

THE STARDUSTERS

A History of the 406th Fighter Group

by W.L. Matthews, Jr.

This organizational history of the 406th Fighter Group has been put together by reproducing selected excerpts from the narrative descriptions of the organization's activities contained in the unit history reports submitted by Group Headquarters to higher headquarters for the period February 1, 1944, through April 30, 1945. The first of these periodic reports included a "Synopsis of Past History," so in a sense these reports cover the activities of the Group from the date of its activation on March 1, 1943, until the end of the air war in the European Theatre on May 8, 1945.

A good deal of important, revealing information is recorded statistically in the unit history reports, but it is the narrative which tells how Group and Squadron personnel lived, moved, trained, and above all, fought the enemy that forms the basis for this article. The parts of this narrative are arranged in the time sequence in which the described events occurred. They are given here exactly as written, except where correction was necessary to supply meaning or clarification. Although the copy of the official Group Headquarters unit history bears my signature, I must confess I remember surprisingly little about the actual preparation of it after 38 years.

March 1, 1943 to January 31, 1944

The Group was activated March 1, 1943, by General Order 28, Headquarters Key Field, Meridian, Miss., as the 406th Bomb Group (Dive) under the command of Lt. Col. Bryan B. Harper. It was composed of the 628th, 629th, 630th, and 631st Squadrons and was a part of the III Air Support Command, Birmingham, Ala., and the

3rd Air Force, Tampa, Florida. Original cadre personnel were assigned March 4, 1943, and the 41 officers and 73 men were immediately attached to the parent organization, the 48th Bomb Group (Dive), for quarters, rations and duty. In April and May 1943, all personnel attended AAF School of Applied Tactics, Orlando, Florida, for the Air Support course. In June and July the organization was brought to 50 percent of full strength and received its first planes—one each A-35, A-24 and BC-1 per squadron. This period was one of organization, training of key personnel and acquiring equipment.

In August 1943, the Group was reorganized and redesignated the 406th Fighter Bomber Group composed of the 512th, 513th, and 514th Squadrons and transferred to command of the III Fighter Command, Drew Field, Tampa, Florida. In September 1943, a change of station was ordered and the Group moved to Congaree Army Air Base, Columbia, South Carolina. By October 1, 1943, the organization was to full strength in ground personnel and half strength in flying personnel, had received P-39 type aircraft, and begun a combat readiness training program prescribed by the III Fighter Command. A tactical inspection at the end of October brought about the transfer of all flying personnel. This reorganization, the Group's second, was based on the inadequate fighter time of the pilots. Though experienced in dive bombers they averaged less than 100 hours in fighters. Lt. Col. Anthony V. Grossetta, the present commanding officer, assumed command from Lt. Col. Harper on November 6, 1943, and on December 1, 1943, the present flying personnel together with P-47 type planes were assigned. The

Group's "modern" history may be said to date from this time.

The period December 1, 1943, to March 1, 1944, was one of successive stages of training: principally gunnery, divebombing, formation and mission. This period too was marked by intense preparation for overseas movement. A final POM inspection was passed in mid-February and movement orders received March 1, 1944. On March 13, 1944, the organization proceeded to the Port of Embarkation and sailed for the ETO March 23, 1944, arriving April 4, 1944, where it was assigned to the XIX Tactical Air Command of the IX Air Force.

February 1, 1944, to April 31, 1944

On February 7 came the long-awaited day and arrival of the POM inspection team. They "looked us over" for three days and pronounced us ready. The reaction was immediate—everyone began arranging for leave and furlough. Fortunately enough time existed between POM inspection and movement order date for leave to be granted. All personnel with few exceptions had a few days at their respective homes between February 7 and February 25. It would be impossible to overestimate the effect of this fact on the morale of the organization. Movement orders were received March 1, 1944, one year to the day from activation, and for 12 days all worked like mad packing personal and organizational equipment and arranging personal affairs. One week before movement the Group was restricted to the base. The highlight of this week was a going-away party given at expense and instigation of the base organization.

On Monday morning, March 13, 1944, at 0900 to the tune of Auld Lang Syne, the Group, henceforth known as 1404N (Shipment Number) entrained for the New York Port of Embarkation. An uneventful 36-hour train ride followed. This was the turning point, the culmination of a year's work—and even longer for many as individuals. None could express their feelings, but few suppressed their thoughts. There was a quiet look of anticipation on the faces of all. Arrival was at the previously undisclosed staging area, Camp Shanks, New York. Immediately on arrival the Group was billeted together, established a headquarters and began intensive processing. Security and censorship orientation was given; organizational and personnel equipment checked, records inspected and physical examinations taken. Because of the previous preparation the Group was processed in short order and four days after arrival was released for passes to New York. The next two days were marked by last trips and "flings" in the city. Restriction came on 20 March 1944 and on the 22nd the organization boarded HMT STERLING CASTLE of the Union Castle Line via the Weehawken ferry. In the early morning of March 23, 1944, the CASTLE sailed and we knew we were on our way.

Life aboard ship for the next 14 days was a strange mixture. It was new to most and at first the cramped conditions below deck, English food, and even the sporadic seasickness was tempered by watching the sea, counting the ships as they joined the convoy, and the seriousness of boat drill. This soon gave way to a boredom and disgust with the men's quarters together with the seemingly complete disorganization of ship life. Before long, Red Cross and Special Service Kits organized recreation and a certain degree of order emerged from the confusion. The balance of the trip was enjoyable. The crossing was uneventful and marked both by unusually balmy weather in the gulfstream and a good "blow" or two as the Arctic Circle was approached.

In the afternoon of 3 April 1944, the STERLING CASTLE dropped anchor in Liverpool and 1404N was the first to disembark. Amid coffee and doughnuts, comments about "the small cars" and bomb damage, we boarded the "funny little train" and started across England for Ashford, Kent. The regular green pattern of the countryside, the neatness of the towns and thousands of chimneys caught and held all eyes. Most of the trip was made after dark and only the dim outline of wartime English cities and villages could be picked out through the carriage windows.

The following morning at 0700 hours we arrived at Ashford to be met by Lt. Col. Leslie Bratton, Major William Merrian, Capt. Jephtha L. Larkins, and Capt. Irvin Rome who had preceded the Group by

air as the advanced party. Our trip was complete. It had been successful but its significance faded away as we began the job of setting ourselves up to operate.

