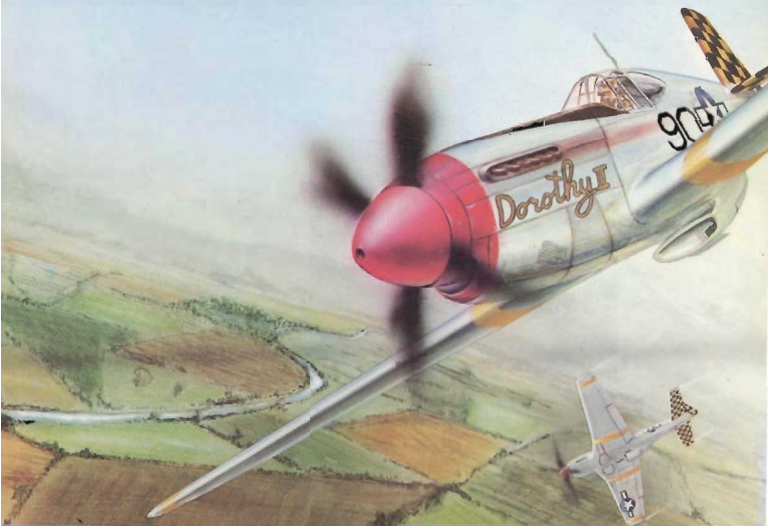


AIRCAM/AIRWAR 12

# USAAF FIGHTER UNITS MTO 1942-45

CHRISTOPHER SHORES



AIRCAM / AIRWAR

EDITOR: MARTIN WINDROW

# USAAF FIGHTER UNITS MTO 1942-45

BY CHRISTOPHER SHORES

COLOUR PLATES BY  
TOM BRITAIN  
AND GERRY EMBLETON

OSPREY PUBLISHING LONDON

Published in 1978 by  
Osprey Publishing Ltd  
Member company of the George Philip Group  
12-14 Long Acre, London WC2E 9LP  
© Copyright 1978 Osprey Publishing Ltd

This book is copyrighted under the Berne Convention. All rights reserved. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study, research, criticism or review, as permitted under the Copyright Act, 1956, no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, electrical, chemical, mechanical, optical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner. Enquiries should be addressed to the Publishers.

ISBN 0 85045 244 9

Filmset by BAS Printers Limited, Over Wallop, Hampshire  
Printed in Hong Kong

## NORTH AFRICA

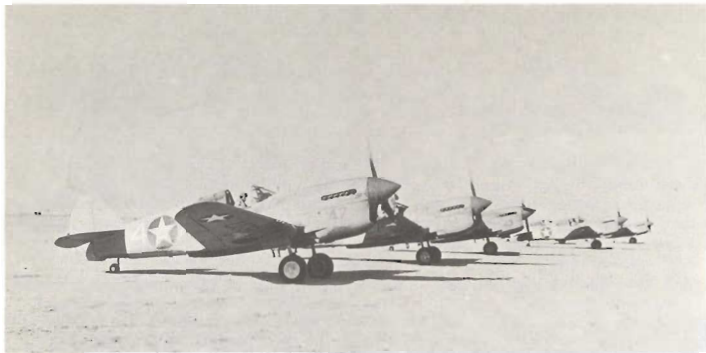
Even with the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941, the USAAF honoured its agreement with Britain to defeat the European Axis before turning its attention to the Pacific theatre and the first combat units began moving to England during the early summer of 1942. At this period the main British involvement in the war—other than a growing strategic bombing campaign of their own against Germany—was in the Middle East. The Americans were not over-enamoured of the prospect of war in this theatre, considering it peripheral, and liable to draw off reserves from the primary aim which they saw as an early invasion of Western Europe. Despite their basic distaste, however, they were prevailed upon to agree to the despatch of aerial reinforcements when the British 8th Army was decisively defeated by Erwin Rommel's *Afrika Korps* at the Battle of Gazala during early June 1942.

On 1 July 1942, the 57th Fighter Group, led by Lt Col Frank H. Mears Jr, went aboard the aircraft carrier USS *Ranger* for transshipment to the war zone. On arrival off the West African coast the group's three squadrons (the 64th, 65th and 66th) made their way along the tortuous air reinforcement route to Egypt, where they had arrived and fully assembled by the beginning of August. The 57th was equipped with the P-40F Warhawk powered by a Rolls-Royce Packard-Merlin engine, in which it differed from the otherwise basically similar Kittyhawk which several of WDAF's squadrons were flying at the time.

Compared with the majority of hastily-trained British Commonwealth pilots then in the desert, the Americans, with their thorough peacetime training, enjoyed many advantages of piloting skill, although they had not had the benefit of the combat-backed operational training afforded the RAF. Initially

therefore, the squadrons were fed into the WDAF Kittyhawk wings (Nos. 233 and 239) singly to gain operational experience. Early missions involved escort to medium bomber formations and fighter-bomber and strafing attacks against Axis ground targets.

The first US fighter sorties in North Africa were undertaken on 8 August 1942, and the initial combat successes were not long in coming. On 14 August, Lt William O'Neill, one of six pilots flying alongside the RAF's No. 260 Squadron on a bomber-escort mission, became involved in a fight with a number of Messerschmitt Bf109Fs over the coast, and claimed two shot down before his own aircraft was also brought down into the sea. The first major ground battle in which the group played a part was at Alem el Halfa, where Rommel launched his final—and unsuccessful—offensive at the start of September 1942. Throughout that month, the three squadrons continued to fly with the British units, initially only the 64th and 66th undertaking these operations. On 17 September the whole group was reunited at Landing Ground 174, but still no autonomous missions were undertaken, the 64th and 65th Squadrons flying with No. 233 Wing, while the 66th flew with No. 239 Wing. The opening clash with Luftwaffe aircraft in strength occurred on 13 October, when the 65th FS fought more than 20 Bf109Fs, claiming two for one loss; during the afternoon two more were claimed. Later that same month the great Alamein offensive was launched by 8th Army, and the US squadrons were deeply involved from the first day. Now aerial opposition was frequently encountered, including formations of Junkers Ju87D *Stukas*, and Italian Fiat CR. 42 biplane fighter-bombers. Victories came thick and fast, and by the end of October the group's score had risen to 27, with six probables



1. First in Africa. Brand-new Curtiss P-40F Warhawks of the 65th Squadron, 57th FG in Egypt in late 1942. Each machine has Desert Pink (Sand) upper surfaces with its aircraft number split by the fuselage national insignia. Five of the six aircraft visible have the markings as shown in our colour view, the third aircraft in line being No 43. (IWM)

and 15 damaged; on the 27th Lt Lyman D. Middleditch claimed three Bf109s in a single sortie to become the first USAAF ace in the war against the western Axis. Several P-40s had been shot down during the month, but only two pilots were lost.

November was to bring some harder actions as the WDAF pursued the retreating *Afrika Korps* across Cyrenaica towards Benghazi and Tripoli. The demoralized and worn-out German fighter pilots of *Jagdgeschwader 27* were progressively replaced by those of JG 77, fresh from the Eastern Front. By the end of the month, the Americans were frequently coming up against these aggressive newcomers. Several notable events during the month included the destruction of four Junkers Ju 52/3m transports of III/KGzbV 1 over Gambut airfield on 1 November, although one squadron commander was shot down and became a prisoner. On the 17th, the 66th Squadron left No. 239 Wing, joining the rest of the group at Martuba, and from there three days later it at last began operating as a unit in its own right. By

the end of the month, 17 more victories had been claimed for the loss of six P-40s.

The beginning of November also saw the arrival at the front of the first elements of a second USAAF fighter group, the 79th, which had followed the 57th across the Atlantic on *Ranger's* next trip. Also equipped with P-40Fs, the unit despatched the commanding officer, Lt Col P. McGoldrick, and four other pilots to join the 57th at the front to gain experience. On one of the first missions undertaken by the detachment (on 6 November), McGoldrick's aircraft was hit by ground fire while strafing, and he was obliged to carry out a hurried force-landing. Unfortunately his aircraft struck a mine which detonated, resulting in the death of the pilot. He was replaced by Lt Col Earl E. Bates. By the start of December however, the first of the new group's squadrons, the 85th, had been attached to the 57th, and on the 8th this unit's first claim was recorded, for a Bf109 damaged. December proved a more costly month for the 57th, as the group—temporarily at four squadron strength due to the attachment of the 85th Squadron—carried out bomber escort missions and ground attacks. By mid-month, eight P-40s had been lost in five missions, half falling to no less a pilot than *Maj* Joachim Müncheberg, *Kommodore* of the opposing JG 77.

Elsewhere in North Africa the American presence had been greatly increased following the Anglo-American *Torch* landings in the French colonial territories of Morocco and Algeria, which had taken place on 8 November 1942. Landings took place in three locations—Algiers and Oran on the Mediterranean coast of Algeria, and Casablanca on the Atlantic coast of Morocco. The main American commitment was made initially at the latter location, where an all-American task force transported direct from the States, went ashore. Carrier aircraft of the US Navy provided initial air support against relatively determined French opposition. A third P-40F unit, the 33rd Fighter Group had been despatched with this force, this time aboard the carrier *Chenango*, but by the time the unit flew ashore on the 10th and 12th, the fighting was over. Landing conditions were found to be far from ideal, and of 77 aircraft catapulted from the carrier, one was lost in fog and 17 were damaged in landing accidents. Next day 35 more were flown off the British carrier HMS *Archer*.

The main element of what was to become the US 12th Air Force was in fact sent from England rather than from the States, and was provided by denuding the newly-formed 8th Air Force of most of its combat-ready units. Two fighter groups—the 31st and 52nd—had been equipped under reverse Lease-Lend with British Supermarine Spitfire Vs, the pilots having arrived by sea at Gibraltar on 7 November to find their newly-erected aircraft ready for them. All other units were to make the long flight from England to Algeria as soon as airfields on African soil became available. Much of the initial support to the predominantly British landings on the Algerian coast was to come from the Royal Navy carrier aircraft and from RAF fighter squadrons which were also ready on Gibraltar. British Hurricanes and Spitfires flew off first on 8 November, heading for Algiers, for which destination the 31st FG was also intended. The 52nd, with its aircraft lined up behind the former unit, was to make the flight to Oran.

It was at Oran that unexpectedly severe resistance was encountered, and it was there that the 31st (307th, 308th and 309th Squadrons) was

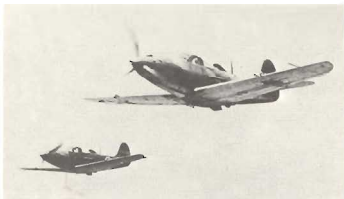


2. P-40Fs of the 65th Squadron, 57th FG, take off from a desert airfield as the machine in the foreground prepares to start up. Note the 'shadowed' fuselage numbers, serial number (41-13969) in yellow on the rudder, and bomb or auxiliary fuel tank shackle under the centre section.

therefore redirected. The first Spitfires arrived during the afternoon to find fighters circling over La Senia airfield. These were assumed to be Hurricanes, but were in fact French Dewoitine D.520s of GC III/3, which attacked and shot down one Spitfire, Lt Joe Byrd being killed. Maj Harrison Thyng led the 309th Squadron down in a counter-attack which resulted in the swift demise of all three French aircraft. Over the next two days the group was engaged in some ground strafing sorties as the French strove to reinforce the Oran area, but even as the 52nd FG (2nd, 4th and 5th Squadrons) arrived, hostilities ceased, and both units were placed in reserve.

It was to be the Lockheed P-38 Lightning in its F and G models which was to carry the weight of initial USAAF fighter activity, the first units equipped with these aircraft flying in direct from England a few days after the initial landings. First to arrive on 13 November was the 1st Fighter Group (27th, 71st and 94th Squadrons) under Col John N. Stone, followed two days later by Col Thayer S. Olds' 14th Fighter Group (48th and 49th Squadrons). This latter group was only two squadrons strong as its third unit had been left behind in Iceland where it was to remain.

The 14th FG was the first to move forward to the Algiers area on the 18th, escorting C-47 transports bringing up reinforcements. The arrival was not an auspicious one, for that night a German air raid



3. Third US-built fighter type to see action in North Africa with the USAAF was the Bell P-39 Airacobra. Two of these aircraft are seen here in flight shortly after arrival in the area, both with RAF-type camouflage. (Howard Levy)

damaged nine of the unit's fighters. Despite this, on the next day sufficient were airworthy to accompany newly-arrived B-17s on the first American escorted daylight heavy bombing raid in the theatre, Tunis being the target.

Escort to the heavy bombers was taken over by the 1st FG from its base at Nouvion, east of Oran, on 20 November, the 14th moving to Youks-les-Bains near the Tunisian frontier, to provide tactical air support to US and French troops moving into the line to the south of the British 1st Army. From there the P-38s flew tactical reconnaissance, strafing missions, patrols over the front and escorts to light bombers. Several combat successes were enjoyed



4. Second fighter unit to reach Africa was the 79th FG, late in 1942. The unit's P-40Fs had Olive Drab shadow shading over Sand and 41-14216 also has a toned-down fuselage star, along with the 'X' prefix to the aircraft number, which identified the group and the 86th FS respectively. (Via R. C. Ward)

against Axis reconnaissance and transport aircraft; indeed by the end of the month some 18 had been claimed shot down without loss, but at the same time the first Bf109Gs had also been encountered with less satisfactory results, three P-38s being lost and three more badly damaged, while only one German fighter could be claimed. A further setback occurred on the evening of 22 November when six P-38s were lost in accidents while attempting to land after dark.

The decision of the French in North Africa to rally to the Allies had caused the Americans, with characteristic generosity, to pass 30 of the 33rd FG's P-40Fs to the *Armée de l'Air* in Morocco to re-equip some of its units before entering action. The unexpectedly heavy losses of P-38s by the 14th now led to the despatch of the 94th Squadron from the 1st FG, to reinforce the units at Youks-les-Bains on the 25th. Meanwhile the RAF, which was responsible for the northern sector of the front, and the defence of the forward bases at Algiers, Bone and Djidjelli, was under some pressure. Based on fields well behind the front, and without an adequate early warning system, it was faced with newly-arrived units of the Luftwaffe and *Regia Aeronautica* on excellent permanent airfields around Tunis and Bizerta, within easy reach of British positions and bases. To aid operations over this area, the Americans detached the Spitfire-equipped 2nd Squadron from the 52nd FG, and sent it forward to Bone to operate as part of the RAF's No. 322 Wing late in November; the first operational sorties were undertaken on the 28th.

XII Fighter Command arrived at the start of December to control the five squadrons of P-38s and one of Spitfires now operational, but the month was to be bleak for the USAAF as it was now meeting some of the cream of the Luftwaffe, not only in Bf109Gs, but from 1 December onwards, in the superlative Focke-Wulf Fw190. Also the Americans found not the legendary sun of Africa, but a cold and wet winter, which turned their airfields to quagmires. Organization showed weaknesses and replacements, spares and other necessities were soon in short supply.

It was the bomber support units, now meeting

increased resistance over Tunis and Bizerta, which first fell seriously foul of the Luftwaffe. On 3 December, six 1st FG P-38s were lost, while two more from the 14th failed to return from the same area later in the day; only five claims for opposing fighters were submitted. A further three Lightnings were lost that day over the front line, for only one claim. By the end of December, the 1st had suffered the loss of 18 aircraft while making only eight claims. The 14th had done rather better with 13 claims, but had itself lost 13 P-38s. On 28 December, Lt Virgil Smith from this unit had shot down a Bf109 to raise his personal score to five, and become the first USAAF ace in Tunisia; two days later he was dead, his aircraft one of three shot down on the 30th.

