front of his squadron and he had to chase one of them up into the sun until he broke out to the left where Williamson could destroy him.

The second victim took Williamson through some of the most exhausting maneuvers he had ever encountered, during which he would wind up going straight down with the enemy doing snap rolls. The last time, he hit compressibility and managed to pull his P-47 out, but the 109 continued snapping on into the ground. He scored the next two in head-on attacks and then destroyed the fifth by shooting him off his wingman, who unfortunately went down, too.

On 22 March, Lt Col Sidney Woods, Deputy Commander of the 4th Fighter Group, caught a formation of 15 FW 190s north of Berlin with their bombs still slung on them. Col Woods led his flight down to catch the 190s on the deck. Although he was flipped on his back when only one of his drop tanks released, Woods still held the first 190 in his sights and blasted it into the ground. He then pulled up into a second and downed it with a deflection shot. He destroyed three others right down on the deck from astern, most of them still carrying their bombs. His bag of five in one day would be the last by a pilot of the 8th Air Force.

Final ace in a day in the European Theater of Operations was Lt Bruce W. Carr of the 354th Fighter Group.



Lt Gordon H. McDaniel (right) receives his "Ace" after a memorable fight over Hungary. (Photo - Stan Wilson)

On 2 April 1945, flying a P-51D Mustang, he destroyed three Focke Wulf FW 190s and two Messerschmitt 109s in the late afternoon.

In the spring of 1945 the Luftwaffe was making only sporadic appearances in the Balkan area and targets for the bombers of the 15th Air Force were growing fewer. These conditions, however, did not keep Lt Gordon H. McDaniel of the 325th Fighter Group from destroying five FW 190s on 14 April 1945. Strangely, this air battle over Gyor, Hungary came about as the result of an oxygen failure on Lt Joseph G. Pace's plane. He had to let down to lower altitude just after the bombers had started for home, and he sighted four FW 190s and a few seconds later saw a flight of five more. He called the rest of the squadron as he and his wingman attacked the formation of four.

The balance of the squadron broke into two sections with Lt McDaniel leading the second section. "When I first saw the enemy planes, I pulled alongside of their formation to make positive identification. When I saw their markings I pulled in behind one and gave him a short burst. The plane exploded", said McDaniel.

The enemy formation headed for a cloud layer with McDaniel in pursuit and he brought his P-51 into close range and fired and watched as a second 190 went down in flames. He lined up on a third, fired, and the pilot bailed out. For five minutes he chased a fourth and finally succeeded in shooting its right wing off. The fifth kill came on the deck, spinning in after being hit squarely by the guns of his Mustang. This final victory made McDaniel the last ace in day in the Mediterranean Theater of Operations.

PACIFIC THEATER - 1945

In the Pacific, U. S. Forces had come back to the Philippines. Many of the old fighter units were already in action from their new bases and newly-equipped squadrons were entering the fray all the time. Such an outfit was the 82nd Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron flying the Mustang which was new to the theater. On 11 January, Major William A. Shomo, the squadron commander, and his wingman, Lt Paul M. Lipscomb, were on their way

to photograph and strafe Aparri and Laoag airdromes in Northern Luzon when they encountered a Betty twin-engine bomber with one Tojo and 11 Tony fighters flying 2,500 feet above and headed in the opposite direction.

Since this was the first appearance of the Mustang in the area, it was quite likely that the Japanese pilots did not recognize them as American aircraft. Regardless, Shomo and Lipscomb climbed to the attack and Shomo scored hits on one of the fighters and it exploded. Skidding over to the other side of the formation he lined up another from astern and destroyed it, too. Now the Japanese were aware of the attack and they tried to maneuver into position. In the course of their maneuvering Shomo closed on a third victim and shot it down in flames. He then dove beneath the bomber, came up under it, and sent it down to destruction. As he pulled up from this pass he encountered another of the fighters head-on and destroyed it. Next he dove on another element of the Japanese fighters and sent the leader flaming down, and as he continued his dive he lined up on another and sent it into the ground from an altitude of only 300 feet --his seventh victory. By this time Lipscomb had taken care of three of the fighters himself and the other three had headed for home.