ESTABLISHING THE BASE AND PREPARING FOR OPERATIONS

The first look at our Advanced Landing Ground indicated we had a job ahead of us in establishing living quarters, setting up sections, getting equipment and planes and preparing to operate. Thanks to the work of the advance party the minimum initial equipment was on hand so the task could be begun at once. The next two weeks cannot be chronologically or clearly described. They were a succession of "hammer and saw" days when tents were pitched, offices set up in trailers and farmhouses, dispersal areas cleared away, equipment requisitioned, begged, borrowed, and undoubtedly stolen. Little by little, day by day, progress was made—never very much at a time but all in all satisfactory. The headquarters established its own mess, set up its communications systems, established its administrative and operations headquarters, sent its officers off to school and orientation courses, its pilots to fly operational missions with other units, absorbed distribution from higher headquarters, and acquired its various supporting and service organizations. Planes arrived by the middle of the month and with them the organization took on the aspect of an operating unit about ready for the big test. By month's end the basic organization was established, most preliminary theatre training done and we needed only planes and parts in quantity to go operational.

Looking back at the short interval of a month it is difficult to assess this period in the organization's history. The problems of establishing a headquarters section under field conditions were great. Some time was undoubtedly lost because organizational equipment brought on the transport was slow in coming from the Port of Debarkation. The Advanced Landing Ground was probably put in use too soon although this was not a major problem because flying before the 15th of April was at a minimum. The headquarters section was not entirely prepared to absorb the administrative burden of mass distribution from higher headquarters nor to make full use of the various service organizations. Maintaining itself on a large scale was something new for the headquarters that the squadrons probably did not experience. On the credit side very valuable help was received from higher echelons, particularly in orientation and learning the "channels" of the theater. Personnel of the Group were unusually good at adapting themselves to field conditions, both in living and working. It is safe to say that practically all major problems were attributable to a pressing lack of time and a scarcity of equipment.

By month's end the Group was ready and anxious to go operational. There was still reorganization under a new T.O. to be accomplished, more planes to be received, more pilots to come in, camouflage and sanitation work to be done and many improvements and enlargements to be carried out, but the organization was adequately housed, maintaining itself, had its sections functioning properly, and had completed its preoperational training. All personnel reacted accordingly. If a period of training, movement, and establishment had brought all these experiences, what would combat bring? They could hardly hold their anticipation.

May 1, 1944, to May 31, 1944

The month of May 1944 can be described only in relation to a single event: an event long awaited, universally anticipated and vividly experienced—the committing of the organization to combat. May 9, 1944, may have had its significance to others but to the men and officers of this Group it was a day apart. The day when from runways lined with onlookers 48 P-47s took off, formed up and set course for an enemy coast. Although Colonel Grossetta, the commanding officer, described it as a "geography mission" to the packed briefing tent some two hours before takeoff, no mission will ever mean quite as much to the 406th, or its history, as the first one. It is rare when so much preparation, so many months of training and

work, so many trials and problems, have such a tangible and vivid culmination. When the last plane was airborne those who waited turned away and made a pretense at nonchalance, some going to eat, others to sleep, still others back to work. For all there was an undercurrent of satisfaction and a feeling that from this simple yet meaningful beginning would develop a substantial, sustained and highly personalized contribution to the war effort.

Around this focal point of mission one the other events of the period flowed in two well-defined channels. First, and decidedly downstage, were the succeeding missions and operational experiences. In the immediate background and often crowding the main attraction for interest was the organization's continuing training and development for future phases of operations. It might be well in reporting them to follow this apparent division keeping in mind their interdependence as to sequence, purpose and personnel.

OPERATIONAL PHASE

From 9 May until end of period (31 May) the Group flew 21 combat missions ranging from four Fighter Sweeps in the beginning to 13 Escorts with four interspersed dive bombings during the rest of the month. A total of 935 sorties were flown for a composite pilot's operational total of 1937 hours. The missions ranged in penetration from short sweeps in northwest France to escorts and a train-busting foray into western Belgium and western Germany.

Statistical analysis can give only the briefest outline. It cannot convey the problems confronted or the experience gained. The fighter sweeps in the beginning were marked by trial and error perfection of battle formation, by flak "orientation" and by a complete lack of enemy aircraft opposition. These missions too were characterized by developing in the pilots the long-accepted habits of a good fighter pilot, i.e., to have a "swivel neck," correct R/T procedure and discipline, and even further clarification on how to call "bogies" and "bandits." The little things that have been learned by many before us were experienced by us. On May 21 the Group participated in the first big sweep against enemy rolling stock attacking its assigned area in Belgium and western Germany with good success.

The majority of missions during the period were escorts with both

medium bombers of the Ninth Air Force and heavies of the Eighth. Close support, cover, and area support were flown and the problems of each met in turn and solved successfully. Each mission differed from the other and each in turn was studied, planned and flown with the object in mind of furnishing the best possible protection to the bombers at a time when their successful attacking of strategic and semi-tactical targets was essential to the isolation of the enemy and his battlefield. Proven tactics were used but in some instances innovation crept in, for instance, high cover squadrons on escort missions at times dispatched one flight still higher to gain the maximum protection from enemy aircraft operating in pairs up sun.

The monotony of the escort work was broken with four dive-bomb missions. These missions came at a time when much discussion was going on in this theater about the use of the P-47 as a dive bomber. It was with some satisfaction that this Group, originally activated as a dive-bomb group, attacked the marshaling yards at Cambrai on 19 May 1944. The pinpoints were overpasses and choke points at the northern and southern ends of the yard, plus repair shops in the center. The dive was begun at 7,000 feet with release varying between 3500 and 2000. The repair shop was hit squarely by three 500-pound GPs and fair-to-good results obtained on the overpasses and tracks. The Group critique following this initial try was an exciting if somewhat incoherent affair. Each man fumbled his way from the rear of the darkened briefing tent to point out on the target photograph as it was flashed on the screen just where his particular bomb hit. Each pilot's personal participation in the mounting attack on the enemy was brought home to him that day. Subsequently the marshaling yard at Creil, a railroad bridge at St. Germain, and the Cambrais/Epinoy air defense guns were subjected to similar attack. All dive-bomb attacks were made from echelon and as one expressive pilot put it, "That method is here to stay." The success of these first and experimental dive-bomb missions did much to convert the fighter-trained pilots of the organization to the ground-attack type of work, an important fact for a fighter bomber group slated for close support work in a tactical air force.