The Spitfires of the 2nd Squadron were holding their own however, and it was one of this unit's pilots, Capt Arnold E. Vinson, who claimed the USAAF's first Fw190 in North Africa. Reinforcement was on the way, the 58th Sqn of the 33rd FG moving forward on 6 December to Thelepte; the arrival of the P-40s relieved the 1st's 94th Squadron, which flew back to Nouvion to resume bomber escort duties. Within two days, the 33rd's 60th



5. Bell P-39 Airacobra on a North African airfield during the Tunisian campaign. Note the unusual aircraft identification mark and the rear fuselage band. It is tentatively identified as either an aircraft of the 154th Observation Squadron or the 350th FG. (Dan Hartline via Dana Bell)

Squadron had also reached Thelepte, and both units were soon fully operational over the front, enjoying a few early combat successes. Later in the month a third P-38 group, the 82nd (95th, 96th and 97th

6. The 9th Air Force's third and last fighter group to enter action—again with the P-40F Warhawk—was the 32nd. Here aircraft of the 314th Squadron (41-4282 in the foreground) 'beat-up' a Tunisian airfield in mid 1943. (Howard Levy)





7. Fully-operational P-40F on a North African landing ground, 1943. This Sand and Olive aircraft of the 85th Squadron, 79th FG, carries the squadron's 'Flying Skull' insignia on the nose. (W. Ball via Bruce Lander)

Squadrons), made the long flight from England. En route across the Bay of Biscay, four Ju88s were encountered, these shooting down Lt Earl T. Green's fighter. One of the attackers was itself brought down by Maj Robert E. Kirtley, but he then had to turn back and force-land in southern Eire when his fuel ran out. On arrival of the rest of the formation, many of the unit's P-38s were taken to bring the depleted 1st and 14th up to strength. The unit remained at Tataroui, Oran, undertaking anti-submarine patrols late in the month.

While the P-38 units were being despatched, two more fighter groups (81st and 350th) were soon to follow, both equipped with the Bell P-39 Airacobra.

8. A P-40F of the 66th Squadron, 57th FG is serviced by RAAF personnel at Landing Ground 175 during the advance on Southern Tunisia during early 1943.



A third unit, the 68th Observation Group, was partially equipped with these aircraft for tactical reconnaissance. 41 P-39s from the 91st and 92nd Squadrons of the 81st FG left England on 27 December, led by Lt Col Kenneth S. Wade, heading for North Africa. Five including Wade's landed in Portugal, and one at Tangiers, all due to fuel shortage; all were interned. Maj Jack Wertz took over command. A few days later, on 2 January 1943, a squadron from the 68th OG made the flight, one P-39 being shot down off the coast of France by a patrolling Ju88. Next day 15 more P-39s from the 91st and 93rd Squadrons (81st FG) reached Port Lyautey, Morocco, unscathed. A flight on 15 January was less successful however; 11 P-39s of the 350th FG and two from the 81st met strong headwinds, only Lt Col Richard P. Klocko, commander of the 350th, and his wingman reaching Africa. The other 11 all landed in Portugal when the bomber leading them was forced to turn back; again all were interned.

The final fighter reinforcements to reach the area in time to operate over North Africa came once again from the States, and both units sent were equipped with P-40Fs to bring the number of groups flying these aircraft to five. The 324th FG (314th, 315th and 316th Squadrons) flew to Egypt to join what had become the US 9th Air Force, while the 325th FG (317th, 318th and 319th Squadrons) flew off *Ranger* to airfields in Morocco during February 1943.

Over the front meanwhile, the 4th Squadron of the 52nd FG had replaced the 2nd at Bone during January, while the P-40-equipped French GC II/5 had arrived at Thelepte to operate with the 33rd FG. The airfield here was frequently raided by the Luftwaffe during this period, and aerial activity over the front was fierce as the greatly-reinforced Axis forces in Tunisia counter-attacked in an effort to throw the Allies off balance before they could be further increased in strength.

Generally at this stage the Americans still found themselves somewhat outclassed by the German fighter pilots, and losses were quite heavy at times. There were however, some notable successes—though not all were fully realized at the time. On 12

January 1943, 14th FG P-38s engaged Bf109s of II/JG 77, which had moved into Southern Tunisia ahead of Rommel's forces, which were soon to retreat from Tripoli onto Tunisian soil. During this combat *Ltn* Johannes Badum, a German 'ace' with 54 victories was shot down and killed. Next day in the north, Spitfires of the 52nd FG shot down 114 victory ace *Ltn* Wilhelm Crinius of II/JG 53, who became a prisoner. More immediately obvious was the success of P-40s from the 33rd FG and GC II/5, which claimed 10 Ju88s from a force raiding Thelepte on the 15th. Like the P-38 units, the 33rd suffered badly at times, five P-40s being lost on 1 February and six more next day. By that time all the original 71 P-40Fs flown off *Chenango* had been lost to one cause or another, and the unit was withdrawn to Morocco to rest, and to be brought up to strength with aircraft from the untried 325th FG.

Before their withdrawal the P-40s had been joined at Thelepte by the first P-39s to enter action in Africa. These were from the tactical reconnaissance 154th Observation Squadron, but were soon joined by others from the 81st FG. The heavily-armed Airacobras were employed mainly for ground strafing, but rarely operated without fighter escort. The withdrawal of the 33rd led to the despatch to Thelepte early in February of the 52nd FG, soon to be followed by the 31st. A re-arrangement of the 12th Air Force had now brought the tactical units at the front under the control of XII Air Support Command, while XII Fighter Command became responsible for coastal defence. XII Bomber Command controlled the strategic bombers, and now had all three P-38 groups to provide escort. By the end of January however, the 48th Squadron of the 14th FG had suffered such severe and regular losses that its pilots refused to fly any further missions. Aircraft were handed to the 82nd FG, most personnel sent back to the US, and work begun on rebuilding the unit as a full three-squadron group. The 82nd had despatched a few of its aircraft and pilots on operations with the other units before this happened, and had undertaken its first mission in its own right on 17 January. It was to benefit from the earlier experience of the other groups, and employ more appropriate tactics from the start; as a



9. The letter 'Q' identifies this P-39 as a machine of the 93rd Squadron, 81st Fighter Group during mid-1943. (Howard Levy)

result casualties were generally less heavy—although on an early mission on 31 January five of its aircraft were lost in combat.

While the P-38s were to devote much of their energies over the next few months to sweeps over the sea lanes between Sicily and Africa, dive-bombing shipping and intercepting transport aircraft, they also continued to fly escorts to bombing raids which were now growing in both strength and diversity. Several attacks were directed southwards to Tripoli's Castel Benito airfield during January, while on 7 February the 1st FG accompanied bombers on the 12th's first attack on a European target—on the island of Sardinia. A few weeks later on 1 March, Palermo in Sicily was to be the objective.

10. A P-38 Lightning of the 27th Squadron, 1st FG, North Africa, mid-1943. (Dan Hartline via Dana Bell)





11. First USAAF ace in North Africa (and indeed against the Germans and Italians on any front) was Lt Lyman D. Middleditch of the 57th FG. He gained the fifth of his six victories on 27 October 1942 over El Alamein, when he claimed three Bf109s shot down in one combat. (IWM)

By early February, Rommel's forces were entrenched in southern Tunisia, and aware that it would be some weeks before General Montgomery could have the 8th Army ready to assault his Mareth Line positions, he swung a part of his force westwards. His aim was to drive through the American lines into Southern Algeria, turning north to take the Allied base and supply areas from the rear, and thereby disrupt the whole front in northern and central Tunisia. Joined by elements from von Arnim's forces in the north, he launched his attack towards the Kasserine Pass in mid-February, pushing the Americans back, and coming close to breaking through. Bad weather reduced aerial participation, and by 17 February the Axis advance so threatened Thelepte that the airfield had to be evacuated, units of XII ASC withdrawing to bases in Algeria. During this precipitate retreat, many unserviceable aircraft had to be destroyed on the ground to prevent their capture. Speedy Allied reinforcement, lack of unity of command on the Axis side, and the return of better weather, allowed the advance to be halted in the pass itself, and within a few days Rommel's forces had withdrawn from all the ground they had won. It had been a costly episode however, and when the weather had allowed aerial activity, losses of XII ASC aircraft to German fighters had been heavy.

During the crisis, the 81st FG had been joined at the front by the 350th, but at the start of March this unit withdrew again to undertake coastal patrol duties. One of the results of the near-disaster of February 1943 was the re-organization of the Allied air forces in the Mediterranean under a unified command. XII ASC and the WDAF (the latter renamed simply Desert Air Force), came with RAF units in northern Tunisia under the operational control of North West African Tactical Air Force: XII Bomber Command joined with other strategic bombing elements in NWAf Strategic Air Force, while XII Fighter Command became a part of NWAf Coastal Air Force, all forming together NWAf Allied Air Force. The 9th and 12th Air Forces remained in being for administrative rather than operational purposes.

The retreat of Rommel's forces into Tunisia brought the units of DAF over the southern part of the country during March, the P-40s of the 9th Air Force continuing their bomber escort and fighter-bomber activities unabated. It also brought the whole of JG 77 to bolster the Axis fighter units in Tunisia, and this at times proved costly to the Allies. On 13 March, JG 77 enjoyed one of the greatest successes against American fighters ever achieved in the area. In the morning, a formation of Bf109s from I/JG 77 led by Joachim Müncheberg, shot down four 57th FG P-40Fs over Gabes. Further north during the afternoon the same pilots caught a formation of 81st FG P-39s when their Spitfire escort was drawn away by some Fw190s, and shot down seven of the Airacobras. On that day the 79th FG at last joined DAF to operate as a complete unit, while on the 15th, the 33rd FG returned to XII ASC. The latter unit had made good use of its brief rest to learn the lessons of its earlier period of action, and began a series of very successful combats. Müncheberg, probably the most deadly of the USAAF's early foes, gained his 135th and last victory on 23 March when he and his wingman shot down two 52nd FG Spitfires; Müncheberg collided with (or was rammed by) his stricken victim, and crashed to his death.

The 8th Army's offensive at Mareth was by now underway, and on 26 March DAF fighter-bombers undertook the first major and decisive direct



battlefield support operation, waves of aircraft attacking gun positions in the Tebaga Pass, allowing them to be overrun by infantry, so that the armoured forces could pass through almost unscathed. Losses of aircraft to ground fire were heavy, but the results fully justified this. Both the 57th and 79th FGs took part, each reinforced to four squadrons by the attachment of units from the new 324th FG (314th and 316th Squadrons respectively).

April was to be a month of intense activity as the 8th Army drove steadily northwards, joining forces first with the US and French corps in western central Tunisia, and then with 1st Army. By the latter part of the month the Axis were hemmed into the north-eastern corner of Tunisia, facing a strong and unbroken Allied line from coast to coast. During this period the 31st, 33rd and 52nd FGs flew many offensive patrols over the front to bring the remaining Axis air forces to battle, and victories mounted fast. On 3 April, the 52nd claimed 13 Ju87s shot down over El Guettar, while on the 9th this same unit claimed 11 Ju88s. In between, six Spitfires were lost on the 6th, four falling to ground fire which was now becoming increasingly deadly

12. The first Mustangs to see service with the USAAF where a handful of early P-51s modified as F-6A tactical reconnaissance fighters, which were used initially by the 154th Observation Squadron late in the Tunisian campaign in April 1943. One of these aircraft, 'Mah Sweet-Eva Lee' (41-37322) is seen here soon after its arrival in Morocco, still bearing the US national flag on the tail. (Howard Levy)

as the Axis forces were compressed into an ever-smaller area. At this time a number of superior Spitfire IXs were supplied to the Americans, most flying with the 31st FG

With their sea communications almost cut, the Axis now attempted to supply their forces in Tunisia by an airlift from Sicily. As soon as it became apparent what was happening, Allied fighter patrols were instigated under the codename Operation *Flax*. Results were spectacular. On 5 April, the 82nd FG's P-38s were able to claim 15 victories, while the 1st FG claimed 16; 18 of the 31 aircraft claimed were Ju52/3m transports. Further such slaughters followed—most success continuing to accrue to the long-range P-38s. The greatest success of all occurred on 18 April however, when 46 P-40Fs from the 57th FG and attached 314th



13. Just too late to see action in Tunisia, the North American A-36A dive-bomber version of the Mustang entered combat in June 1943. The aircraft seen here soon after arrival in Morocco was issued to the 27th Bombardment Group (Light). It is believed to be serving with the 91st Squadron (later redesignated 524th Squadron, 27th Fighter-Bomber Group). (Howard Levy)

Squadron, escorted by RAF Spitfires, caught a huge formation of transports in the evening. In a welter of butchery known afterwards as the 'Palm Sunday Massacre', the four squadrons were credited with a total of 75 victories—59 of them transport aircraft; the cost was six Warhawks. Three pilots were credited with five victories each and two with four

14. Early national markings with yellow surround with a numerical, rather than letter, identification on the coolant radiator housing, identify this P-38 as an aircraft of the 37th FS. This unit joined the 14th FG during Spring 1943. (Howard Levy)



apiece. Shortly afterwards, the Axis air transport effort was abandoned by day, and later in the month the final concerted Allied 'push' began, soon sweeping all before it. Before that time the 325th FG had entered action—the last new unit to do so over Africa. It undertook a number of bomber escorts and offensive sweeps during mid-April, but later in the month was transferred to the Strategic Air Force—the only single-engine fighter group in that command. While welcoming the new 325th to its ranks, XII Bomber Command also saw the return of the rebuilt 14th FG to action at this time.

For the final operations in Africa, the 350th FG replaced the battered 81st in the ground attack role with XII ASC, while the 154th Observation Squadron received a handful of F-6s—modified North American P-51 Mustangs—for its tactical reconnaissance role.

While XII ASC units provided support for the ground forces during the last hectic days before the Axis surrender on 13 May 1943, the 9th AF fighter-bombers patrolled around the coast, attacking shipping attempting to supply or evacuate the remaining forces in Tunisia. A number of vessels, including at least one destroyer, were sunk during these operations. The strategic fighters also took part in these activities, but increasingly they were involved in taking the war further afield, regularly escorting bombers to targets in Sicily and Sardinia, while P-38s also dive-bombed the fortified island of

Pantelleria. By this time several groups had already claimed victory totals in the region of 100, and 29 pilots had become aces; 15 of them flew P-38s, 9 P-40Fs, and the remainder, Spitfires. The three most successful were Capt Levi R. Chase, a P-40 pilot of the 33rd FG with 10, Lt Sylvan Feld, a 52nd FG Spitfire pilot and Lt Claude R. Kinsey Jr, a P-38 pilot of the 82nd FG who had seven each.

## ON INTO EUROPE

Following the end of Axis resistance in Tunisia, several units were able to enjoy a brief respite from operations. This was certainly not so for the four groups now within NWAf Strategic Air Force however, for these continued their more far-ranging duties unchanged. The USAAF was now fast approaching its peak level of fighter strength in the Mediterranean. With Strategic Air Force were the three P-38 groups (1st, 14th and 82nd) and the single P-40 unit (325th); Tactical Air Force had four P-40 groups (the 12th AF's 33rd, and the 9th AF's 57th, 79th and 324th; the latter had now come together again as an autonomous unit, with two of its squadrons combat-experienced), and one Spitfire group (31st). It was about to be joined by a new unit, the 27th Bombardment Group (Light), with A-36A dive-bombers. The exchange of equipment had occurred at a late date, after the group had already reached Morocco. Also from Morocco came the first all-Negro unit to see action, the 99th Fighter Squadron, equipped with P-40Ls; in the first instance this unit was attached to the 33rd FG at the end of May 1943. The remaining fighter units—the

52nd with Spitfire Vs, and the 81st and 350th with P-39s—were now a part of the Coastal Air Force, responsible for the air defence of the North African ports and escort to the many Allied shipping convoys now arriving.

To keep the Axis guessing as to the destination for the forthcoming invasion of a major base for an attack into Southern Europe, SAF maintained a balance of attack on both Sardinia and Sicily, concentrating particularly on the airfields on both islands. The P-38s and P-40s flew dive-bombing and strafing attacks, as well as escorts to B-25s, B-26s and B-17s over these targets, many fierce battles with defending fighters developing. Occasionally, the US pilots were also lucky enough to catch formations of transport aircraft attempting to supply the Sardinian garrisons by air, and on such occasions great execution ensued. The most outstanding such event occurred on 20 May, when P-40s of the 325th FG, having fought 16 Axis fighters over the island and claimed six and a probable for one loss, encountered seven giant Me323s and shot down all of them.