The tiny island of Ie Shima was the base of the 318th Fighter Group, and its pilots were flying brand new P-47Ns which were especially designed for long-range escort. On 25 May Lts Richard H. Anderson and Donald E. Kennedy were flying two of these new Thunderbolts over Southern Amami O Shima, a Japanese base between Okinawa and Kyushu, when they saw 30 planes bearing down upon them. The two pilots took them to be friendly Marine Corps fighters, and it was not until they had passed nearly beneath the formation that it dawned on them that these were Japanese Zekes.

Anderson immediately salvoed the bomb that he had been carrying and climbed up to the rear of the Japanese formation. He was still slightly below when the last Zeke in the formation winged over and came down to meet him. Both pilots held their course, blazing away at each other until at the last second, the Zeke pulled up over Anderson with his engine and fuselage swathed in flames.

By this time Kennedy, too, had downed a Zeke and they rejoined and closed on two more Zekes trailing the Japanese formation. Anderson sent the one on the right flaming into the water. He then closed on the leader, at which Kennedy had been firing, and put the finishing touches on him. Almost simultaneously Kennedy sent another Zeke flaming and arcing into the sea.

Reforming once more, the two Americans eased in on more of the Zekes. Anderson fired and one of the Japanese fighters dropped his nose and fell straight into the water. Kennedy opened up and matched Anderson's feat. Anderson now closed in fast on another and sent it flaming and cartwheeling into the sea. In only four minutes Anderson had become an ace in a day and Kennedy had come up with a very creditable three victories himself.

Three days later Capt. John E. Vogt matched the feat of his fellow Thunderbolt pilot of the 318th Fighter Group when he downed five Japanese planes in one fight. He was leading a flight of four over Kanoya at 16,000 feet in the afternoon when he sighted 28 Zekes boring in from the northwest at an altitude of 20,000 feet.

Vogt and his flight dropped tanks and climbed to meet them. Leveling off at 28,000 feet the enemy was sighted to the east, and he now split his formation into seven flights of four planes each. Vogt headed for the lead flight, and as he and his wingman, Lt Philip La Rochelle, closed the gap the Japanese split-essed for the deck and the Jugs went down after them. A Zeke was no diving match for the heavy P-47 and Vogt rapidly overtook them. Blazing away he watched his strikes go all over the first victim, and then it burst

into flames and exploded. Vogt slipped in behind a second Zeke and set it afire, too.

Pulling out of the dive Vogt and La Rochelle headed back upstairs where they fell in on the rear of three more Zekes. La Rochelle sent one of them down and Vogt sent a long burst swinging from left to right over the other two and both of them burst into flame.

Pulling up once more Vogt and La Rochelle encountered four more Zekes but had to break this combat off after the two outside planes pulled out and around in opposite directions to come in on their tails. They then met three more Zekes, two of which came at them head-on. Bursts were exchanged by both sides but there was no time to see what damage had been done. The third Zeke had raced away from the fight, but now it came barreling back at the P-47s. Both Thunderbolts headed into it and Vogt held his fire until he was only 1500 feet away. Then he hit the firing tit and held it until nearly 200 feet. The Zeke exploded, and Vogt had to pull the stick back hard and snap over to avoid the debris. This made the fifth Zeke to fall to his guns that day.

As the war in the Pacific drew to a close, the fighters flying from the new bases in the islands ranged further and further afield. The B-29s which they had expected to escort were fire bombing Japan at night and they began to fly sweeps over the islands of Nippon and on to Korea by day. It was on a sweep to Korea that the last ace in a day was born. The same pilot, Lt Oscar F. Perdomo of the 507th Fighter Group, also achieved the honor of becoming the last fighter ace of World War II. On that memorable day of 13 August 1945, the 507th encountered a large number of enemy aircraft and Perdomo downed four Oscar fighters and a Willow trainer to enter the select circle. Only two days later Japan would surrender and World War II would be ended.