No operational report is complete without an account of some personal experiences that stand out from the daily run of events and add immeasurable color to an organization's traditions. Unfortunately this Group's opportunities to produce such tales during the period were at a minimum because no enemy air opposition was encountered. We entered the picture after the Luftwaffe had been swept from the sky over western Europe, and it remained for an air-sea rescue incident to save our face on this score. On the 21st of May, Captain Henry W. Shurles, operations officer of the 513th Squadron, was hit by flak while attacking a train deep in Belgium. With much care, and the constant encouragement of the members of his flight, he managed to glide some five miles beyond Bolohne before hitting the silk. His flight gave air-sea rescue a fix and 30 minutes after hitting the water he was picked up. Within an hour he was safely ashore in England and arrived back at the base only a short time after the last plane was down from the mission which must be a record of some sort. Captain Shurles' account to the commanding officer in his Mississippi drawl of "Ah thought ah'd drown, suh!" was a fine testimonial to the air-sea rescue service.

Not all of the operational phase during the period was devoted entirely to flying of the missions. As much development and effort was devoted to planning and premission procedure as to the actual flights, and probably more in point of time. Much of the success in going operational and in handling successfully such a variety of missions in the first stages of being operational is attributable to the careful planning undertaken by the Command, Operations, and Intelligence Sections. The burden of this work fell on Group Headquarters. Briefly, the following procedure was used: The Squadron Intelligence Officer maintained an Intelligence Duty Officer who received the Teletype Operations Order. Immediately on its receipt he notified Operations and posted on a planning map the assigned courses, distances, and times while the Intelligence Officer assembled target and other necessary information. On completion of these tasks, the commanding officer with his Squadron Operations Officer



Loading fragmentation bombs on a P-47D at Mourmelon Le Grand, France, 1944.
(Jack Robinson)



Engine repair on a P-47 at Ashford, Kent, England, June or July 1944.
(Jack Robinson)

and Squadron Intelligence Officer studied the assignment, made his decisions and prepared for briefing. An hour and a half before take-off all pilots were assembled in a Group briefing tent and thoroughly instructed on intelligence, weather and tactics.

With going operational there was a natural adjustment of duties and schedules among the men, particularly maintenance. Despite the ever-present limitation of parts, an excellent maintenance record was maintained. The planes had hardly returned from their first mission before names and insignia of pilot and crew chief began to appear on the cowings. The mess virtually went on a 24-hour basis, weather furnished information at any time of the day or night, and the attached units of flying control, bomb disposal, and service group geared themselves to keeping the planes in the air. In the truest sense, the entire organization went operational together.

TRAINING PHASE

If any single factor deserves special attention it is the degree to which the organization was able to maintain a full operational schedule and complete its training program. During the first half of the period there were still some pilot ground school courses of importance to complete, principally recognition, escape and evasion, geography, flak, and air-sea rescue. Considerable time too was devoted to the practice of dive-bomb formations during the release periods for training and maintenance. Midway in the month the first pilot replacements arrived and 20 hours of transition time was given all but four. A bit of night flying and some before-dawn takeoffs rounded out the flying training for the period.

The main training effort was directed toward preparing the organization for rapid movement. This work fell principally on the various sections in the headquarters who were already carrying the operational load. The personnel of the organization was divided between air and ground echelon and each division prepared to operate in two sections on movement. It was conceived that any moves affecting a mobile organization such as this would be made by the air echelon moving out first, proceeding to the destination and establishing an advanced base. In the interim the flight echelon would be operated

by the ground echelon until such time as the air echelon was established. This procedure was outlined roughly by the headquarters section and on May 23 a practice training move was made to Brinzett Advanced Landing Ground some 15 miles away.

The air echelon consisting mainly of the operations and intelligence sections plus the necessary communications equipment, all operating out of trailers, moved out promptly at 0600. A mission was received, briefed, and flown from the regular base by the ground echelon. On the return the planes landed at Brinzett shortly after noon where they were received by the air echelon. By 1500 the ground echelon had moved to Brinzett and the organization was ready to operate at normal strength. The following day the procedure was reversed and another regular operational mission was handled without mishap. This practice move demonstrated the necessity for traveling as light as possible. The air echelon administrative procedure was not entirely adequate and at the time the organization did not have sufficient organic transportation to move itself, but these problems were soon resolved and the organization became reasonably able to accomplish a "leap-frog" move on short notice without serious interruption to its operations.

June 1, 1944, to April 30, 1945 (An Overview)

A recording of the 406th Fighter Group's experience from 1 June 1944 to the present (May 1, 1945) must follow necessarily the rather clear historic phases in which this experience occurred. These phases shaded into one another but now sufficient time has passed to gain a proper perspective and they can be described as: (1) The invasion and subsequent interdiction missions in the Normandy area lasting until the end of July. (2) Participation in the St. Lo breakout, Brest peninsula occupation and Third Army's initial lap in the race across France which was well underway by 1 September. (3) Protection of the Loire River flank and support of the drive to the Moselle. (4) The initial isolation of the Saar in November. (5) Blunting of the German winter offensive with five famous days at Bastogne in December, and January devoted to attacking a retreating enemy. (6) The shift to the north to cooperate in preparing the Ruhr for encirclement which culminated in late March 1945, in a crossing of the Rhine and the drive to the North German plain.

The six periods enumerated are evidence of the distinguishing features in this organization's combat history as a whole as well as in terms of time, place and task. It is a history marked by the closest of cooperation with ground forces and their campaigns. It is full of the new uses to which tactical air power was put in this theater. Its very foundation was built around the problems of mobility, living in the field, and operating all the flyable hours of long summer and short winter days of northwestern Europe with a minimum of equipment, and a maximum of aggressive enthusiasm. The thread of continuity in the story, which ties together the periods, the distinguishing features, even the days and months, can be found in the Group's united effort to fulfill its mission of finding the enemy and bringing the full weight of its attack to bear on him. The planes were flown, the tents were pitched and houses built, the records kept and meals cooked, all for this purpose. A written history cannot relate the problems in their entirety, nor adequately describe the expenditure of energy and emotion inherent in maintaining such a sustained effort; it can only attempt to capture some of the events—both humorous and trying—that were the highlights, and record them in the sequence of their happening.