As a preliminary to the planned Allied invasion of Sicily, the capture of the Italian island of Pantelleria, and smaller islands nearby, was a prerequisite. Consequently, at the start of June, the weight of air attack was turned on this target. This all-American effort included not only regular escorted raids by all bombing types, but also

15. Maison Blanche airfield, Algiers, May 1943. Much of the 12th Air Force appears to be present! Visible are P-39s and C-47s, 31st FG Spitfire Vs (MX-307th Squadron, HL-308th Squadron), an A-20, B-25 and B-17, together with visiting RAF Kittyhawks and an Italian Cant Z.1007bis. (USAF)





16. On an airfield in Tunisia an A-36A of the 27th Bombardment Group (Light) is prepared for action over Sicily during July 1943. It is believed to be an aircraft of the 91st Squadron. The wreckage in the foreground is the remains of an Italian Macchi MC.202 fighter. (USAF)

concentrated dive-bombing by the P-38 groups, the P-40s of the 33rd and 325th FGs, and the new A-36As of the 27th BG(L). Escort was provided by P-40s of the 57th and 79th Groups, and Spitfires of the 31st Group. The Axis air forces made repeated efforts to contest these raids with their fighters from Sicily, and some large air battles occurred over and around the island. American losses were relatively light, but several of the fighter groups achieved impressive successes. On 6 June, the P-40s of the 325th were able to register six victories, while two days later pilots of the 79th FG claimed six more; 31st FG Spitfire pilots claimed five on 9 June, while 1st FG P-38s got six and two probables on this same date, three of the confirmed being credited to Lt Daniel Kennedy. The most successful day was the 10th, when the 31st made 12 claims and the 79th, 15. Next day as invasion forces landed without resistance, the battered and demoralized garrison giving up without a fight, the 31st was back, its Spitfires shooting down eleven for a single loss. 1st FG P-38s broke up an attempt by Axis fighter-bombers to interfere with the landing

17. P-40L Warhawks of the 33rd Fighter Group, newly-landed on Licata airfield, Sicily, on 17 July 1943. Two A-36As are beginning their take-off run in the immediate background. (USAF)

fleet, sending them back towards Sicily, their formation completely broken up. At once the attack was turned on neighbouring Lampedusa, but within 24 hours this island too had surrendered to the crushing power of Allied air superiority. On 16 June, the 33rd FG flew in to take up station on Pantelleria's airfield. The 99th Squadron had not managed to greatly impress the battle-hardened 33rd, and at the start of July was attached instead to the almost equally-raw 324th FG, which after a few patrol missions undertook its first serious sorties on 2 July, escorting medium bombers attacking airfields in Sicily.

As soon as Pantelleria and Lampedusa had fallen, the Allied air forces resumed their attacks on Sardinia and Sicily. The former was left primarily as the preserve of the SAF units, aircraft of Tactical Air Force throwing their weight against airfields, defences and communications targets in southern Sicily. Much of the bulk of escort missions to the medium and light bombers of TAF was handled by the 33rd and 324th FGs, which were over Sicily virtually daily during early July. The 324th pilots were very keen to get to grips with their opponents, but their inexperience showed when on two occasions they were caused to leave their charges unprotected. This had disastrous results for Baltimores of No. 3 South African Air Force Wing on 3 July, these bombers being subjected to an attack by Italian-flown Bf109s which shot down four of them and damaged several more very badly. In a period of seven days of operations the four squadrons of the 324th were to claim a creditable 21 victories—one of them the first for the 99th Squadron—but in so doing they lost a dozen of their own Warhawks in battle, with three more badly damaged.



When the invasion of Sicily—Operation *Husky*—began, most USAAF elements of Tactical Air Force would operate under control of XII ASC, but the 57th and 79th FGs remained with Desert Air Force, and were to support the British part of the invasion on the south-eastern shores of the island. In consequence, these units moved with RAF Kittyhawk squadrons to airfields on Malta early in July. Because of their relatively limited range, XII ASC's Spitfires (31st FG) also moved nearer to Sicily, flying to a new airfield on Malta's neighbouring Gozo island on 30 June. All other USAAF units remained in North Africa, from where the areas of south-western Sicily which US troops were to invade, were within reasonable reach. These units now included a second A-36A group, the 86th BG(L), which arrived at Korba, Tunisia, on 6 July, and began dive-bombing operations over Sicily forthwith.

While the pre-invasion attacks on Sicily were underway, Luftwaffe reconnaissance aircraft were making strenuous efforts to photograph the shipping in North African ports and a number of small 'hit-and-run' attacks on Tunis and Bizerta were also made by German fighter-bombers. In the latter area, 52nd FG Spitfires were pre-eminent in intercepting such attacks, and having already put paid to some nine Axis aircraft around Pantelleria during early June, the group now made a further eight claims against intruders during the first eight days of July. Lt Sylvan Feld of this unit's 4th Squadron had now become the USAAF's top-scoring Spitfire pilot of the war with nine victories. In the Algiers area, the absence of high-performance interceptors had led the Americans to issue a few P-38s to the 350th FG, and with these the unit was able to shoot down four



19. When the new strategic 15th Air Force was formed in November 1943, most bomber escorts were flown by three P-38 groups. This Lightning, of the 94th FS, 1st FG (code UN) is seen here at Catel Benito, Tripoli at the time of the transfer from the 12th AF. (W. Ball via Bruce Lander)

'snooping' Ju88s in the same period.

From Malta the 57th and 79th FG P-40s flew a few bombing sorties over Sicily before the invasion began, but when the landing barges went ashore early on 10 July, they were not immediately called upon, and remained for several days virtually without employment. By this time the Axis air forces on Sicily had been bombed very close to extinction, and only on the first day or two was there any notable level of resistance in the air. During the early phase of *Husky* the three P-38 groups were removed from their strategic duties and subordinated to TAF control. They joined with the two A-36A groups in providing the bulk of the close-support dive-bombing and strafing activities in support of US ground forces. The 31st FG's Spitfires were active from the start, patrolling over the beaches and the front line troops as they moved inshore. On the second day, they were to claim eight victories in a series of fights. Most of the air fighting over the island was to be undertaken by Spitfires—largely from RAF units. However, on 10 July, P-38s from the 82nd FG enjoyed considerable success during a fighter sweep over the island, six of



18. Following the landings of the 3rd Army at Salerno on 9 September 1943, 12th Air Force units were soon moved to bases on the Italian mainland. At Montecorvino late in the month are these 308th Squadron, 31st Fighter Group, Spitfire Vs. (IWM)



20. It was not long after arrival in the MTO that the 325th FG's razorback P-47Ds acquired red cowling bands as a theatre marking. This example, believed to be 42-76996, is from the 317th FS and has not yet had the group's yellow and black diamond-pattern 'checkertail' markings applied. There is a large shooting star emblem under the cockpit and a name on the cowling. The Halifax is from No. 205 Group, RAF. (IWM)

the Lightning pilots claiming ten Axis fighters shot down, three being credited to FO Frank D. Hurlbut. Also during that first day, the 324th FG claimed its last victory for many months, as it was then kept back on the more mundane task of providing escort to supply convoys and transport aircraft heading for Sicily. Before the month was out the unit would be withdrawn for further training, the 99th Squadron being sent back to resume its attachment to the 33rd FG.

The first USAAF unit to make the move to Sicilian soil was the 31st, which flew its Spitfires to Ponte

21. The establishment of an Allied beachhead at Anzio in January 1944 soon brought units to operate from hastily-prepared strips there. Here a P-51 (F-6A) Mustang of the 111th Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron is pushed into a dispersal pen built from sand-filled wine vats and sandbags. 'Betty Jean' was 41-37367. (USAF)



Olivo on 13 July. It was joined next day by the 111th Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron. This unit had taken over the 154th Squadron's duties, together with the latter's P-51s. Other P-51s which had been loaned to the RAF had been reclaimed, but still the squadron had only 20 to hand, maintaining its strength with nine P-39s. The unit made a good start on 15 July by shooting down an aircraft identified as a Henschel Hs129, but on one of the first missions undertaken by P-39s, one was lost near Agrigento, and thereafter these aircraft were held back for liaison duties. The designation of the squadron reflected a general renaming of Observation groups and squadrons as Tactical Reconnaissance units.

On 18 July, the 33rd and 27th Groups also moved to Sicily, followed on the 20th by the 86th, and further east by the 57th and 79th, the latter units now resuming full fighter-bomber duties. With these units close to the front, the P-38s ceased most of their close-support activities, returning to the escort of bombers attacking targets on the Italian mainland. On one mission on 18 July, the 14th FG was fortunate enough to encounter a formation of Ju52/3m transports flying supplies to the south, and a large number was shot down.

While the Sicilian invasion was underway, the 325th FG was continuing to wage what had become practically its own personal war against the Axis in Sardinia, in order to tie down the remaining fighter units there. On 21 July, these attacks approached a climax when 17 victories were claimed for two losses, whilst on the 30th in a battle with some 40 Axis fighters, 21 and four probables were claimed for just one loss, winning for the group a Distinguished Unit Citation. Apparently a freshly arrived Luftwaffe fighter Gruppe was virtually destroyed in this engagement, and the survivors had to be withdrawn to the Reich; its identity has unfortunately not been established. On 5 August three of the 325th's P-40s returning from Sardinia attacked a submarine, and while this was at first considered to have been damaged, it was later credited to the group as sunk.

As the advance across Sicily progressed swiftly, units moved towards the northern coast, and to

provide cover for convoys approaching from the south, Coastal Air Force's 52nd Group moved from Tunisia to Boccadifalco on 30 July, leaving the air defence of North Africa in the hands of the two P-39 groups, some RAF and French fighter units, and the new 414th and 415th Night Fighter Squadrons which had become operational during the month on Bristol Beaufighters.

With the remaining Axis defenders putting up a hard resistance in the north-east corner of the island with the Strait of Messina across which their supplies had to come at their backs, the Americans now advanced along the north coast, undertaking small landing operations behind the German front line on two occasions during August in order to speed the end of resistance in Sicily. Meanwhile, the fighter-bombers of both XII ASC and DAF concentrated much of their effort on the shipping crossing the Strait, dive-bombing and strafing vessels and barges in the face of a hail of concentrated flak. These activities also brought out the Axis fighters in limited strength on occasions. While covering one of the landings at Cap Orlando, 31st FG Spitfires were twice engaged, on 8 and 11 August, claiming as a result a further six victories. On the 12th, about ten fighters attacked 79th FG P-40s as they were bombing shipping in the Messina area, and in the fight which followed, four were shot down for the loss of one Warhawk and a second damaged; the group also celebrated the emergence of its first ace, Lt Paul G. McArthur, who gained his fifth victory during this battle.

Despite Allied air power, the Axis were successful in evacuating most of their men and equipment from Sicily, and resistance there ended on 17 August 1943. The assault on the mainland was at once stepped up, the A-36As particularly making a number of bombing attacks on communications targets in southern Italy. They also provided a number of escorts for medium bomber formations. The P-38s were also very active, escorting B-17s, B-24s and B-26s to attack targets of all types as far north as Rome, while also taking part in some particularly telling missions against Axis airfields.

While the fighting in Sicily had not produced a great deal of air combat, much had been learned and



22. 'Lady Ellen III', one of the Spitfire IXs employed by the 31st Fighter Group's 309th Squadron over Anzio and Cassino during early 1944. The group was equipped at this time with Spitfire Vs, VIIIs and IXs, with which it claimed an impressive 192 victories. (Via Jerry Scutts)

perfected in the close support of advancing troops. As in the late stages of the Tunisian campaign, flak and small arms fire had proved a more deadly enemy to the fighter-bombers than had the rare hostile fighter and the A-36As had suffered particularly; the 27th BG(L) had lost some 17 aircraft on operations, with at least three more seriously damaged. Against the Axis air forces the far-ranging P-38s had enjoyed above-average success, most notably the 82nd FG. Since the end of the North African fighting, this unit had claimed 78 victories for the loss of 11 Lightnings. By the time Sicily fell, it had also produced a new top ace for the 12th Air Force—Lt William J. Sloan, who now had

23. On 19 December 1943 a trio of Spitfires from the 4th Squadron, 52nd Fighter Group, on a mission over Northern Italy from Corsica, ran short of fuel and had to crash-land in hostile territory at Borgotaro. Three other Spitfires reached Corsica with their tanks virtually empty. One of the aircraft lost, a Mark IX carrying the RAF serial NH605, is seen here. (Interinfo)





24. By the spring of 1944, new P-47D-25 Thunderbolts with 'bubble' canopies and natural metal finish were reaching the units of 12th Air Force for fighter-bomber duties. Second tactical group to so re-equip was the 79th, one of which unit's 85th Squadron aircraft is seen here, fitted with three long-range drop tanks. (Via F. F. Smith)

12 victories; the unit's FO Frank D Hurlbut had also done well, equalling Levi Chase's 10.

Opposition over Italy was becoming stiffer however, as the Germans re-equipped and re-organized their fighter forces there. Returning from a bombing raid on railway targets at Catanzara on 19 August, the pilot of one of twenty 27th BG(L) A-36As was forced to bale out into the sea from his flak-damaged aircraft. As eight of his fellow pilots circled overhead, twelve Bf109s attacked, shooting down five. Some of these were not shot down until they had been able to fight back however, and the surviving American pilots saw between eight and ten parachutes, noting that five of the pilots had black leather suits not worn by US personnel. Only one and two probables were claimed by these survivors, but it was assumed that up to four more Messerschmitts had been shot down by those who had not returned; before this time the group had been able to claim only one confirmed victory. While escorting B-26s to Caserta the next day, 1st FG P-38s encountered 40-50 fighters, and while claiming five and five probables, lost five of their own. In a counter-air operation on the 25th against

the landing-ground complex on the Foggia plain, 140 Lightnings from all three groups strafed while B-17s followed with bombs. Over 100 Axis aircraft were claimed destroyed, but many of these were bombers, and the fighters were still very much alive on 30 August when 48 1st FG P-38s escorted B-26s to Aversa. On this occasion, between 60 and 75 fighters attacked, and while eight and three probables were claimed, a record 13 P-38s failed to return. Four days later on 3 September, 72 P-38s of the 82nd FG covered an equal number of B-25s to attack the Canello marshalling yards. Again upwards of 60 hostile fighters were met, some of which were seen to fire rockets into the bomber formation. With equality in numbers, the Lightning pilots reacted vigorously, and were able to claim 23 brought down—one of them by collision—and five probables, but at a cost of 10 P-38s. Although the rate of exchange on this occasion was favourable, it was still a staggering level of attrition. However, these actions seemed to take much of the 'sting' out of the opposition, for further raids during the month, while frequently opposed, did not result in actions or losses of comparable magnitude. On 18 September, the 14th and 82nd FGs were again able to mount a very successful strike on the Foggia airfields, although again the main losses inflicted were on Ju88 bombers.

The war had changed considerably in the meantime, however. Following the fall of Sicily,

renewed German reconnaissances over North African ports to seek evidence of a pending invasion of Italy, continued to fall foul of the 350th FG's handful of P-38s, and during a brief period in late August/early September, five Bf109s and two Ju88s were sent to the depths of the sea. Landings were indeed in the offing, Montgomery's 8th Army going ashore on the 'toe' of Italy on 3 September, supported by DAF units including the 57th and 79th FGs. Early success was followed by a relatively rapid occupation of most of the far south of Italy, XII ASC's A-36A units lending a hand by bombing Axis columns and important communications bottlenecks.