U.S.A.A.F. ACES IN A DAY World War II

<u>Name and Rank</u>	<u>AF</u>	<u>Group</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>EVA</u>
Lt Richard E. Duffey	9	57th	4-18-43	5
Lt McArthur Powers	9	57th	4-18-43	5
Lt Arthur B. Cleaveland	9	57th	4-18-43	5
Lt Murray J. Shubin	13	347th	6-16-43	6
Lt Elmer L. Wheadon	13	18th	7-1-43	5
Lt Col William L. Leverette	12	14th	10-9-43	7
Lt Harry T. Hanna	12	14th	10-9-43	5
Lt Col Neel E. Kearby	5	348th	10-11-43	6
Maj Herschel H. Green	15	325th	1-30-44	6
Lt Carl J. Luksic	8	352nd	5-8-44	5
Capt Robert J. Rankin	8	56th	5-12-44	5
Lt Herbert B. Hatch	15	1st	6-10-44	5
Capt Frederick J. Christensen	8	56th	7-7-44	6
Maj George E. Preddy	8	352nd	8-6-44	6
Capt Laurence E. Blumer	9	367th	8-25-44	5
Lt William R. Beyer	8	361st	9-27-44	5
Capt Charles E. Yeager	8	357th	10-22-44	5
Capt Donald S. Bryan	8	352nd	11-2-44	5
Lt Claude J. Crenshaw	8	359th	11-21-44	5
Capt William T. Whisner	8	352nd	11-21-44	5
Capt J. S. Daniel	8	339th	11-26-44	5
Capt Leonard K. Carson	8	357th	11-27-44	5
Capt. William J. Hovde	8	355th	12-5-44	5.5
Lt Col David C. Shilling	8	56th	12-23-44	5
Lt Col Edward O. McComas	14	23rd	12-23-44	5
Maj William A. Shomo	5	82 TRS	1-11-45	7
Capt Felix D. Williamson	8	56th	1-14-45	5
Lt Col Sidney Woods	8	4th	3-22-45	5
Lt Bruce W. Carr	9	354th	4-2-45	5
Lt Gordon H. McDaniel	15	325th	4-14-45	5
Lt Richard H. Anderson	7	318th	5-25-45	5
Capt John E. Vogt	7	318th	5-28-45	5
Lt Oscar F. Perdomo	20	507th	8-13-45	5

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AUTHOR'S NOTE: In following the criteria set forth in USAF Historical Study No. 73 "A Preliminary List of U. S. Air Force Aces 1917-1953", I have not included in this article any pilots who were rated as aces in a day for aircraft destroyed on the ground. While the author is cognizant of the hazards of their feats, they have not been included in fairness to the pilots of other commands who were not credited with such destruction even though they operated in the same theater of operations under identical conditions and circumstances.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Bill Hess, of 9641 Kingston Road, Shreveport, Louisiana, is one of the leading authorities on fighter aces of the Second World War. Already well known to JOURNAL readers for his work on "The German Jets" and "Checkertails" he is presently working on a series of books covering all of the world's fighter aces of WW II. The first will be published shortly.

SPECIALISTS

Since the announcement of eighteen Aircraft Specialists in the Spring issue, Vol 11, No 1, six more Members have been named to specialize on specific aircraft as a center for information on the type. They are:
 Curtiss Racing Planes (1920-25) -- Thomas G. Foxworth, 192-20B 67th Ave (3C), Flushing, N.Y. 11365.
 Grumman F2F & F3F -- Benton E. Reams, 3505 Madonna Lane, Bowie, Maryland 20715.
 McDonnell F-101 -- Paul D. Stevens, Box 183, Little York, Illinois 61453.
 North American P-51/F-6 -- Ken A. McLean, 47-1740 Decarie Blvd, St. Laurent, Montreal, Quebec, Canada.
 Northrop P-61 -- Gary R. Pape, 10131 Buford Avenue, Inglewood, California 90304.
 Vought VE-7 -- Larry W. Griffin, 17438 Virginia Avenue, Bellflower, California 90706.