June 1, 1944, to July 25, 1944

June 1944 was a dramatic and busy time for all the 406th Fighter Group with no exception. The first days of the month combined the final missions of the preinvasion air campaign with a time of extreme expectancy and planning. The briefing tent was closed to the Group planning personnel who had access to certain secret information concerning the Normandy invasion. Aircraft were painted with distinctive markings, the weather officer was haunted, and the unenlightened made wager after wager as to the exact day, hour and minute. On June 3, 1944, the Group flew a particularly effective

armed reconnaissance mission at low level northwest of Paris from which Major William H. Merriam, the Group operations officer, did not return, but preparations went on apace. On the night of June 5, to a packed and tense briefing tent, Major Jephtha L. Larkin, the Group Intelligence Officer, Lt. Col. Leslie R. Bratton, the Deputy Commander, and Col. Anthony V. Grossetta, the Commanding Officer, revealed the plan for the invasion as it applied to the Group. That briefing has never been equaled for pent-up feeling. It was a short night and before dawn, still highly keyed up, 16 aircraft led by the Group Commander took off to cover Utah Beach. Four missions a day led by each squadron for the next four or five days were flown in execution of operation Neptune. The days settled down to a series of continuous operations for all the Group headquarters and squadron sections that the few hours of darkness offered little respite from. After the first week the Group went to work cutting rails, attacking marshaling yards, hunting down motor transport, and attacking all movement behind the beachhead and Normandy area. The first experiments were made with breaking the Group up into squadron elements to cover the assigned areas. An occasional static target was attacked but close cooperation missions were largely unknown and awaited the committing of ground units in force.

On the night of June 13, 1944, a new and unknown factor entered the organization's experience which was to affect every action until the move to the continent—the strange "Buzz Bombs" made their first appearance. Situated in southern Kent on a direct line between the Pas de Calais coast and London, the field and all its surroundings were constantly "covered" by the things. The first night of their coming was like a chapter from Buck Rogers for the antiaircraft belt which opened up in full fury to lace the overcast sky. As if this new thing was not enough it was accompanied by a rumor, dignified by telephone transmission from higher headquarters, of parachute landings taking place along the nearby coast. The unrehearsed Group ground defense plan was immediately invoked and the balance of the night devoted to a hysterical and very funny floundering around in the dark by all personnel clothed in a weird combination of night dress and web equipment together with steel helmet, the only useful item around as long as the flak continued to fall down as well as up. That night passed and the Group adjusted itself to this additional burden with characteristic individualism. Some dug foxholes and slept in them, all kept their helmets handy and their ears cocked for the ominous silence of a cut-out motor. The urge to run and look up, or to see the red tracers and searchlights, and to hug the ground at night were never overcome. The Buzz Bomb menace never did materially hinder operations except for lost sleep but it added an additional strain to already taut nerves that never will be forgotten.

Between June 15 and 20, Major Jephtha L. Larkin, the Group Intelligence Officer, was lost to the organization because of sickness which led to his evacuation to the Zone of the Interior. Within a two-week period, the Group had lost the two officers in charge of its Tactical Headquarters and an inevitable period of adjustment resulted. These last days of June and early July witnessed a continuation of the round-the-clock missions schedule marked by the Tactical Air Power show preceding the assault of Cherbourg, the first of many such pre-jump off affairs the Group was to participate in. The plan as explained at the briefing was to bring the Group through the attack area four ships abreast on the deck at such interval as would allow the entire formation to complete its attack in ten minutes. The plan was executed efficiently with all bombs in the target area despite extremely intense and accurate antiaircraft fire especially from the forts rimming the southern boundary of the city. Five planes, including three pilots, were lost on that mission, the Group's heaviest single loss to that time, and it can be thought of as the harbinger of the Group's distinctive willingness to aggressively press home the attack, and the price that would have to be paid.

By the middle of July, the Group had its 513th Squadron under the command of Major Gordon W. Fowler in the midst of installing and training with the five-inch, high-velocity rocket. This installation was the first of its kind to be used on American fighter aircraft in



Col. Anthony V. Grossetta, 406th Fighter Group commander at Mourmelon Le Grand, France, Nov. 1944. (Jack Robinson)

this theater and was to prove itself beyond doubt less than a month later against German armor on the roads south of St. Lo. The Group headquarters trailers and briefing tent served as one of the practice targets and undoubtedly added incentive to the estimating of range, etc. This training was done rapidly and without a letup in operational flying so that by the 17th it could be used in an attack against the Nevers marshaling yard which was loaded with locomotives. That mission was a decided success and marked the acquiring by the Group of another full-fledged weapon with which to destroy the enemy. Though its use was cloaked in secrecy at the time and for two months thereafter, this weapon was responsible for much of the Group's early success and contributed immeasurably to our total claims, particularly in locomotives, tanks and armored vehicles destroyed.

As the buildup of units on the continent continued it became increasingly evident that we would be crossing the channel any day. So the interest, problems, and burden of work shifted to the personnel and supply sections of the Group headquarters as they readied the organization for its first great test in mobility. Vehicles were "waterized," equipment was crated, pup tents were unpacked and used while other large tents were packed, supplies were divided between air and ground echelon and on July 19 the journey began. The air echelon proceeded by train and motor convoy through southern England to a staging area near Plymouth. There they spent a week on constant alert for movement; a week that will never be surpassed for sheer inactivity and boredom when the complete day's routine consisted of sleeping until breakfast, sleeping from breakfast until lunch and from lunch until supper after which one could go to sleep again. During this time the interdiction of Normandy reached its height and the Group with only half of its personnel available in the ground echelon, and less than half its equipment, flew three and four missions a day. Only the undivided effort and attention of the available personnel made this period of intense activity and unusual destruction possible, and their contribution was justly rewarded by the receiving of the Group's first written commendations, a result of missions on July 23rd. The end of one phase and the beginning of another was taking place but to the participants at the time it was merely a time when the days were too long and the nights too short.

After an overnight trip across the channel first elements of the air echelon came alongside Omaha beach on July 24, to be followed the next day by the vehicles on Liberty ships. With backs bent under full pack and hands full of gas masks, protective clothing and extra rations, the party was unloaded from landing craft and marched up the long and unmercifully steep hill from the beach and assembly area in an apple orchard that was to be the first bivouac area on the continent. On the same day the squadrons back in England were participating in the first of a two-day saturation attack on enemy lines below St. Lo. In addition, the rocket-firing aircraft of the 513th Squadron had moved to the continent to operate separately from an



Crew chiefs rode the wing of their aircraft to help the pilot see where he was taxiing, at A-79 near Rheims, France. (Jack Robinson)

advanced landing strip. On the morning of the 19th, the air echelon started out in search of its assigned air strip in the vicinity of Bayeux. The Group flew its part of Operation Cobra and the Thunderbolts with the secret weapon hunted the hedgerows for enemy tanks.

Thus the first phase described in the beginning came to a close with the 406th Fighter Group in a state of separation and suspended mobility that was to characterize its existence for the next two months through the passing of two other phases and from which it was never to entirely recover. The gypsy spirit as well as the gypsy habits became part of our makeup during that week and was to sustain us during our later wanderings up and down the beachhead, into western France and across the Seine.