The main punch was to be delivered further north however, with a major landing on the west coast at Salerno, just to the south of Naples, by General Mark Clark's new Anglo-American 5th Army. Even as the landing force convoy from North Africa approached its destination came the news of the armistice with Italy, and as the landing barges poured men onto the beaches on 9 September, Germany remained as the only combatant. Salerno was at maximum range for effective fighter cover from north-west Sicily, and to provide this cover the longer-ranging aircraft—SAF's P-38s, together with the A-36As operating in a fighter role—were to be supplemented by British Royal Navy Seafires flying from a carrier task force. For this purpose, two of the three P-38 groups moved from North Africa to Sicily during early September, and were soon flying many sorties a day providing cover over the beachhead.

The obvious fighter capability of the A-36A led to a change of designation of the units flying these



26. P-47D 42-7972 features the red cowl ring and red-striped tail of the 86th Fighter Group. The insignia on the nose identifies it as an aircraft of the 526th Squadron. (E. McDowell via R. C. Ward)

aircraft on 8 September 1943. The 27th and 86th Bombardment Groups (Light) became Fighter-Bomber Groups, and the squadrons were re-numbered in the range retained for fighters, thus:

#### 27th FBG

- 16th Squadron became 522nd Squadron
- 17th Squadron became 523rd Squadron
- 91st Squadron became 524th Squadron

#### 86th FBG

- 309th Squadron became 525th Squadron
- 310th Squadron became 526th Squadron
- 312th Squadron became 527th Squadron

The Luftwaffe threw in Do217s armed with radio-controlled glider bombs to attack the shipping, but the main aerial riposte was by Fw190 fighter-bombers from Foggia. These were aircraft of SKG 10, and were generally escorted by Bf109s of the remaining *Jagdgeschwadern* in Italy—elements of JG 53 and 77. It was these latter types which proved the main opponents of the USAAF A-36As, P-38s, P-40s and Spitfires, and of the British Spitfires and Seafires that patrolled over Salerno. The A-36As proved particularly successful in their new role, the 27th FBG claiming 10 victories

25. Availability of increasing numbers of P-47Ds allowed the older 'razorback' models—now stripped of camouflage—to be passed to the A-36A groups, which had been forced to supplement their remaining aircraft with worn P-40s in the interim. The 27th was the first to re-equip, becoming formally a Fighter Group. The aircraft here are from the 524th Squadron. (J. Wiltz)





27. Four 12th Air Force night fighter squadrons in the Mediterranean Theatre flew British-built Bristol Beau-fighter VI aircraft for a considerable period of time. Generally no unit markings were carried, and V8694 is a typical example. (Howard Levy)

between the 9th and 17th, including four Fw190s on the 13th. In the same period, the 31st FG's Spitfires were able to claim only four and a probable, while the P-38s of the 1st and 82nd FGs claimed eleven in three engagements. On 11 September, Lt Rodney W. Fisher of the 1st Group claimed three fighters in one sortie, while aircraft of the 82nd shot down five Bf109s from a force of 24. On occasions the drab green A-36As and the very similar P-51s of the 111th TR Squadron, which were directing naval gunfire, were mistaken by other units for Bf109s, Seafires shooting down a P-51 on the 12th, and P-38s similarly bringing down an A-36A next day; fortunately both pilots survived.

As it soon became obvious that the Spitfires and P-40s could cope better than had been expected, the A-36As quickly augmented their patrols with bombing and strafing of German columns, while from 11 September onwards the P-38s also joined in this task, as they had in Sicily. The first USAAF unit to move into the beachhead area was the 33rd FG, which arrived on the 13th, joining RAF Spitfire units already there. On the 16th, the 111th Squadron followed, and on the 18th, the 27th FBG. By that date, the P-38s had returned to their strategic duties, and indeed, as related earlier, were engaged in attacking the Luftwaffe airfields around Foggia. Meanwhile, the two P-40 groups with DAF also moved to Italy on 15 September, though initially to Rocco Bernardo (57th) and Crotona (79th) in the south, from where they continued their

fighter-bomber support for the 8th Army as it fought its way northwards to link up with 5th Army forces at Salerno. Since August these and other units of the 9th Air Force had been transferred to the 12th, when the headquarters and organization of the 9th were posted to England to form a new tactical air force.

At Salerno the 33rd FG P-40s were particularly active against the German *Jabo*, and by the end of September had claimed 13 victories and four probables for just one loss. After initial hard fighting when a German counter-attack nearly drove the 5th Army back into the sea, things had progressed well. Much had been done by fighter-bombers to slow down the German attack, particularly by the 27th FBG, and on 16 September, 8th Army forces from the south made contact with those in the beachhead. The Germans then retreated rapidly, Naples being taken on 1 October, and the line of the Volturno River being reached soon afterwards. This advance included the overrunning of the valuable airfields at Foggia, which brought into early prospect the next major phase of the air war.

Over the battlefield few Luftwaffe aircraft were to be met for some time after the fighting around Salerno, for all had been withdrawn to the Rome area, where they were being retained for the time being mainly to contest bombing raids. During October the 57th and 79th FGs moved with other DAF units to airfields on the Foggia plain, where the latter unit was joined by the 99th Fighter Squadron on yet another attachment.

## AEGEAN DIVERSION

During September the British had launched an ill-fated venture in the Aegean, landing on islands well within the German sphere. Heavy air attacks and counter-invasions resulted in a total failure for this enterprise during October. Repeated appeals to the US forces for air aid had at first fallen on deaf ears, but now with the Salerno landings safely established, attacks by strategic heavy and medium

bombers were diverted to German-occupied airfields in Greece and Albania. Finally, in answer to particularly desperate appeals for long-range fighter support, the air parties of the 1st and 14th FGs were dispatched to Gambut in Libya, on 4 and 6 October respectively. A series of patrols and escorts to British shipping was undertaken, the most successful occurring on the 9th, when seven aircraft of the 14th Group's 37th Squadron encountered a formation of Ju87s of StG 3 and a single Ju88. The latter and 16 of the former were claimed shot down, seven of the *Stukas* being credited to Maj William L. Leverette and five to Lt Harry T. Hanna. It is now known that StG 3's losses actually totalled only eight, but it was nonetheless a most outstanding effort. Sadly for the British, the group flew back to its Tunisian airfield, St Marie du Zit, that same evening, while the 1st left three days later. Operations over Greece and other areas of the Balkans were to continue for the rest of the year, and it was here that a new fighter in the area was to see its Mediterranean combat debut.

Following the pacification of Axis air units in Sardinia by the 325th FG, the Italian armistice had caused the German garrison to be withdrawn and the Allies were able to occupy the strategically-valuable island without a fight. It was planned to base medium bombers, plus elements of Coastal Air Force there, and soon B-26s plus the P-38s of the 1st FG had moved in, together with the 350th FG less one squadron which remained in Algeria. The other P-39 unit, the 81st FG, moved now to join the 52nd FG in Sicily. Relieved of the activity it had been involved in over Sardinia, the 325th ceased operations on 22 September to convert to the first Republic P-47D Thunderbolts to reach the Mediterranean. The group was able to train fully on the new aircraft at leisure, not moving to Italy until 9 December, when it flew to Foggia. Meanwhile its near neighbour in Tunisia, the 324th FG, its additional training completed, at last returned to operations on 30 October, flying to Cercola in Italy to join XII ASC as a fighter-bomber unit in support of the 5th Army in Western Italy. The 325th was not in fact to be the first unit to take the P-47 into action in the area, as late in November, supplies of this



28. Longest user of the Thunderbolt in the Mediterranean Theatre was the 57th FG—the veteran fighter-bomber unit in the area—'Billie' of the 66th Squadron, features a red cowling, the unit's 'Fighting Cock' badge, and black-edged yellow bands around wings and tail. (E. McDowell via R. C. Ward)

fighter began to be made to the 57th FG in Italy. Unable to enjoy the luxury of a complete change-over while off operations, the 57th began phasing the new aircraft into its squadrons gradually, at first operating them alongside the P-40s. The first P-47 sorties were made on 3 December during a sweep over Yugoslavia, and on the 16th in the same area, P-47 pilots were able to shoot down several German aircraft without loss. Next day seven of them accompanied six P-40s back to the scene of their success, engaging five Bf109s and claiming three shot down. The 325th FG first flew its P-47s operationally on 14 December, but it was to be the 19th before it was able to register its first claim.

## BIRTH OF THE 15th

Until late 1943 the available bomber bases in North Africa had not allowed the US heavy bomber units in the Mediterranean to undertake any missions—other than two attacks on the Ploesti oil refineries in Rumania—of a truly strategic nature. They were involved almost entirely in attacking targets in Sardinia, Italy, the Balkans, and occasionally Southern France, which were more properly of a tactical nature, in that they were either in direct or indirect support of military operations in the area. Certainly no escorted raids deep into southern

continental Europe had been possible. The occupation of the Foggia landing grounds changed all this, and in consequence on 1 November 1943, US 15th Air Force was formed as a second strategic air force (8th Air Force in England being the other) to join in a combined Anglo-American bomber offensive on German-occupied Europe and the German homeland. At once the B-17 and B-24 groups began moving into the Foggia area. Before leaving 12th Air Force, they had undertaken one truly strategic mission on 24 October against an aircraft factory at Wiener Neustadt, Austria, and this was to be their second target with the 15th on 2 November, the first having been an Italian one on the 1st.

Because of the shortage of heavy bomber groups, the 15th had attached to it the B-26 medium bombers until the end of the year, while it also took over the three P-38 groups and the 325th FG with its new P-47Ds. For the rest of 1943 most objectives continued to be in Italy, the Balkans or Southern France, and it was some time before the escorting fighters were straying very far from their previous haunts. All four groups were in the Foggia area with the bombers before December was out, but their first completely new area of operation was to be Bulgaria. The first mission here was on 14 November, and was in fact an escort to 12th Air Force B-25s bombing the marshalling yards at Sofia, the capital. Escorting 82nd FG P-38s claimed five intercepting fighters for no loss. They returned to the same target on the 24th, but the first really big 15th Air Force raid there occurred on 10 December, when 43 P-38s, again from the 82nd, accompanied B-24s to the target where 30 Bulgarian fighters intercepted. The latter claimed two P-38s but lost 11 of their number. The American pilots returned claims for nine and one probable, but their only loss was one pilot who had turned back early, but failed to reach his base. This was one of the 15th's first battles with a wide range of national air forces which were to take place over the next 18 months. Because the main equipment of these various countries' fighter arms was increasingly to be the Bf109G, the Americans would rarely identify their opponents as other than the Luftwaffe. In fact they were to be faced by Bulgarian, Rumanian, Hungarian, Slovakian and

Croatian fighter pilots, and by Italians of the new Repubblica Sociale Italiana (RSI) in Northern Italy, at least as often if not more so, than by pilots of German birth. The first real penetration into the hinterland by the fighters occurred on 19 December, when P-47s accompanied B-17s to Innsbruck in Austria, and P-38s of the 1st FG gave withdrawal support to B-24s returning from bombing the main Messerschmitt works at Augsburg in southern Germany.

While the new 15th Air Force was getting into its stride, the units of the 12th continued their duties over Italy. With movement on the ground virtually at an end during the winter, these were mainly fighter-bomber attacks against transport facilities, convoys, and targets in the general area of the front line, together with some patrol activity. There was little aerial combat at this time, although the 31st FG Spitfires continued to intercept the odd reconnaissance aircraft or *Jabo*. Oddly enough, the most successful group during this period was the 27th FBG, its A-36As—now unofficially christened 'Invaders'—ranged up to the Rome area on their interdiction missions, during which they frequently met a wide variety of aircraft types. To add to their earlier successes over Salerno, the Invader pilots claimed 25 victories in the air during this period, with 20 more destroyed on the ground, and several probables. Lt Michael T. Russo shot down two Bf109s on 30 December 1943 to become the 27th's first and only ace.

On Sicily, after a few combats during August and early September, the 52nd and 81st FGs had virtually nothing to do, and morale began to suffer as a result. Relief for the former unit came at the start of December with a move to Corsica, which had been invaded by French troops some two months earlier. From here the Spitfires flew escorts to anti-shiping aircraft, together with sweeps. A couple of reconnaissance aircraft were shot down, but seven machines were lost on these operations, though all crashed for reasons other than enemy action. Other Coastal AF units still in North Africa enjoyed some action in November when Luftwaffe bombers appeared in force on the 26th to bomb a large troop convoy heading towards Italy from Gibraltar. P-39s



from the 350th FG's 347th Squadron and Beaufighters of the 414th NF Squadron joined French Spitfires and RAF Beaufighters in intercepting the raids. The P-39s were only able to claim an He177 heavy bomber as a probable, but the 414th sent one of these into the sea for the unit's first confirmed success.

With the position on the ground near stalemate, a new landing operation was planned in an effort to turn the German line to the south of Rome, and lead to a retreat by the Wehrmacht north of the Eternal City. While strategically the Germans expected such a landing, Allied air power was so effective in preventing their reconnaissance aircraft from getting through that when the troops were able to go ashore in the early hours of 22 January 1944, it was to the complete tactical surprise of their opponents. This time range was no problem for air cover, and no call on 15th AF fighter units was necessary, Mediterranean Allied Tactical Air Force, as NWAFTAF had now become, having sufficient units to cover the landings and still provide support for the troops on the main front. To reinforce XII ASC in the west, the 79th FG left DAF on 15 January and moved to the Naples area, though the air echelon continued to operate over eastern Italy for several more days in order that the departure of the unit's P-40s should not be noticed. For this new venture, XII ASC had gathered in the Naples region the 31st FG with Spitfire Vs, VIIIIs and IXs, the 33rd,

29. Spring 1944 saw the introduction of the superlative Merlin-powered versions of the P-51 Mustang long-range escort fighter to the 15th Air Force, and the transfer of the two 12th Air Force ex-Spitfire groups to the former command to fly the new aircraft. This yellow-tailed P-51B is from the 5th Squadron of the 52nd Fighter Group. (Stan Staples via E. A. Munday)

79th and 324th FGs with P-40s—now mainly P-40Ls—the 27th and 86th FGBs with A-36As, the 111th TR Squadron with P-51s and a few A-36As, plus the recently-arrived 415th NF Squadron with Beaufighters. Two wings of RAF Spitfires were also available. To join in the operations here, XII Fighter Command had under Coastal AF on Corsica the 52nd FG with Spitfire Vs and IXs, and a squadron of P-39s from the 350th FG. Most of the rest of the 350th, together with the 414th NF Squadron, were in Sardinia. In Sicily was the 81st FG, and in North Africa two new Beaufighter units, the 416th and 417th NF Squadrons.

From the start of the new invasion the landing forces were provided with a constant umbrella of American and British Spitfires and US P-40s by day, while Beaufighters patrolled at night. P-40s and A-36As flew a prodigious number of sorties in close support of the ground forces, as the Germans scraped together sufficient divisions to throw in a series of sustained counter-attacks. The Luftwaffe also appeared again in quite substantial force. Around Rome the Fw190 *Jabo* of SKG 10 were still

available, reinforced by I/SG 4, while I/JG 4 had recently moved to the area from Rumania to aid in the defence against the growing 15th AF raids. Soon after the landings began II/JG 51 was rushed to Italy from south Germany, these units joining JG 77, the two new Italian fighter *gruppi*, and the remaining elements of JG 53. Ju88s were also flown down from the north to operate by night, while He177s, He111s, Do217s and Ju88s from the south of France were also active. Some of the latter fell foul of the 52nd FG on 23 January, when four Spitfire pilots caught 50–60 bombers loaded with torpedos on their way to attack the invasion fleet. The Spitfires despatched seven of the bombers, while Beaufighters of the 414th Squadron scrambled from Sardinia, and then joining the attack, accounted for two more.

Over the beaches the fighters were engaged in some of the biggest combats for many months, mainly against the *Jabo* and their escorts. Much to the fore were the 31st and 79th FGs, the 33rd and 324th also achieving several successes. Service on attachment to the 79th at last saw the Negro pilots of the 99th Squadron realize their full potential, and during a number of highly successful combats in late January and early February, 16 confirmed victories were claimed by them. On 1 February meanwhile, the Spitfires of the 31st FG's 307th Squadron became the first US aircraft to move to an airfield within the beachhead area itself. By now the Americans were more convinced than they had ever been that the Italian campaign was an expensive sideshow, diverting resources from the main epicentre of the struggle with Germany—the impending invasion of Western France. Consequently not only was no more strength to be diverted to Italy—other than to increase the power of the 15th Air Force as part of the Combined Bomber Offensive—but units both ground and air were steadily to be diverted elsewhere. This new policy was first felt by the 12th Air Force on 3 February when the veteran 33rd FG was withdrawn and posted to India. Since November 1942 the unit had claimed 131 victories in the air and five on the ground, with 29 probables and 70 damaged; 48 pilots had been lost, either killed, missing or made prisoner, 29 of them by enemy action of some

form. However, only 17 P-40s had been shot down by Axis aircraft. Since the end of the Tunisian campaign, the group had produced no new aces, but Col Momyer had raised his score from five to eight by the time he handed over to Lt Col L. F. Stetson Jr during the autumn, and returned to the States. During this final period of operations over Salerno and Anzio Maj Tyler had been the most successful pilot, with 4.5 victories. The group's P-40s were divided between the 27th and 86th FBGs, which between them then released 14 A-36As to the 111th TR Squadron. All early versions of the P-51 and A-36 were now out of production and replacements were becoming in short supply. Initially one squadron in each fighter-bomber group converted to P-40s, but on 21 February, after Col Dorr E. Newton Jr, commanding officer of the 27th, had shot down two Bf109s between Rome and the beachhead for the last A-36A victories against the Luftwaffe, the group handed all its remaining Invaders to the 86th, and converted fully to the Warhawk. As will be seen shortly, more of these were becoming available as other units began conversion to more modern types.

On 13 February, only ten days behind the 33rd, the 81st FG left Sicily for the same Far Eastern destination. Having achieved relatively little in the Mediterranean, the group left behind its P-39s for a new unit. This was the all-Negro 332nd Fighter Group (100th, 301st and 302nd Squadrons), which now arrived from the States. The other Coastal AF groups were very active from Sardinia and Corsica at this time, the latter base proving particularly useful. While the 52nd FG's 4th Squadron provided escorts for cannon-armed anti-shiping B-25s, the other two units, joined by the RAF's No. 253 Squadron, undertook frequent escorts of B-26 formations over the territory of western Italy to the north of Rome, also undertaking offensive sweeps in this area. The 350th FG also flew patrols up the Italian coast and attacked coastal installations, particularly radar stations. During March this unit began undertaking some dive-bombing operations with its P-39s. The activities of the 52nd Group led to several fierce combats, and during February 1944 the 2nd and 5th Squadrons were able to claim 26

victories, and the 4th, another five. Losses were sometimes severe, with ten lost in action during February and four more in March. On 9 February for instance, bomb-carrying 4th Squadron aircraft were 'jumped' near Nice, off the French coast, by Fw190s described as having 'in-line engines and an improved performance' (possibly a test batch of Fw190Ds with JGr 200). Only one claim could be made, but three Spitfires failed to return. Ten days later, eight 5th Squadron aircraft on a sweep over Viterbo, Italy, became involved with a large number of hostile fighters; four Spitfires were lost, the survivors claiming four German fighters in return. Later in June 1944, one of the missing pilots returned to the unit, and on the strength of his evidence claims for a further five fighters shot down were submitted.

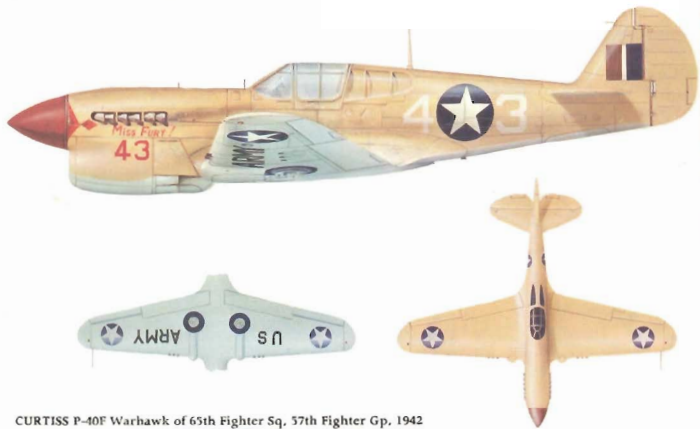
Success in the air continued to meet the efforts of the XII ASC fighter units, though for most the ground support part of their activities was becoming ever more important. Not least successful during the early months of 1944 as the slogging battles around Anzio and Cassino continued, was the 79th FG. During the early part of March the unit's first P-47Ds arrived, and gradually phased into service. The first success for the group with one of the new aircraft came on 17 March when Capt Carl Stewart shot down a Bf109 (his third victory). Stewart was subsequently to raise his total to four and one probable.

During this period several units got in on the air combat act. The old 154th TR Squadron had been re-equipped with P-38s and sent to Italy as a weather reconnaissance unit, in which role it was subsequently to join the 15th AF. On 31 March, however, the pilot of one of the squadron's Lightnings saw seven Bf109s, and when two approached, fired on one head-on, causing the pilot to bale out.

More changes of great moment were afoot; at the end of February the RAF had delivered a dozen more Spitfires to the 52nd FG to make good recent losses. The days of the Spitfire with the 12th AF were fast drawing to a close, for on 11 March, the 31st FG received its first three North American P-51B Mustangs, and on the 28th was withdrawn

1st Lieutenant, aircrew, Mediterranean, early 1943. In hot climates many pilots used to fly either in light khaki 'chino' shirt and slacks, or in olive drab mechanics' overalls in a light twill material, as illustrated here. The light fatigue cap was often worn as casual service headgear, sometimes with rank insignia pinned on. This pilot wears a regulation life-jacket, and beneath it the issue webbing pistol belt with a .45 cal. automatic in the issue brown leather holster.

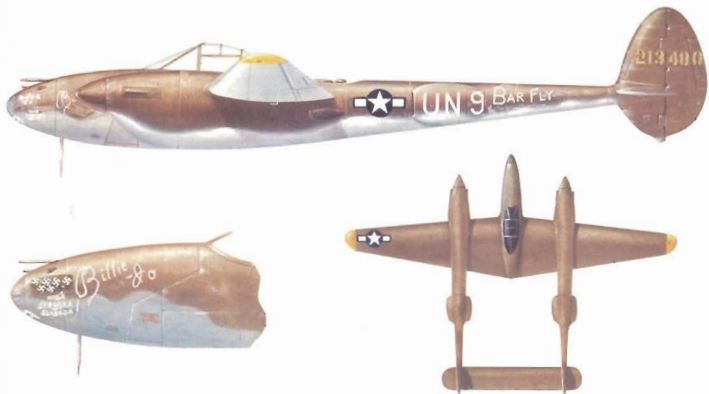




CURTISS P-40F Warhawk of 65th Fighter Sq, 37th Fighter Gp, 1942

SUPERMARINE Spitfire Mk VIII of 308th Fighter Sq, 1st Fighter Gp, February 1944





LOCKHEED P-38G Lightning, 42-13480, of 94th Fighter Sq, 1st Fighter Gp, February 1944

OPPOSITE TOP: Curtiss P-40F Warhawk of the 65th Fighter Squadron, 57th Fighter Group, 9th Air Force, Burg-El-Arab, Egypt, 1942. Desert Pink and Azure Blue scheme was one of several applied to USAAF aircraft in the MTO during this period. National insignia in all six positions, the fuselage marking bisecting the aircraft number '43', a style of application that helped identify the 57th Group, along with the red sweptback nose blaze and diamond. The aircraft number (the range from 40 to 69 being used by the squadron) is repeated under the aircraft name—which appeared on both sides. In common with most USAAF aircraft in the MTO at this time, this P-40 bears an RAF fin flash as a theatre marking, which gave way to red spinners to identify fighters. This particular machine also has chrome-plated exhaust stubs.

OPPOSITE BOTTOM: Supermarine Spitfire Mk VIII, flown by 1st Lt Leland P. Molland, CO of the 308th FS, 31st FG, Amendola, Italy, February 1944. Camouflage is British pattern Dark Earth and Middle Stone with Azure Blue undersides. White codes read X-HL on starboard side, the name and personal insignia appearing on the port side only. The red spinner served as a theatre marking by this

time, although available photographs show little evidence of British serial numbers being retained on American Spitfire VIIIs, either on the rear fuselage or in 4in high characters on top of the fin, an application noted on other variants of the British fighter in US service.

ABOVE: Lockheed P-38G Lightning, 42-13480, flown by 1st Donald D. Kienholz of the 94th FS, 1st Fighter Group, 15th AF, Italy, February 1944. Standard Olive Drab upper surfaces (which tended to weather to a yellowish-brown shade very quickly in desert climes) with Neutral Grey below, with a 'soft' demarcation line between the two shades. The nose markings indicate six kills by the pilot and the Czechoslovakian phrase 'NASA SERBSKA SLOBODA' appears forward of a second name, 'Billie Joe'. The individual aircraft identification appears as the number '9' rather than a letter, showing a markings transition from 12th to 15th AF practice—the 1st FG went over to a numerical identification system after the group became part of the 15th in November 1943. The 94th Sqn's colour appears on the wing-tips, and the decoration of the rear booms with a name, as shown, was a feature of other P-38s in the MTO.

NORTH AMERICAN P-51D Mustang, 44-15459 of 308th Fighter Sq, 31st Fighter Gp, late 1944



**AMERICAN BEAUTY**



*Captain Voll*  
*Crew Chief & Mustang Aces & Aces*





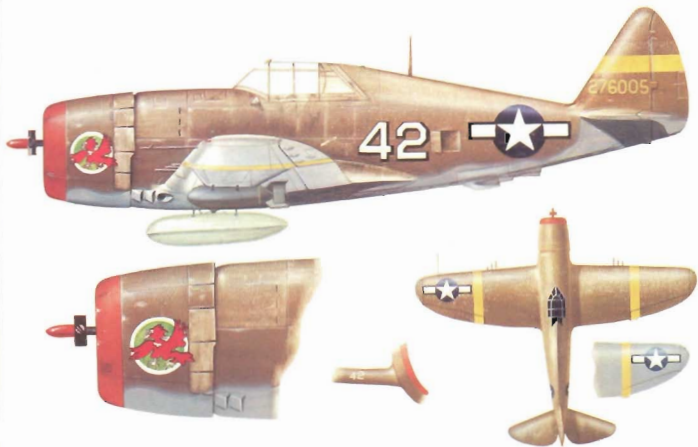
PAGES 28-29: North American P-51D Mustang, 44-15459 of the 308th FS, 31st FG, 15th Air Force, San Severo, Italy, late November 1944, flown by Capt John J. Voll, top-ranking USAAF ace in the MTO with 21 victories. Aircraft is in neutral metal finish overall with the tail markings of the 31st FG and wingtips and spinner in theatre identification colour, with an additional yellow band inboard on the wings. The single yellow wing and tailplane bands were sometimes retained on NMF, these being type identification markings for Mustangs, the equivalent of the white markings first used in the ETO to distinguish the P-51 from the Bf109. Application of ground crew names was common practice in the USAAF.

BELOW: Republic P-47D Thunderbolt, 42-76005, of the 65th FS, 57th FG, 15th Air Force, Grosseto, Italy, early 1944. Overall finish is very weathered Olive Drab and Neutral Grey, the cockpit canopy framing being in natural metal finish. The Thunderbolts carried their theatre markings in the manner shown, although the propeller hub was not always included, colour usually being confined to the cowling ring. The machine has yellow type identity markings in the form of a single band on the wings and

fin/rudder, with the aircraft number '42' repeated on the wing leading edges for quick identification on the flight line. Numbers in the 40-69 range continued to be used when the 65th FS converted from the P-40, although the digits were grouped together on P-47s, aft of the national insignia on the starboard side, forward on the port, as shown. The nose emblem (both sides) is that of the squadron, such embellishments being common on US fighters in this theatre. The drop tank remains in NMF.

OPPOSITE TOP: Squadron insignia, all carried on nose section of P-40s and/or P-47s. (A) 86th FS; (B) 525th FS, (C) 527th FS, (D) 66th FS, (E) Personal marking of Lt Col Robert Hasler on P-47D 42-75008 '88' of the 319th FS, 325th 'Checkertails' FS, Italy.

OPPOSITE BOTTOM: Dodge WC-54  $\frac{3}{4}$  ton 4 x 4 ambulance of the 883rd Collecting Coy, Peninsular Base Sector (Italy) US Army, summer 1944. Unit markings and style of medical and air recognition symbols are correct for this period; registration number is typical, selected from a batch of numbers correct for a WC-54 ambulance.



REPUBLIC P-47D Thunderbolt, 42-76005, of 65th Fighter Sq, 57th Fighter Gp, early 1944



A



B



C



D



E





Captain, 15th Air Force, wearing a typical combination of uniform items. The cap, with rank bars on the left and gold and black officer's piping, is the lightweight version of the garrison cap. Rank bars and the Air Force branch badge are pinned to the collar of the olive drab wool shirt; the jacket is the 1941 field jacket worn by all branches of the army, with rank bars on the shoulder and a 15th AF patch on the left arm only. The slacks are officer's 'pinks'.

WAC private, 1943-44—one of the many women soldiers attached to the Army Air Forces as communications personnel and clerks of various kinds. She wears regulation WAC service dress in olive drab, with cap and collar insignia of the branch—a special form of eagle badge, on a brass disc for non-commissioned personnel. The left shoulder patch is that of the Army Air Forces.



from operations to complete conversion. By special permission, the group was permitted to fly a last sweep with 36 Spitfires next day, and as a fitting finale, four 308th Squadron aircraft caught 20 Fw190 *Jabo*, Lt Emery claiming one shot down to bring the group's total to 192:39:124. It had produced ten aces with the Spitfire. On 6 April 1944, the 52nd FG flew escort to B-26s on a raid to Orvieto. Four Spitfire IXs of the 5th Squadron forming the top cover were able to 'bounce' six Bf109s, two and a probable being claimed. Both the confirmed victories were credited to Lt Joe H. Blackburn to bring the 52nd's Spitfire operations to an end as well, with a group tally of 164½:22:71. The unit had produced only three aces, but two of them, Sylvan Feld with nine victories and Norman McDonald with seven and a half, were the USAAF's top-scorers on Spitfires. Five other pilots had scores of four. This unit also began conversion to P-51Bs, and by the end of the month was almost ready to return to action. The 31st was already operational again by this time, but with the 15th Air Force; both groups were transferred to this organization on completion of conversion, to undertake long-range bomber escort missions.

Supplies of the new Merlin-engined Mustangs did not go only to the fighter groups; a few P-51Cs were issued to the 111th TR Squadron during March, and in mid-April the first use was made of the full fighter-reconnaissance version, the F-6B. Indeed, by 21 April, sufficient new aircraft were available to allow the squadron to pass three of its old Allison-powered P-51s to the 86th FBG for operations alongside its remaining A-36As. Meanwhile current models of the P-47D with 'bubble' cockpit hoods were now reaching Italy, and during April a few of the older 'razorback' versions were passed by the 79th FG to the 27th FBG.