July 26, 1944, to August 31, 1944

The Group was first assigned to Strip A-13 near Bayeux on the continent and first elements of the air echelon arrived there by noon of the 25th. At first, all was confusion but before another day had passed the tents were pitched, areas assigned, and some semblance of order achieved. In a couple of days, the 513th moved down from A-2, Col. Grossetta flew in from the United Kingdom, communications were established with the 70th Fighter Wing and the place was ready to receive airplanes. A-13 was a beautiful field, consisting of two long Pierce-plank runways cut out of the tall trees and interlocking hedgerows within sight of the barrage balloons protecting the British beach nearby. With the arrival of the flight echelon, mostly by July 30 and 31, the green foliage and landscape became yellow from the great fogs of dust that hung over the dispersal areas and blew across the field to settle inches thick on everything and everybody.

Operations from A-13 quickly conformed to the pattern of the new phase in ground operations. Under control of the 70th Wing and IX TAC, the first two weeks of August the Group ran column cover for the armored units fanning out below St. Lo toward Carentan and Avranches, close cooperation missions of eight ship flights against motor transport, armored concentrations, and gun positions in the vicinity of the Vire pocket, and armed recce nearly to the Seine. The pilots learned to use large-scale maps in pinpointing targets, had many humorous and highly satisfactory experiences with the Ground Controllers operating with the armored and infantry units. The operations and intelligence sections quickly adjusted to scheduling and briefing many separate squadron flights each day as well as maintaining sufficient map coverage to show the fast-changing ground situation. The Ground Liaison Officers came into their own as the entire Group's attention centered on the bomb line and front line of troops which they kept up to date.

Life in the Group headquarters section focused on the problems of living in the field. For seemingly endless days we existed on ten-in-one rations but eventually we began to eat with one of the squad-

rons. A tent city was established in an orchard least plagued with the dust, an ingenious shower rigged by the colonel, foxholes dug, etc. One other thing for which the life at A-13 was noted: the trips to the front. "Reconnaissance Parties" of the 406th Fighter Group explored every nook and cranny of the Normandy line from Caen to the sea and in many instances led the advancing columns into Granville, Carentan, Avranches, and even St. James. The result was a noticeable increase in organization as transportation and equipment as well as many tall tales about narrow escapes with the enemy.

After the weeks in the eastern part of the beachhead the Group was reassigned for operational control to its original higher headquarters, the 303rd Fighter Wing. This involved various and changing plans for moving the Group to the other end of Normandy. The air echelon once more packed its belongings and took off for A-20 at Lessay to establish itself—arriving there to find the place a complete wreck from enemy demolition. After setting up in a minimum of time and becoming reasonably comfortable, the line was narrowed and movement orders for the flight and ground echelons to Lessay canceled. For two days indecision continued until finally late one night the two separated echelons were ordered to move simultaneously to A-14 near Carentan the following day and to run a mission from the new field on the following day. That next day was without doubt the busiest and most backbreaking the ground personnel of the Group ever experienced. With the help of some 20 quartermaster trucks the move was made by shuttling from A-13 to A-14 and from A-20 to A-14 as well as shifting surplus trucks between all three places as soon as they could unload. No attempt was made to set up, unpack, or get ready for the next day. By working late into the night there was a sufficient organization the next day to fly a mission but it was four or five days before all the sections were functioning and everyone knew where he was to sleep and eat.

The setting at A-14 was a picture book one. Combat Ops established itself under a high canopy of trees behind a chateau close by the field with the three squadron operations nearby immediately across a dry moat which enclosed the entire surroundings. All officers in the Group were billeted in the chateau or in the courtyard in front and the mess set up in adjoining servants' quarters. There was good weather, relief from the dust, and adequate space in the chateau for a rather elaborate officers' club and bar which made the days at A-14 as pleasant as any thus far experienced.

Missions in these days were characteristic of air power in its most flexible and versatile form. As the breakout phase continued into the exploitation stage the Group would fly a fighter sweep into Brest, dive-bomb the encircled garrison at St. Malo, support Third Army armor driving for Le Mans, and armed recce to the Seine on successive missions. Those were the days of the Falaise pocket and disorderly retreat when fat targets were plentiful and claims good. Too, the German Air Force made one of its sporadic attempts to put up a fight at this point. From the few fields remaining to them in the Dreux and Paris area they attempted to protect the retreat across the Seine and interfere with our bridgehead being established at Nantes-Gassicourt. The result was frequent sightings and some encounters, the most important of which was on 19 August when all three squadrons were involved in a real dogfight after the 513th and 512th Squadrons were jumped when making ground attacks and were extremely vulnerable. We claimed six destroyed and three damaged that day for the loss of Major Henry Shurlds, operations officer of the 513th and Capt. Jesse Underwood of the 512th.

Lt. J.C. Brown of the 512th and Lt. Robert O'Neil of the 513th were also shot down but later returned to the organization. As the rapidly moving front continued on beyond the Seine toward the Meuse the missions in that direction became long and wearing and it was evident that the 406th's participation in the war was entering a new phase. The Group headquarters began to revolve around rumors and plans for moving which occasioned some real and definite planning to incorporate some of the things we had learned in previous moves. Responsibilities for leading and dispatching trucks by the sections of the headquarters and squadrons, their consolidation into serials for movements, routines for the advanced and rear echelons

and many other details were worked out in advance in the hope that sufficient notice of a move and future location would be given to allow its execution as planned. By September 1 the next spot, A-36 near Le Mans, had been selected and the Group was on the move again.

September 1, 1944, to September 22, 1944

The next step in the 406th Fighter Group's operational history was a short one; it actually lasted just over 21 days, but it was so filled with activity, both in the air and on the ground, that it stands out distinctly. The air echelon moved into A-36 the first few days in September before construction was completed, to be followed by the flight and ground echelons nearly a week later. From the beginning, missions came fast and furious under the control of the 100th Fighter Wing, the third wing with whom we had operated on the continent. The work varied nearly half and half between supporting the 79th Infantry Division, 2nd French Armored combination that was sweeping through eastern France and aiding in the all-out assault to reduce the fortress of Brest. As the Seventh Army began to drive north out of southern France forcing the enemy to make for the Belfort Gap, the Group's aircraft, along with those of other units of the XIX, figured heavily in the campaign by bombing dug-in positions immediately in front of the advancing infantry and on one mission even venturing into the harbor to successfully attack enemy shipping with bombs and rockets.