In Italy the climax was fast approaching. Plans were now finalized to move a substantial part of the 8th Army and DAF from the east to the west and centre of the front, to aid 5th Army in a final breakthrough of the stubborn defences at Cassino. During March the 57th FG, the only remaining USAAF element in DAF, left that command and moved its P-47s first to Naples, and then on the 30th



30. Arrival of adequate numbers of P-51s, and reduction of Axis aerial opposition relegated the P-38 groups increasingly to the fighter-bomber and strafing role. The 82nd FG undertook some level-bombing sorties led by 'droop-snoot' bomb-aiming aircraft. This P-38L of the 96th Squadron, flown by one of the group's aces, is so engaged. (Stan Staples via E. A. Munday)

to Corsica. Its role was to include a series of special fighter-bomber attacks on bridges to the north of Rome, a task for which its recent activities over Yugoslavia had well prepared it. The P-39s of the 350th FG, now fully established on Corsica as well, provided voluntary sorties over the same area, taking part in a massive Allied air offensive—Operation *Strangle*—designed to choke off the German supply lines to the front. During one such mission on 6 April, six P-39 pilots achieved a most unexpected and unlikely combat success. While attacking ground targets in the Grosseto-Pisa area, the Airacobras were attacked by at least ten assorted German fighters. Turning into them with great aggression, the American pilots were able to claim five shot down and two damaged for no loss. For this outstanding operation and for the recent very successful dive-bombing and strafing activities, the group received a DUC. This was not the only notable combat for Coastal AF at this time; four days later, as night was falling, a pair of Beaufighters of the 416th NF Squadron which had only recently moved up from Africa, intercepted a big force of 30–40 bombers heading towards Anzio. Although greatly outnumbered the two pilots attacked, probably shooting down one He177 and causing the formation to break up and disperse. One Beaufighter was shot down in flames and the other damaged.

During April the 99th Squadron moved again, leaving the 79th FG to join the 324th FG once more. On Corsica the 57th FG had attached to it the first unit of the French *Armée de l'Air* to go into action equipped with P-47Ds, the GC II/5. As the 12th Air Force units prepared for the forthcoming big 'push', which was to be launched on 11 May 1944, 15th Air Force too was getting fully into its stride.

## STRATEGIC OPERATIONS JAN-SEPT 1944

With the New Year of 1944 the 15th AF gradually began to step up its heavy bomber raids, initially still under the watchful eyes of the faithful P-38s. The latter's pilots were still continuing to find the opposition tough at times. On 3 January over Turin, the 1st and 14th FGs suffered three losses for only one probable victory, while on the 7th over Wiener Neustadt, Austria, the 1st suffered seven losses although this time the total claims for the two groups rose to four and two probables. More success came on 10 January. Sofia, Bulgaria, was the target and 40 fighters of the Bulgarian 6th *Orliak* (Fighter Regiment) rose to the defence of their capital, but suffered very severe losses at the hands of the P-38s and bombers' gunners. On this occasion, the 14 FG was able to claim eight and one probable for only a single loss. Immediately thereafter the P-47s of the 325th FG began to take a much more active part in these escort missions, and raids followed on Northern Italy, Greece, France, Austria and Bulgaria during the rest of January, during which a steady toll of defending fighters was exacted. The outstanding mission of the month was undoubtedly on the 30th, when 61 P-47s preceded the main bombing force in a raid on the major German/Italian air base at Udine in north-east Italy. Flying up the Adriatic at very low level, the Thunderbolts escaped radar discovery, arriving just as Axis aircraft of all types were becoming airborne due to the approach of the main B-17 force and its P-38 escorts. In a fierce series of dogfights the 325th claimed 38 and six probables for two Thunderbolts

lost and two damaged. The victories included 16 Bf109s, 11 Ju52/3m transports, six Macchi fighters and a variety of other types. Capt Herschel H. Green personally shot down four Ju52s, an MC202 and a Do217. The bombers then arrived, catching 70 aircraft still on the ground, while the three escorting P-38 groups were able to claim eight more and five probables in the air for a single loss.

Raids continued during February, with some hard fighting late in the month during two attacks on Steyr, Austria, and two on Regensburg, south Germany. Similar targets were visited in March, though northern Italian targets still predominated. The 325th FG achieved a high level of success during the month with a total of 36 victories, but on several occasions had some hard fights with experienced Bf109 units. On 3 March for instance, a battle over Rome resulted in the loss of four P-47s, although six Messerschmitts were claimed; over Verona on the 28th three more losses were suffered for claims of seven. The P-38 groups continued to rack up a steady if unspectacular series of successes, but sustained no more major losses during this period. The arrival of spring weather allowed the offensive to be stepped up greatly during April, and many more big clashes with defending fighters occurred. A raid on Steyr on the 2nd brought over 30 victories to the fighters, two thirds of them credited to the P-38s of the 14th Group, which tore apart a big force of twin-engined *Zerstörer* Bf110s and Me410s. Next day, during the first raid on Budapest, Hungarian Bf109s were engaged in the first of many severe encounters. Bucharest, Rumania, followed next day, then Zagreb in Yugoslavia. A return to Udine on the 7th allowed the 325th FG to gain ten more victories, as a result of which Maj H. H. Green became the leading USAAF ace in the Mediterranean Theatre with his score at 13. Wiener Neustadt on 12 April brought Fw190 *Jabo* from *Schlachtgeschwader* 10 into combat with the 15th AF, while on the 16th, the Bulgarians were again encountered when some 80 of their Bf109Gs intercepted an attack on Brasov. This day's raids saw the debut of the P-51B as an escort fighter in the Mediterranean, the newly-equipped 31st FG taking part. The Mustangs achieved their first three



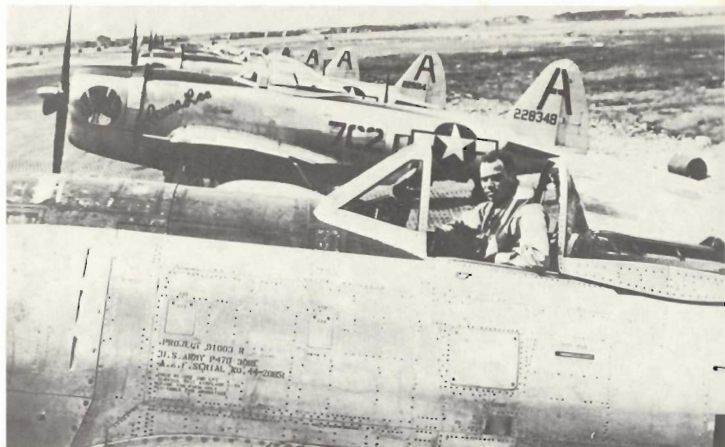
victories during a raid on Belgrade on the 17th. They then began a run of success, claiming seven over Trieste on the 20th, and 17 with seven probables on the 21st, during a big raid on Ploesti. This cost them three P-51s, but the P-38s were also successful here, the 14th FG claiming 11 more for one loss. Following 13 victories over Wiener Neustadt for the 31st FG on the 23rd, three more enemy aircraft were shot down during a return visit to Ploesti next day. One of these was a Bf109 of III/JG 77 flown by Luftwaffe ace *Hptm* Emil Omert (70 victories).

May saw even heavier air combat, mid-month missions being accompanied by the 52nd FG with its new P-51s. Some strafing of airfields in Yugoslavia was undertaken by P-38s during May, resulting in claims for victories in the air of 174:32:88, and 89 more on the ground by the fighters; 24 May saw the last success by the 325th FG with P-47s, when six victories were claimed over Wollersdorf. With these aircraft six pilots had become aces and 153 victories had been claimed. Of 38 losses, only nine were known definitely to be to enemy aircraft. The

31. Top-scoring US fighter group in the Mediterranean was the 31st. This 308th Squadron P-51D, 'Tempus Fugit', was flown by the group's commanding officer, Col. William A. Daniel. (Stan Staples via E. A. Munday)

unit now began conversion to P-51s, passing its P-47s to the 332nd FG, which was transferred from the 12th AF to the 15th during the month as the seventh and final fighter group to join the strategic force. At the end of May, Ploesti was again the target, but here the 52nd FG, although claiming 14 victories, came up against a formidable new foe. Elements of JG 52 had been withdrawn from the Crimea to Rumania; and now joined the fight against the bombers. One of the pilots involved was young *Ltn* Erich Hartmann, later to be the world's top-scoring fighter ace, who made his first claims against US aircraft at this time, in combat with P-51s.

Mid-summer 1944 was to see the peak of fighter operations for the 15th, as the walls began to crumble in on Germany. Following the successful Allied offensive in Italy which led to the fall of



32. Formation of the XXII Tactical Air Command to give continued air support to 5th Army in Northern Italy from September 1944 onwards, saw the transfer from coastal to full fighter-bomber duties of the 350th FG. Re-equipped with P-47Ds, the unit was active in this role for the rest of the war. The group commander, Lt Col John Robertson, sits in his aircraft at the head of a line of 347th Squadron aircraft. (J. Robertson via D. Weatherill)

Rome on 5 June (of which more later), came the landings in Normandy next day, while later in the month the massive Russian summer offensive began all along the Eastern Front. The 325th FG returned to operations on 2 June to escort B-17s on the first shuttle mission to Russia. From bases there one raid on Galati, Rumania, was flown on the 6th, the units returning, bombing en route, on the 11th. Other raids were made on Munich, Budapest, France, Vienna, and as far north as Bleckhammer on the German-Polish border. But above all Ploesti and the oil refineries of south-eastern Europe were the targets at this time. Rumanian, German and Hungarian fighters, German and Hungarian *Zerstörer* formations, and *Jabo* of SG 2 were amongst the main opponents in a month that brought a record 299

victories. The 332nd FG flew its first mission on the 7th, and gained its first five victories on the 9th, but it was to the P-51s that most successes went. By 23 June, the 52nd FG alone had claimed over 100 victories in a month for relatively minimal losses. On the 16th, the group fought the Hungarian 101 'Puma' Group, shooting down ten of the unit's Bf109s.

Other units met formations of Rumanian IAR 80 fighters on occasions and took a heavy toll of them, while on 26 June P-38s of the 82nd FG almost completely wiped out the Slovakian 13th Squadron, which lost or had badly damaged eight of its Bf109Gs. The month was not without severe cost however. With the increasing availability of the P-51s, the P-38s were frequently diverted to dive-bombing and strafing attacks against Axis airfields. One such strike on 10 June proved disastrous; 39 aircraft from the 1st FG covered 39 from the 82nd to attack Ploesti. Violent resistance was encountered, during which 23 victories were claimed, but the 1st lost 14 Lightnings and the 82nd, eight, with 11 more damaged. Lt Herbert B. Hatch of the 1st's 71st

Squadron personally claimed five Fw190s, but was the *only* member of his squadron to return! Despite this setback, the general trend was of great success, and July was to prove an even better month than June. It was also the last month in which the P-38s took as large a part in combat as did the P-51s. At the start of the month, Mustang units from the 8th AF in England were present in Italy, having undertaken escorts for a shuttle mission from their bases there. Intent upon showing the 'country cousins' how it should be done, the 4th and 352nd FGs flew a few missions with the 15th's Mustangs, but suffered heavier losses for lower claims than did the 'local boys'. They also lost Lt Ralph 'Kid' Hofer of the 4th, who with 16 victories was the highest-scoring USAAF fighter ace to be lost in air combat in Europe.

July began well with a mission to Budapest on the 2nd, when 16 claims were made by 15th AF Mustangs, four by the visiting 8th AF units, and eight by the P-38s, for the loss of six P-51s. Raids followed almost daily, Ploesti, Bucharest, Budapest, Munich and Zwolfaxing all receiving more than one visit. The Lightnings were completely vindicated on 8 July, when 36 aircraft from the 82nd FG swept over Munich to claim 21 victories without loss, most of them against Me410s of the *Zerstörergeschwadern*.

On 22 July came the second Russia shuttle. The 31st FG covered the 82nd's P-38s to Piryatin, attacking Russian airfields on the way. At Buzan and Zilistea the Lightning pilots claimed 41 aircraft destroyed on the ground, also shooting down another five, for the loss of three. Several sweeps and strafing attacks were made from the Russian base with some success. Whilst returning to Italy on the 26th, the 82nd swept over Ploesti where it was able to claim a further 12 aerial victories, the escorting Mustangs of the 31st claiming six more. The 31st's 307th Squadron had remained in Russia, returning next day. Before leaving however, it encountered a large force of 40-50 Ju87s circling over their airfield at Mielec, Poland, prior to an attack over the eastern front. Scarcely able to believe their luck, the American pilots attacked with vigour, claiming 21:3:6 without loss. Six other aircraft of varying types were also caught in the vicinity and shot

down. On the same day meanwhile, the group's 309th Squadron visited Zilistea, Rumania, claiming four other victories, while the 325th FG claimed five in the same area. The previous day this unit's Mustangs had accounted for 13 fighters over Zwolfaxing for the loss of two. The month was to end on an equally high note, 31st, 52nd and 325th FG P-51s claiming 31 for three losses during a mission to Bucharest on the 31st.

The month also saw the arrival of quantities of P-51Ds for the 31st and 325th Groups allowing earlier models to be passed to the 332nd FG. This unit not only exchanged its somewhat tired P-47s for the newer Mustangs with alacrity, but also became the 15th's only four-squadron fighter group with the arrival from the 12th AF of the 99th Squadron, which had at last found a permanent home.

Operations continued unabated during August, but now the cumulative effects of the war on all fronts was beginning to tell on the defences, and opposition began to reduce visibly. Southern France also became a more favoured target during the early part of the month as the date for the Allied landings there approached (Operation *Dragoon*). By now most of the great fighter aces of the 15th had reached, or were approaching, their peak. On 4 August, Capt James 'Sully' Varnell of the 52nd FG's 2nd Squadron equalled Herschel Green's current score of 17; this particular squadron also boasted the No. 3, Maj Robert C. Curtiss (14 victories) and the No. 5, Lt John B. Lawler (11) at this time. During a raid on Bleckhammer on 7 August, the 31st and 325th FGs claimed a combined 19 victories. Some of their opponents were again pilots of the Hungarian 'Puma' unit (now a full Regiment), which suffered the loss of eight Bf109s. The following two weeks also saw the last few raids on Ploesti. The penultimate attack on the 18th brought nine victories to the 31st, among them being Capt Alexandre Serbanescu, one of the leading Rumanian aces of the war, who was killed on this date after his 50th victory.

Meanwhile on 13 August, the 1st and 14th FGs had been detached to Corsica to participate in the landings in Southern France on the 15th. Flying many escort, strafing and dive-bombing missions.

they met little fighter opposition, claiming only three victories, but during this period they lost 23 P-38s, nearly all to ground fire.

With the success of the Russian advance through south-eastern Europe now removing many locations from the bombers' target list, raids became concentrated on the area still in Axis hands, with an increasing number of attacks being made on targets in Czechoslovakia. Here on 25 August, the fighters caught Fw190 *Jabo* of the operational training unit SG 152. Amongst those claiming successes was the last of the outstanding P-38 aces, Lt Michael Brezas of the 14th FG, who claimed two to raise his total to 12, all gained in just seven combats since 8 July. At the end of the month a series of highly-successful airfield strafes was begun against targets in Hungary, western Rumania and Yugoslavia. On 30 August, the 52nd FG claimed 13 on the ground in Hungary, while next day this unit claimed 60 on the ground and 10 in the air at Reglia, Rumania, though losing four Mustangs—apparently to II/JG 52 Bf109s. On 1 September, the 325th FG claimed 59 ground and four air victories at Debrezen for two losses, while on the 8th, this group claimed 63 more at Ecka, Yugoslavia, for only a single loss. On the same day the 332nd FG claimed 18 more at Ilandza, another Yugoslav airfield. Another claim for 63 was made during a return visit to Reglia by the 52nd on 22 September. Generally however, resistance in the air was almost nonexistent during September, only 12 claims being submitted by P-51 pilots, while the P-38s gained not a single success.

## ITALIAN FRONT

While the growing fighter strength of 15th AF Fighter Command ran up its ever more glowing tally of successes during the summer of 1944, the situation in Italy had also reached a climax for the remaining units of the Tactical Air Force. The final great 'push' at Cassino which was at last to break through the defences and link up with the beach-head at Anzio, leading to the fall of Rome within a period of less than a month, began on 11 May. XII

Tactical Air Command, as XII ASC had now become, now left air superiority to its RAF Spitfire squadrons, its USAAF fighter strength being involved almost entirely in ground support and general fighter-bomber duties. From Corsica the 57th FG, reinforced by the French GC II/5, continued to operate against communications targets to the north of Rome, while the troops on the ground received a high degree of close support from the 27th, 79th, 86th and 324th Groups. The 27th had by now received sufficient P-47s to re-equip fully its 524th Squadron, this unit's P-40s being passed to the 86th. This period saw the last regular appearances of Luftwaffe aircraft over the front, and several hard combats were fought. On 13 May, 324th FG P-40s engaged a large formation of Bf109s and Fw190s, claiming two and one probable for the loss of three of their own aircraft. P-47s of the 57th FG claimed four Fw190s and a probable while on a mission to attack bridges on 25 May, but this unit also suffered losses, two Thunderbolts being shot down. Next day the 27th FBG recorded its first P-47 claim against a German *Jabo*, although suffering one lost and one damaged in return, while on the 27th, two pilots of the 111th TR Squadron were able to shoot down a Bf109 in their new F-6B Mustangs. Most successful unit in air combat during this period was the 79th FG, the group's experienced Thunderbolt pilots claiming 11 victories in May, with two more in early June. Losses were at a record level however, mainly as a result of increasingly deadly ground defences. When Rome fell on 5 June, the 27th and 324th groups had each lost a dozen aircraft since the start of the offensive, while the 79th had lost 18, and the 86th, 19. The high level of losses indicated the intensity of operations; groups sometimes sent out more than 25 missions a day, each of six to 12 aircraft. The 86th FBG put in a particularly good performance on 25 May, claiming 217 motor vehicles destroyed and 245 damaged at a cost of two A-36As shot down, with four more and two P-40s damaged. The unit received a DUC.

The fall of Rome and the rapid German retreat which followed brought a general reduction in aerial activity after 6 June. The invasion of Normandy on that date also led swiftly to the



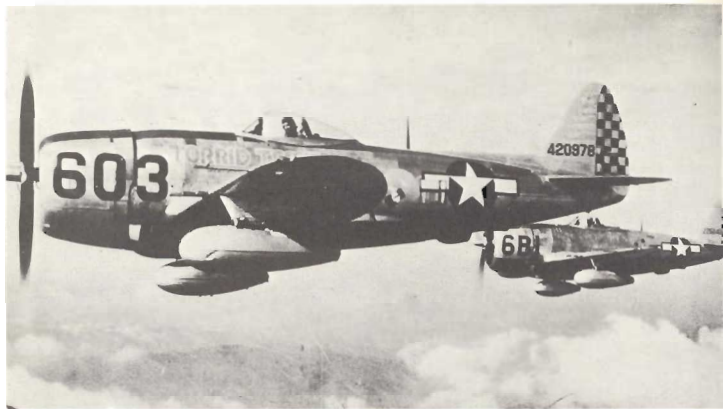
withdrawal of nearly all remaining Luftwaffe units in Italy to Western Europe, leaving only the Italian units of the RSI to continue the battle in the air. Some 12th AF units continued to operate to the north of Rome, notably the 57th FG from Corsica, and the 27th FBG and 324th FG which gave close support to the ground forces pursuing the Germans northward—particularly to the US 1st Armoured Division. During these activities, losses continued to mount, the 27th losing 14 aircraft between 3 and 14 June. However, on the 17th, this unit flew its last P-40 mission, having by then received sufficient P-47s to re-equip the whole unit. At the same time, the designation 'Fighter-Bomber Group' was discontinued, this unit and the 86th becoming normal Fighter Groups.

On 11 June the much moved-around 99th Fighter Squadron left the 324th FG and joined the 86th FG. On the 29th, it passed its remaining P-40s to the 324th and, as already noted, left to join the 15th AF. At this time the 79th FG moved to Corsica, where on 18 June, together with elements of the 350th FG, its

33. The 350th FG was joined by the Brazilian 1<sup>o</sup> Grupo de Caça, which operated as a fourth squadron with the unit from late 1944 to the end of the war. This Olive Drab and grey aircraft carries a 75-gal belly drop tank, together with underwing rocket launching tubes and 500lb bombs. (Paulo F. Laux via R. C. Ward)

aircraft covered French landings on Elba. Thereafter, the 350th concentrated its tired P-39Ns and Qs at Tarquinia in Italy, from where it would despatch detachments to airfields all along the west coast for patrol duties as the advance continued.

At the start of July the 86th FG also converted to P-47s, the last A-36As ceasing operations, while the 324th FG remained the only unit still flying P-40s. A general move to Corsica now began, including the Headquarters of XII TAC. From this island base, operations over both northern Italy and the South of France could easily be undertaken, the latter area being considered of more importance to the US High Command. Landings on the French Mediterranean coast were due to take place on 15 August under the codename Operation *Dragoon*, and air attacks in the



34. Be-tanked Thunderbolts of the 350th FG's 346th Squadron over Italy late in the war. Note squadron identification coding on nose and rudder (black/natural metal chequers) and the squadron badge on the fuselage of 'Torrid Tessie', which is apparently the commanding officer's aircraft. (IWM)

area were stepped up. The 27th and 324th FGs moved first, followed by the 86th and 111th TR Squadron. The latter was joined on 27 July by 15 US Navy pilots, for whose use ten new P-51Cs were received. They were to spot for naval gunfire during the *Dragoon* landings.

Meanwhile, the 57th and 79th FGs, already well established in Corsica, continued to see action over Italy while attacking road, rail and bridge targets, and escorting medium bombers. On 1 July, the 57th encountered Italian Bf109s, claiming six shot down for damage to three P-47s. The 79th claimed nine victories during the month, six in one fight on the 26th, when a formation of Bf109s attempted to 'jump' the group. A successful airfield strafe by aircraft of the 85th and 87th Squadrons netted an estimated 13 aircraft on the ground, with at least an equal number damaged. The 86th FG achieved even greater success on the 29th, when its new P-47s

attacked an airfield near Milan, claims for 23 destroyed and 10 damaged being made.

In the meantime, the 324th FG at last began receiving P-47s, the final P-40 mission being flown on 18 July. Unfortunately this was marred when a P-51 mistakenly shot down one of the Warhawks, wounding the pilot. By the 30th the whole group was fully operational on Thunderbolts. All five groups with these aircraft, together with 15th AF, French and British units, and carrier-borne aircraft from an Anglo-American task force, covered the very successful landings carried out on 15 August, and within a few days, the 27th, 79th, 86th, and 324th FGs, and the 111th TR Squadron had moved to bases on the French mainland. Losses to ground fire were again substantial at times, but few enemy aircraft appeared, only the ever-successful 79th FG being able to claim three Bf109s shot down during early September.

Due to the success of the Allied breakout from Normandy, the campaign in southern France proceeded with considerable speed, and forces involved were soon deep into the hinterland. General lack of resistance reduced the need for air support, and by the end of September, most units

could be released for return to Italy. The 57th FG had finally moved to France on 17 September, but only a week later flew over to Grosseto with the 86th. XII TAC remained in France with the 324th FG and the 111th TRS, together with the *Armée de l'Air* units, moving northwards to link up with the forces driving east from Brittany and Normandy.

In Italy meanwhile, a new XXII TAC had been formed and on 10 September the 350th FG, now fully converted to P-47s, had left Coastal Air Force to become this new command's first operational unit. On 2 October, it was joined at Tarquinia by the 27th FG from France, while on the 7th the 350th had attached to it the P-47-equipped Brazilian 1° *Grupo de Caça*, as a fourth squadron. At the same time the 79th FG left France for eastern Italy, rejoining its old RAF friends in Desert Air Force at Iesi. After giving close support to the later stages of an early-autumn assault on the Gothic Line, the five Thunderbolt groups settled down to another winter interdicting the German supply lines across the North Italian Plain and through the Brenner Pass. During this stage rocket tube clusters, firing six 4.5in rocket projectiles of the 'Bazooka' type, were added to their inventory of underwing stores, followed by early examples of the terrible napalm fire bombs.

These activities continued well into 1945, brightened for the 86th FG on 1 December 1944 when that group's 527th Squadron shot down a Ju88 for its first air victory. February brought a limited resurgence of aerial opposition over north-west Italy. During an anti-flak diversion mission for medium bombers on 4 February, the 57th FG met over 15 Bf109s and Fw190s, losing two P-47s to these, while two days later aircraft from the 27th FG's 522nd Squadron met nearly 50 fighters, claiming three and four damaged, suffering severe damage to two Thunderbolts. On 8 February this group flew MATAF's 500,000th sortie of the war, but lost three aircraft to flak, with four more damaged. On 14 February however, the 27th and 86th FGs left Italy again, to rejoin XII TAC in France. The three remaining groups carried on their activities, continuing to see hostile aircraft from time to time. During March, the 79th FG was able to claim a single Bf109, but lost one P-47 in an air battle on

the 23rd over Udine. Me262 jets were occasionally encountered, but no conclusive engagements resulted.

The final Allied offensive in Italy began on 9 April 1945 with a massive air strike and continued with an exceptionally high degree of air support, achieving immediate and total success. Units were very busy, flying record numbers of sorties. The 57th FG for instance, flew 34 missions totalling 137 sorties on the 14th, 31 totalling 142 sorties on the 15th, and 36 with 152 sorties on the 17th. As always during such periods of intense activity, losses to ground fire tended to be heavy, and on the 23rd, 117 sorties resulted in the loss of six P-47s. Indeed, during the period 1 September 1944 to the end of the war, the 350th FG had Thunderbolts hit by ground fire 522 times, 53 of these aircraft being shot down. On 26 April came Tactical Air Force's last victory. Two strafing P-47s of the 57th FG's 66th Squadron were 'bounced' by a single Bf109, which was itself then shot down by Lt Roland E. Lee. Thus, the first and last claims in the Mediterranean were made by the same group. By the end of the month there was little more for the fighter-bombers to do, and on 2 May 1945, the German army in Italy surrendered.

Throughout this time the small force of US night fighters continued to give good service. The 415th NF Squadron had moved to France with XII TAC in August 1944, while due to lack of night raiders during the later stages of the war, the air echelons of the 416th and 417th Squadrons had been sent to fly on attachment with 9th Air Force night fighter units on the Western Front. While flying Beaufighters, the four squadrons had claimed 31 victories—ten credited to the 415th. A new squadron, the 427th, was sent to Italy late in 1944 equipped with Northrop P-61 Black Widow night fighters, but was posted to India in December before seeing any action. That same month, the 414th Squadron re-equipped with these new aircraft. As the remaining US night fighter unit in Italy during 1945, five victories were claimed with the P-61 to raise the squadron's total to 13—the highest score of the four. The 416th Squadron received a few Mosquitoes from the RAF, making one claim while flying these.



35. A section of P-51Ds of the 31st FG in flight late in 1944. The second aircraft, HL-C, is flown by Maj Leland P. Molland, commanding officer of the 308th Squadron (note 11 victory marks); the most distant aircraft, HL-B, is 'American Beauty', flown by Lt John J. Voll, 15th Air Force and Mediterranean Theatre US top-scorer with 21 victories. (USAF via R. L. Ward)

## STRATEGIC OPERATIONS OCT 1944–APRIL 1945

Following the hectic summer of 1944, operations during the autumn became very routine for the escort fighters of the 15th AF. Raids continued, but interception was increasingly rare. With four P-51 groups available the P-38s were relegated to close

escort for the bombers, which allowed few opportunities to indulge in such air fighting as did occur. The Lightning groups also took part in an increasing number of dive-bombing attacks on targets in Yugoslavia, northern Italy and Austria. Indeed, the 82nd FG received a number of 'droop-snoot' P-38s, incorporating a glazed nose with a position for a bomb-aimer. Leading formations of bomb-carrying Lightnings, these men pinpointed the targets and gave the signal for all pilots to release their bombs together whilst in level flight and at medium altitude. Trains also became a favourite target for attacks by P-38s, and the 1st FG particularly was to become very proficient at hunting them. Losses to ground fire were frequently severe, but the successes gained were substantial, as on 11 April

1945, when the 14th FG was able to claim 84 locomotives destroyed for the loss of three P-38s, and also to shoot down one German aircraft. One unfortunate event occurred on 7 November 1944 when 82nd FG aircraft attacking a convoy in Yugoslavia became inadvertently engaged in combat with Russian Yak 9s and Il-2s, shooting several down.

With little to be seen in the air on most occasions, the P-51s also indulged in regular strafing attacks on airfields, railways and road transport. Late in 1944 however, Allied reconnaissance Mosquitoes and F-5 Lightnings from Italy began reporting frequent interception by the new jet Me262s, and it became necessary thereafter to provide Mustang escorts for such flights. Several more really successful airfield strafes took place in October 1944, but by November even these targets were becoming scarce. Throughout the summer, a 31st FG pilot, Lt John J. Voll, had been scoring steadily and by the start of November was close behind the leaders, Green (18) and Varnell (17), both of whom had by then returned to the States. The 31st was to be involved in combat only twice in November, but Voll was present on both occasions. During the second, on 16 November, on the return flight from a raid on Munich, he chased a Ju88 over the Adriatic, but was attacked by a dozen fighters. He managed to claim the bomber and three of the fighters shot down, with hits on four more. This raised his score to 21—the first USAAF pilot in the Mediterranean Theatre to break the 20 barrier—and made him the 15th AF top-scorer of the war.

The first success for the 15th against one of the new jets came on 22 December when Lts Eugene P. McGlaufflin and Roy L. Scales of the 31st FG shot down an Me262 while escorting a PR aircraft over south Germany. The next such success did not occur until March 1945. By that time the area of territory still left to the Reich defenders had become so restricted that the chances of meeting some survivors of the Luftwaffe had risen markedly, and during the last few weeks of the war engagements were once more to occur almost daily. Frequently the 15th's opponents were to be Fw190s of the *Schlachtgruppen*, operating over the southern por-

tion of the Eastern Front. In a month which brought the 15th AF nearly 100 victories, the 325th FG was able to claim 20 for two losses over Nove Zamby on 14 March, while on the 31st during an attack on Linz, the 332nd FG claimed 13 and three probables, the 1st FG's P-38s claimed two, and the 31st FG caught more than 30 Bf109s north of Prague heading for the Russian lines, claiming 18 shot down, and adding three Fw190s immediately afterwards. Earlier, on 22 March, the 31st had engaged 25–30 Me262s over Ruhland, claiming one shot down and five damaged, but two days later over Berlin the unit was able to claim five of these jets, while the 332nd claimed three more for the loss of three P-51s.

The final combats occurred during April, beginning well when the 332nd claimed 12 in the Wels area on the 1st. On the 11th, two 52nd FG P-51s caught an Arado Ar234 jet bomber over northern Italy, claiming this as the first such aircraft to be shot down over the area. On a mission to the Augsburg-Munich area on the 18th, the 325th FG claimed an Me262, so that all the P-51 units now had at least one jet to their credit. Both opposition for the fighters and suitable targets for the bombers now began to disappear fast. The last combat occurred on the 26th, when four claims were submitted by the 332nd—the first for a week. During the latter part of the month, with no worthwhile strategic targets remaining, the 15th AF operated in a tactical role in support of the final Allied offensive in Italy. As this met with great success, the Axis front totally collapsing in swift order, the final sorties were flown by the 52nd and 325th FGs on 29 April. Since the introduction of the P-51 into action in mid April 1944, the fighters had in one year claimed 1,496 victories for 156 combat losses. The toll taken by the flak and other forms of ground fire during the strafing attacks which had encompassed a growing percentage of sorties later in the year, had been more severe, 232 fighters being lost to this cause. When the war ended in May 1945, 10 of the 15 USAAF fighter groups which had served in the Mediterranean area were still based there, seven with the 15th AF and three with the 12th AF. Of the other five, three were in France and two in the China/Burma/India Theatre. While

serving in the Mediterranean Theatre, the groups had claimed the following victory totals:

|                         |                   |
|-------------------------|-------------------|
| 31st Fighter Group      | 570               |
| 325th Fighter Group     | 534               |
| 82nd Fighter Group      | 500 approx        |
| 1st Fighter Group       | 435               |
| 52nd Fighter Group      | 421 $\frac{1}{3}$ |
| 14th Fighter Group      | 410               |
| 57th Fighter Group      | 184               |
| 33rd Fighter Group      | 131               |
| 79th Fighter Group      | 121               |
| 332nd Fighter Group*    | 110               |
| 324th Fighter Group     | 66                |
| 27th Fighter Group      | 56                |
| 350th Fighter Group     | 50                |
| 81st Fighter Group      | 2 a.l.            |
| 86th Fighter Group      | 2 a.l.            |
| Night fighter squadrons | 36                |

\*(including 17 earlier victories by the 99th FS.)