At this same time, to the south of Loire River, XIX Tactical Air Command had been given the task of protecting with air power the exposed and extended flank of the Third Army. On September 7, at 1400 hours, Tac Recce pilots of the command spotted and attacked a large column of enemy vehicles and horse-drawn carts, leaving over 300 vehicles destroyed and the road strewn with personnel and wreckage. Returning to base and reloading as fast as possible, the Group returned to the scene of the previous attack and again worked it over adding another 150 to 200 claims to the total. For this decisive mission the Group was awarded a Presidential Unit Citation and immediately following the terrible destruction which hit the enemy from the air he surrendered the balance of his troops south of the Loire to the 9th U.S. Army with the Commanding General of XIX Tactical Air Command participating in the ceremony.

The Group finally solved most of the problems of living under field conditions at A-36. Though completely in tents the areas were so arranged as to be convenient, the messes were quickly set up, field showers constructed and office space cut of the barest operational necessity. The part of France surrounding Le Mans had suffered little from the destruction of the war because of its swift progress. Being a rich rural area, personnel of the Group headquarters ventured out among the natives more than ever before. Recently liberated Paris was the object of frequent visits, and hardly a night passed that didn't see a dinner party at nearby Lufleche. It was a beautiful September and for this short period at least it was good to live in the open. As September drew to a close the Third Army reached the Moselle and the Group began to work on the first interdiction campaign of Alsace-Lorraine, running many missions on the marshaling yards at Saarbrücken, Zabern, Saarbrunn and many other key rail centers. These targets soon became heavily defended and an added problem arose in taking off from the unusually short runway with the external load necessary to reach the target and effectively attack it. The difficulty was eased by frequent use of advanced strips for rearming and reloading. As soon as Brest was taken and airfields were constructed, the inevitable signs of moving began to appear on the horizon.

September 23, 1944, to December 16, 1944

With the arrival of the Group at its first base east of the Seine, Strip A-80 at Mourmelon Le Grand near the Marne between Chalon and Rheims, its life and operations took on an entirely new aspect. In the first place there was an element of permanence, the rush of armor and planes had come to a halt, and the long beautiful days of the summer and early fall which had permitted almost constant



Major John L. Locke, commander of the 512th Fighter Squadron at Strip A-80, Mourmelon Le Grand, France, Oct. 1944. (Jack Robinson)

flying began to play out. It could not be foreseen at the beginning of October that we would settle down at A-80 for our longest stay in a single place since leaving the United States but we were aware that we were no longer a gypsy outfit bent on ending the war by Christmas and all our activity was colored by this.

Mourmelon was an old military establishment dating from before the Franco-Prussian War and used in turn by all the armies which had swept back and forth over that part of western France. The camp had been the site for an artillery unit in the German Army and its adjoining grass landing ground on which the present Hessian Matting Strip was laid, had served the Luftwaffe. No one had occupied the major part of the camp between liberation and our arrival so the buildings were in a disreputable state of repair but they were buildings and their possibilities were immediately apparent to eyes which had been conditioned by long experience with cramped, dark, damp tents. In the portion of the camp nearest the air strip the Group established itself in considerable comfort and with the best administrative setup so far accomplished.

The end of September and most of the month of October were devoted to the isolation and interdiction of the area between the Saar and the Moselle. The marshaling yards at Saarburg, Zabern, Merzig, to name only a few, felt the full weight of the Group's attack on many days. A program of constantly policing the rails for movement and limiting that movement by strategic cutting of the principal rail lines was undertaken by the command and successfully executed. Cooperation was furnished to limited objective attacks by units of the Third U.S. Army, the outstanding mission of which was a fragmentation bomb attack on a heavily defended patch of woods north of Chateau Salins after which ground forces moved in and captured over 200 shocked and bewildered Germans. Toward the end of October operations were severely hampered by continuous bad weather but the Group still managed to fly more than its share of the all necessary missions.

With the coming of November the final phase of isolation in the area under attack came to a climax with a series of attacks against

small rail bridges, particularly at Vendenheim above Strasbourg, and when XX Corps started its all-out attack to take the impregnable fort of Metz on November 8, 1944, it was supported by the 406th. Hour after hour, day after day, close cooperation was furnished to units of this and the XII Corps as the drive continued to the Saar River. Much effective use was made during this period of the Napalm bomb, a comparatively new weapon, and the high-velocity rocket on the innumerable small heavily defended villages that lay in the path of the armor and infantry. This period was also marked by the first rotation of personnel back to the Zone of the Interior and the acquisition of the first replacements in quantity. In this sense at least, the Group began to take on the aspects of a veteran organization with new faces appearing at every turn. The drive to the Saar did not take too long and by the middle of November it was virtually complete. The weather turned against us again and we flew only intermittently. The resulting period of inactivity was difficult to endure and was only broken by a hilarious party most every night. Between Thanksgiving and the first week in December the Group Commander and the three Squadron Commanders returned to the States on 30 days' leave and this fact, coupled with a proposed move to Metz which went as far as sending an advanced party to requisition billets, symbolized the end of another period in the Group's history. It was a period that stands out largely because of its normalcy. With the exception of the limitations of weather and mud, the Group settled down and functioned as a permanent organization. Personnel put down roots, many long put-off administrative and training tasks were undertaken and accomplished. Officers and men went away on detached service and to schools of various kinds. Many of the characteristics of a typical garrison war crept in and little did we realize how suddenly we would be shaken back into the normalcy of the abnormal in the next phase.

Stationed with the 406th Fighter Group at Mourmelon Le Grand in the French area of the installation was the 101st Airborne Division which had arrived there piecemeal for rest and refitting following their drop and subsequent removal from the line in Holland and Belgium. A rather close relationship born of necessity had grown up between the two organizations. Their staff personnel made frequent trips to consult the Group's situation map. A certain amount of friendly barter went on between the two organizations and all the C-47s used to fly in equipment to them landed at our strip. On the night of the 17th of December following a day of intense activity when our planes had been operationally loaned to the XI Tactical Air Command to participate in what at the time looked like a local but very intense revival of the Luftwaffe, an officer of the 101st came to our Combat Ops and requested permission to use the phone for recalling some of his personnel that were away playing football. By morning the news was in of the now-famous German counteroffensive in the Ardennes forest; the 101st was on its way to be surrounded at Bastogne; and the impenetrable fog which was to haunt us for five long days had settled over the field. During these five days the reports continued to come in indicating the seriousness of the situation, ground personnel worked day and night readying all the available aircraft and the pilots and staff pestered the weatherman incessantly and worriedly hung around the ready rooms. The guard protection of the base was doubled, all were alerted to ferret out enemy saboteurs reported being dropped in the area and every conceivable precaution was taken to prevent a surprise attack. With the arrival of first light and clearing weather on the morning of 23 December 1944, there began the most intensive period of activity and destruction in the history of the organization.

For five successive days from sunup to sunset there never was a time when planes of the 406th Fighter Group were not over the beleaguered 101st garrison in Bastogne making attack after attack within a 10-mile range of the town. This Group alone flew over 519 sorties during those hectic days and despite almost insurmountable difficulties caused by the fluid front lines, the use of allied equipment by the enemy, and the most intense light flak ever encountered, as well as a rejuvenated enemy air force, ran up a record of destruction against the enemy that was staggering and materially



20mm shell hole in a .50-cal. ammo tray of a P-47, Mourmelon Le Grand, France. (Jack Robinson)



The P-47s of the 406th Fighter Group at Metz, France, Feb. 1945. The P-47 in the foreground, L3-L, was the aircraft of Major John L. Locke, commander of the 512th Fighter Squadron. Now a retired Major General, he received an Air Medal and 23 OLCs in WWII. (Jack Robinson)



Col. Anthony V. Grossetta, USAF Ret., at first annual reunion, Arlington, Texas, May 1981. (Jack Robinson)

aided in blunting their drive. We lost 10 pilots in those days and of the 60-odd aircraft assigned over 40 suffered battle damage but the attack was unrelenting until stopped by weather. These five days were almost a period in and of themselves. Their effect and the task of beating the enemy back into the Siegfried line from which he had come lasted well into January. Even then the organization searched out enemy armor and motor transport and gradually the tide was



5" HVAR rockets—first used by 406th Fighter Group, at A-79 near Rheims, France. (Jack Robinson)

turned. The weather was bitter that month and the constant freezing and thawing made of A-80 a quagmire. By the middle of January, one good final thaw made A-80 impossible to operate from, and before Y-34 at Metz—to which we were slated to move—could be made ready, we were forced to move the planes to Y-79 near Rheims some eight miles to the north and operate them from there. It was in such a divided state, living at Mourmelon, and working at Theims, that this brief but distinctive phase in the organization's history was brought to a close.

January 31, 1945, to April 30, 1945

On 31 January 1945, the Group began an ill-fated and long-postponed move to Metz. The air echelon proceeded to Y-34 in its usual fashion where it found a weird assortment of half-destroyed hangars, renovated wooden barracks and downtown buildings, in which to establish the working and living quarters of the organization. Despite a shortage of transportation and abominable road conditions caused by the snow and ice, most of the organizational equipment and personnel together with the planes were successfully moved to Metz by the 3rd of February. After running one mission from the new field on the 4th in the afternoon came the low blow that was to rock the outfit on its heels and from which it was not to recover for two or three weeks. Just after lunch, Col. Leslie R. Bratton, the acting group commander, called his staff together and in hushed tones informed them that we had been transferred to the XXIX Tactical Air Command far to the north and would proceed to Y-29 in Asch, Belgium, so as to be operational from that field on the 7th of February. All agreed that it could not be done but that we would have to try. An advanced party of sorts left immediately for the new site and with the help of a fleet of trucks and C-47 transports the move was begun the next day.

Y-29 represented a new low for this organization. There was absolutely nothing there but barren mud and a second growth of stunted pine. The convoy arrived in the night in the rain without food, water, or instructions. There was no opportunity to organize or provide for arrival of personnel, equipment, or planes. It was the night of the 6th before communications were in and enough tents up to provide shelter. It was two days later before there was an adequate supply of bombs, ammunition, and gasoline available. We were saved on making the initial operational date by the weather which on the other hand was a tremendous handicap in establishing a

Group under field conditions. By back-breaking work and much improvising the Group was ready to accept its planes on the 8th and a day later began operations under its new command.

With the new surroundings and new command went a new job of supporting the 9th U.S. Army in its crossing of the Roer River and subsequent drive to the Seine. Due to the flooding of the river when the Germans blew its upstream dams the expected period of intensive ground cooperation did not come off and we settled down into two weeks of working on the principal rail centers of the area as well as entering the initial phases of isolating the Ruhr valley with beyond the Rhine armed recce missions. These two additional weeks were a godsend from a domestic standpoint as they were used to transport lumber from Aachen, prefabricated houses from Antwerp, generators from Metz, and mess tables from England. At the end of this two weeks we had literally built a small city up out of the mud and were as well set up as ever before if not better. On the 22nd of February the long-awaited operation Clarion was laid which involved simultaneous use of all available aircraft in the theater on a tactical strike at strategic rail installations designed to so paralyze the enemy's communications system that they could not effectively defend against the assault on their last remaining Siegfried and Rhine defenses.

The Group's mission on this grand show was to escort groups of medium bombers to rail bridges on the northeast fringes of the Ruhr near Gutersloh where, five minutes before reaching the target, they would precede the bombers with divebombing attacks. After the subsequent attack by the mediums, in addition to escorting them on withdrawal, we were to strafe targets of opportunity. Clarion was one of those operations that tried the souls of the Group staff by not going off exactly as planned but turning out all right in the end. The field order was late coming in but fortunately an afternoon time over the target was assigned which allowed a good briefing and sufficient time to get a maximum number of aircraft in shape. Rendezvous time was changed more than once, but the crowning blow was the fact that after the first squadron and half of the second was airborne the mediums could not make their assigned time at rendezvous. Because two groups stationed on the same field had to be airborne by squadrons at practically the same time this hour delay in bomber rendezvous required that the planes which had prematurely taken off had to orbit the field for an hour and a half.

The resulting confusion caused the first two squadrons to miss rendezvous and escort a different box of bombers into the assigned target area. After successfully divebombing the target and starting on the withdrawal these two squadrons were jumped by enemy aircraft, the only such encounter of importance made by the 9th Air Force on that day. In the resulting fight we claimed 11 destroyed and one damaged to turn a mission based on bad timing into one of singular success. The day following this successful all-out strike, the 23rd of February, the 9th U.S. Army jumped off on its drive from the Roer to the Rhine and the 406th had one of its most profitable days flying both armed reconnaissance and ground cooperation missions. This outstanding effort brought a written commendation from Brigadier General Nugent, commanding general of the XXIX Tactical Air Command.

The next month was one of good and constant activity reminiscent of the summer of 1944 with early takeoffs and landings around 2100 hours. The sweep to the Rhine, and the air power that supported it, was clean-cut and quick. As it was completed the Group shifted without a halt into the job of aiding in isolation of the Ruhr. Mission after mission was run against the small marshaling yards that formed the edge of the built-up area of that great industrial section. Every known method was used to find and destroy profitable targets. Tactical reconnaissance radio broadcasts were monitored for late traffic sightings in the assigned recce area, two ships known as snoops preceded each flight to the target area to find targets, and hot targets were constantly passed from one squadron to the other both on the radio and by telephone immediately after interrogation. This intensive campaign continued unabated right up until the last of March 1945.

On the 22nd of March the Group Commander, the Operations Officer, the Intelligence Officer, and the Ground Liaison Officer went to Munchen Gladbach for Command's briefing on the last great air show of the war—Operation Flashpoint. The Group's assignment in the crossing of the Rhine was one of the most difficult jobs ever given it. It called for flak suppression by bombing and strafing and launching of rockets in an assigned area adjacent to the allied airborne landing area. The 23rd of March was spent in planning and preparing for the mission and early on the morning of the 24th, the day of the operation, the briefing was held. This briefing approached the one for invasion of the continent in suppressed excitement. It was a well-planned and executed briefing. First, the Group Liaison Officer gave the ground picture as to where and how the crossing would be made, then the Intelligence Officer outlined the air plan and briefed in detail on the location and capabilities of all known gun positions in the assigned flak suppression area, following which the Group Commander assigned specific gun positions to each squadron and instructed on the tactics to be used in attacking individual light gun positions as they revealed themselves. The mission was effectively executed but with the loss of Lt. Col. Gordon W. Fowler, 513th squadron commander, who did not return from the first mission. The flak patrol was maintained for over three hours during the entire drop operation including fly-in and fly-out. In the area north of the Lippe Canal, east of Wesel along the uncompleted autobahn, particularly intense and accurate fire against the troop transports was silenced.

With the crossing of the Rhine the Group turned to affording armored column cover, usually for the Second Armored Division which drove north of the Ruhr toward Munster and out into the open country of the north German plain. As this drive developed momentum and went into the breakthrough stage, it became necessary to carry external gasoline and fly longer and longer missions to afford the necessary air cover. This period too was marked by a general shortage of bombs and ammunition. We carried anything and seldom did two planes of the same flight carry the same loading, but the air cover was maintained which was the all-important thing. With the encirclement of the Ruhr and establishment of the pocket there we turned again to some close-in ground work, but for the first two weeks in April the main job was to sustain the thrust into and across the north of Germany. It was soon apparent to all that we would not be able to continue to fly the exceedingly long missions which being based in Belgium required, so plans were laid for what many considered the last move.

The site this time was the former major Luftwaffe facility at Handorf, northeast of Munster, now known as Y-94. In the middle of April we reluctantly left Y-29 and came into Germany amid much preparation for security and non-fraternization. We cleared the small village of Handorf near the air strip and established ourselves in the relative comfort of buildings and homes available there. From Handorf the Group's missions were more in the nature of a rout than anything else but for a few days at least the tempo was fast. At the time the 2nd Armored Division and the 5th Armored Division were nearing the Elbe River north and south of Magdeburg, the enemy was being overrun and was exceptionally vulnerable, particularly his aircraft on the ground. In a very few days we pushed up our number of claims for aircraft destroyed on the ground at a rather phenomenal rate. Before we knew it the area in which we could operate had dwindled to nothing. On the 19th of April a Russian air boundary appeared between Berlin and the Elbe beyond which we could not operate, limiting our activity virtually to the east bank of the Elbe. On the 20th we flew a full day's schedule of ground cooperation missions but they were not too profitable and the following day we were put on ground alert for call by the ground forces. A junction of American and Russian forces was imminent and with its accomplishment a couple of days later we knew that our job was done.

Thus ended the sixth and last phase in the Group's operational history. Of course, the ending was not as clean-cut as all that for we remained on ground alert and the last few days of the month of April we flew patrol over the Elbe but to all intents and purposes it

was over and we knew it. As we tried to get used to the forced inactivity and "sweated out" an unconditional surrender and Victory day, it was too soon to analyze the sum total of our contribution. At best the end came as a sort of anticlimax and practically all the Group personnel were content to relax, marvel at the fact that we were through and let the course of events as it affected our future take care of themselves.

Deactivation

No unit history for the period following the end of the air war was available in the preparation of this summary, but those who did not return promptly to the States will remember movement of the Group from site Y-94 at Handorf to an airfield in the American Forces enclave near the North Sea port of Bremerhaven.

The security mission of this period initially involved protection and processing of military and civilian refugees who fled across the north German plain and the ultimate establishing of an air power presence in the enclave. Beyond this the time was characterized by much speculation about redeployment to the Pacific Theater and by a continuous coming and going of personnel to recreation, rest and sightseeing points including Denmark, the south of France, London, Paris, Brussels and many other places.

The experiences in these days tended to be personal rather than organizational and the long summer passed slowly. In the early fall the management decisions of higher headquarters finally brought orders authorizing the transfer of personnel to Stuttgart for processing and preparation for return to the States through the Port of Embarkation at Antwerp.

406th FIGHTER GROUP FACTS & STATISTICS

Motto:	Soutenir, Attaquer, Detruire (French) Seek, Attack, Destroy
Code Name	STARDUST
Aircraft Markings	512th FS Yellow —Code L3 513th FS Red —Code 4P 514th FS Blue —Code 07
Sorties	13,612
Flying Time	34,616:39
Aborts	227
Aircraft lost to enemy action	133
Enemy aircraft destroyed (air)	98/13/54
Enemy aircraft destroyed (ground)	194/140
Missions	n/a
MIA/KIA	85
50-cal. ammunition fired	4,935,805 rounds (av 362 rds/sortie)
Bombs dropped: 500 lb. GP	10,902
1000 lb. GP	465
100 lb. SAP	20
Frag	4,865
Incendiary	245
Rockets: 5" HYAR	3,870
Napalm	68,520 gal.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

W.L. Matthews, Jr., entered the Army Air Forces in early 1942 and graduated from Officer Candidate School in Miami, Fla., and the Combat Intelligence School in Harrisburg, Pa. He was in the original cadre of officers at the activation of the 406th Fighter Group and served with the Group as S-2 until its deactivation. He was discharged as a Major, returned to Kentucky and joined the faculty of the University of Kentucky Law School, where he has been for 35 years. Mr. Matthews was Dean of the School for 16 years and since 1974 has been Professor of University Alumni.