Some 155 pilots became aces while flying with the above units in the Mediterranean. Of these, 33 served with the 31st FG, 27 with the 325th FG and 26 with the 82nd FG. The most successful were:—

|                             |      |                     |
|-----------------------------|------|---------------------|
| Capt John J. Voll           | 21   | 31st FG             |
| Maj Herschel H. Green       | 18   | 325th FG            |
| Capt James S. Varnell       | 17   | 52nd FG             |
| Maj Samuel J. Brown         | 15.5 | 31st FG             |
| Capt James L. Brooks        | 13   | 31st FG             |
| Maj Robert C. Curtiss       | 13   | 52nd FG             |
| Capt Harry A. Parker        | 13   | 325th FG            |
| Maj Michael Brezas          | 12   | 14th FG             |
| Capt Norman C. Skogstad     | 12   | 31st FG             |
| Lt William J. Sloan         | 12   | 82nd FG             |
| Capt Robert J. Goebel       | 11   | 31st FG             |
| Lt John B. Lawler           | 11   | 52nd FG             |
| Maj William L. Leverette    | 11   | 14th FG             |
| Lt Wayne L. Lowry           | 11   | 325th FG            |
| Col Charles M. McCorkle     | 11   | 31st FG             |
| Maj Norman McDonald         | 11   | 52nd &<br>325th FGs |
| Maj Leland P. Molland       | 11   | 31st FG             |
| Capt Robert E. Riddle       | 11   | 31st FG             |
| Maj Levi R. Chase           | 10   | 33rd FG             |
| Capt Walter J. Goehausen Jr | 10   | 31st FG             |
| FO Frank D. Hurlbut         | 10   | 82nd FG             |

## LÉGENDES

1 Nouveaux P-40Fs du 57e FG en Egypte en camouflage sable et bleu azur. Le troisième avion dans la ligne est le sujet de notre image en couleur au profil. 2 P-40s du 65e FS 57e FG avec les numéros de fuselage en noir chiné, gouvernail jaune de série et ventre à bombes ou des maillons du citerne. 3 Le troisième type de chasseur américain de faire son baptême de feu était le Bell P-39, dont deux sont visibles, ici, avec le camouflage RAF. 4 P-40s du 79e FG utilisèrent le camouflage Olivâtre, par-dessus sable et cet appareil a une étoile d'insigne ternie sur le fuselage et le 'x' en préfixe au numéro individuel qui identifie le groupe et l'avion. 5 Un P-39 pendant la campagne tunisienne avec des points de repères inhabituels sur le fuselage peut-être du 154e OS ou 350e FG. 6 Avec un diamant jaune sur le cône indiquant le 314e FS, P-40 Fs du 324e groupe flanquant une rosée au terrain d'aviation tunisien en 1943. 7 Le 85e FS s'appelait les 'crânes volants' et ici, un P-40F montre l'insigne approprié. 8 Service du personnel australien un P-40F du 66e FS, 57e FG sur terrain d'atterrissage 175 pendant l'avance sur la Tunisie du Sud début 1943. 9 Un 93e FS P-39, du 81e FG, la lettre simple 'Q' identifie l'escadron dans ce cas (10). Un 1st FGP-38 en Afrique du Nord.

11 Le premier as d'USAAF en Afrique du Nord était Lt. Lyman D. Middleditch du 57e FG, qui gagna sa cinquième victoire le 27 octobre 1942 lorsqu'il descendit trois Bf109s. 12 Les premiers Mustangs au désert étaient des F-6A, avions de reconnaissance. Celui-ci est du 154e OS, montrant le drapeau US indiqué pour l'occupation des terrains d'aviateur au Maroc. 13 A-36A bombardiers à vol piqué commencèrent l'action en juin 1943, en attaquant des cibles sur l'île de Pantelleria aux mains du 27e groupe de bombardiers. 14 L'insigne national US du début de la guerre, avec du jaune autour, est visible sur ce P-38 du 37e FS avec son identification numérique. 15 Une scène à Maison Blanche, Algiers, mai 1943, avec des Spitfires, Havocs, Mitchells, C-47s-P-39s et un B-17 visibles. 16 Derrière l'épave d'un MC 202 italien, un 27e BG (L) A-36A est préparé pour une autre sortie. 17 Scène affairé au terrain d'aviation de Licata, Sicile, avec des P-40Ls du 33e FG devant et des A-36s décollant au fond. 18 Après les atterrissages à Salerne de septembre 1943, 308e Sqn. du 31e FG déplaça ces Spitfires Vs A Montecorvino. 19 Escorte de bombardier devient le 'fort' des groupes Lightning du nouveau 15e AF. Ici, une machine du 94e FS du 1er FG est à Catel Benito, Tripoli. 20 Un 'razorback' P-47D du 325e FG avant le bien connu 'checkertail' noir et jaune fut appliqué. Une machine 317e FS, qui partage un terrain avec un Halifax RAF.

21 Un des nombreux avions des Alliés déplacé vers Anzio, était ce P-51 (F-6A) du 111e TRS en train d'être

poussé dans un revêtement anti-charge d'explosifs. 22 Le 31e FG gagna 192 victoires avec des Spitfires au début 1944, dont un était ce Mk IX, du 309e FS. 23 Un de ces trois Spitfires qui atterrit en catastrophe en territoire ennemi à Borgotaro le 19 décembre 1943 était ce Mk IX du 4e FS, 52e FG. 24 Au printemps, 1944, le nouveau pavillon 'bubble' P-47D Thunderbolts atteignaient les 12e AF unités. Le second groupe de les recevoir était le 79e, représenté ici par un appareil du 85e FS. 25 Des P-47s razorbacks plus anciens étaient passés aux groupes A-36 lorsque les modèles plus récents arrivèrent. Ceux-ci venaient du 524e FS du 27e FG. 26 Les rayures rouges de l'empennage du 86e FG sont visibles sur ce P-47D, l'insigne du nez indiquant le 526e FS. 27 Le Bristol Beaufighter VI équipait quatre escadrons chasseurs de nuit 12e AF dans le MTO. Celui-ci, V 8694, vient d'un d'eux, la manque de points de repères des unités rendent difficile l'identification authentique. 28 L'insigne Fighting Cock et les bandes jaunes entourées de noir d'empennage signalent que P-47 est un appareil de vétérans du 57e FG 66e FS. 29 Deux groupes de Spitfires du 12e AF reçoivent des Mustangs P-51 nouveaux au printemps 1944, quand ils furent transférés au 15e AF. Cet appareil à empennage jaune est du 5e FS, 52e FG. 30 Des bombardements deviennent le travail de ces P-38s comme lorsque les Mustangs prirent le rôle d'escorte; cet avion, un P-38L du 96e FS, 82e FG, est sur une ligne de bombardements de basse altitude.

31 Un 308e FS Mustang du 31e FG, le Chasseur du groupe US au plus grand score dans le MTO, piloté par le CO, Colonel William A. Daniel. 32 Avec des P-47s le 350e FG accomplit des sorties de chasseurs bombardiers depuis septembre 1944. Voilà un alignement d'appareils du 347e FS avec l'avion du groupe CO Lt. Col. John Robertson, près de l'appareil à photo. 33 Le P-47D du Brazilian 1<sup>er</sup> Grupo devient un quatrième escadron du 350e FG fin 1944. Un des chasseurs bombardiers lourdement armé est visible ici. 34 Avec un chargement complet de citernes à bascule (drop tanks) pour leur donner une grande portée, ce P-47Ds sont depuis le 346e FS, 350e FG, avec Torrid. Tessie sans doute piloté par l'officier commandant. 35 Un quatuor de P-51Ds du 31e FG fin 1944. Le second appareil est piloté par Major Leland P. Molland, le 380e FS CO et le plus distant par Lt. Voll, dont l'avion est montré dans notre image en couleur à cinq volets.

### Notes sur les planches en couleur

Page 25: 1st Lieutenant, équipage, Mer Méditerranée: début 1943. Ce pilote porte des bleus de travail de mécanicien vert olivâtre, dans un tissu léger, souvent préféré dans des climats chauds. Le calot était souvent porté comme coiffure négligé, le gilet de sauvetage est standard, avec une ceinture à sangles pour pistolets avec un automatique, calibre .45.

Page 26 en haut: Curtiss P-40F du 65th Fighter Squadron 57e Fighter Group 9th Air Force, Egypte, 1942. La combinaison était une de plusieurs utilisées par le MTO à L'époque, avec un éclair RAF sur le plan dérive, indication du théâtre de guerre. Le numéro divisé du fuselage identifie l'escadron, qui utilisa la tranche de chiffres 40-69, comme les signalements rouges du nez. Habituellement cet avion avait des ergots d'échappement chromés.

Page 26 en bas: Spitfire Mk VIII piloté par 1st Lt. Leland P. Molland, Officier Commandant du 308e FS 31e FG, Amendola, Italie, février 1944 Le, camouflage fait partie de la combinaison standard britannique du désert. Le codes blancs se lisent X-HL, côté tribord, les signalements personnels étant seulement du côté bâbord. Ayant enlevé L'éclair du dérive, les chasseurs américains dans le MTO étaient identifiés par des hélices rouges comme on voit ici. Des numéros de série étaient rarement indiqués sur les Spitfire USAAF Mk VIII's.

Page 27: P-38J Lightning piloté par Lt. Donald D. Kienholz du 94e FS, 1st FG, 15e AF, Italie, février 1944. Camouflage standard gris olivâtre et gris neutre très altéré. Six mises à mort et nom sur le nez en blanc, 94e Sqn. couleur sur les bouts des ailes. L'identification de chaque avion par numéro, plutôt que par lettre n'était pas rare dans le MTO.

Pages 28-29: P-51D Mustang du 308e FS, 31e FG, 15e AF, San Severo, Italie, fin novembre 1944, piloté par l'as USAAF du plus haut grade au théâtre. L'avion est fini en métal naturel avec des marques d'empennage du 31e FG, avec imago rousse et marques d'identification du théâtre sur les ailes. Les bandes jaunes des ailes et marques d'identification du théâtre sur les ailes. Les bandes jaunes des ailes et du plan stabilisateur sont du type de marques d'identité utilisées premièrement sur des Mustangs dans le ETO.

Page 30: P-47 Thunderbolt, 65e FS, 57e FG, Grosseto, Italie, début 1944. OD altéré et finition grise avec l'encadrement de la carlingue. Les marques du théâtre habituellement sur le bord du capot seulement mais cette fois ci, sur le hublot de l'hélice aussi. Le numéro de l'avion est répété sur l'aile du bord d'attaque pour identification sur la ligne de vol et présenté derrière l'insigne national côté tribord, et devant côté bâbord. L'attribut de l'escadron sur le cône, des deux côtés.

Page 31: Les insignes des escadrons portés par des avions P-40/P-47 (A) 86e FS (B) 525e FS (C) 527e FS (D) 66e FS, (E) Marques personnelles, P-47-D, 325e FG.

Page 31 en bas: Ambulance typique US Army—Iltalie été 1944 avec des marques standards comme utilisés par le 883e Collecting Company, Peninsular Base Sector.

Page 32 à gauche: Captain 15e AF portant un mélange typique d'uniformes. La casquette, avec des bandes de rang sur la gauche et ganse noire d'officier, est la version

légère de la casquette de garnison. La chemise en laine grise verdâtre à des bandes de rang et l'attribut de l'Armée de l'Air, sous un blouson de campagne 1941 avec des insignes de rang sur les épaules. L'écusson du 15e AF est sur le bras gauche seulement et les pantalons sont ceux des officiers 'pinks'.

Page 32 à droite: WAC Private 1943-44. Beaucoup de femmes furent attachés aux US Air Forces pour du travail de Secrétaire et autres devoirs. Elle porte une robe de campagne WAC réglementaire, en gris verdâtre avec des insignes au col et à la casquette du service en forme d'aigle sur un disque en cuivre indiquant le personnel sous-officier. L'écusson de l'épaule gauche est celui du AAF.

## ÜBERSCHRIFT

1 Neue P-40Fs der 57th FG, Ägypten. Tarnfarben Sand und himmelblau. Die dritte Maschine der Linie ist als Farbtafel (Seitenansicht) zu sehen. 2 P-40Fs des 65th FS, 57th FG mit Rumpferkennungsnummern schwarz schattiert, Schwanzflossnummer in gelb. Unterm Rumpf sind die Bomben-oder Treibstoffzusatzbehälteranbringungsrichtungen zu sehen. 3 Der dritte amerikanisch Jagdflugzeugtyp, der in den Kampf zog war der Bell P-39. Hier zwei davon in RAF Tarnfarben. 4 P-40Fs der 79th FG mit olivegrüner Tarnfarbe über dem Sandanstrich. Der Rumpfstern un 'X' Erkennungsnummeransatzbuchstabe (Gruppe- und Flugzeugerkennungszeichen) sind auch matt. 5 Eine P-39 während der Feldzug in Tunesien. Die Rumpfmarkierungen sind ungewöhnlich—vielleicht vom 154th OS oder von der 350th FG. 6 P-40Fs von der 324th Group im Tiefflug über einem Flugplatz in Tunesien, Sommer 1943. Die gelbe Raute an der Spitze bedeutet—'314th FS'. 7 Der 85th FS nannte sich die 'Flying Skulls'; hier das Abzeichen auf eine P-40F. 8 Australische Bodenpersonal bedienen eine P-40F des 66th FS, 57th FG auf 'Flugplatz 175', Frühling 1943, während dem Vorstoss auf Südtunesien. 9 Eine P-39 vom 93rd FS, 81st FG (Buchstabe 'Q' = 93rd FS). 10 Eine P-38 der 1st FG, Nord Afrika.

11 Das erste USAAF Fliegeras in Nord Afrika war Lt. Lyman D. Middleditch der 57th FG. Am 27. Oktober 1942 vernichtete er drei Bf 109s und erreichte damit seinen fünften Luftsieg. 12 Die ersten Mustangs in der Wüste waren F-6A Aufklärungsmaschinen. Die hier gezeigte Maschine war vom 154th OS und trägt die amerikanische Fahne, die für die Besitznahme der marokkanischen Flugplätze angebracht war. 13 Diese A-36A 'Stukas' hatten Juni 1943 ihre Feuertaufe als sie Ziele auf den Pantellarienseln angriffen. Damals dienten sie mit der 27th Bombardment Group. 14 Das frühe, gelb umrandete US-Hoheitsabzeichen und die Erken-

nungsnummer sind hier auf dieser P-38 des 37th FS zu sehen. 15 Maison Blanche, Algerien, Mai 1943. Spitfires, Havocs, Mitchells, C-47s, P-39s und eine B-17 sind anwesend. 16 Im Vordergrund das Wrack einer italienischer MC202; dahinter wird eine A-36A der 27th BG (L) für den nächsten Einsatz vorbereitet. 17 Vollbetrieb auf dem Flugplatz Licate, Sizilien! Im Vordergrund P-40Ls der 33rd FG; im Hintergrund starten einige A-36s. 18 Im Zuge der Landungen bei Salerno, September 1943, waren diese Spitfire Vs vom 308th SqN, 31st FG nach Montecorvino vorgeschoben. 19 Bombenbegleiteinsätze wurden zum Forte Für die Lightning-Gruppen der neuen 15th AF. Hier eine Maschine vom 94th FS, 1st FG bei Castel Benito, Tripoli. 20 Eine 'Razorback' P-47D vom 317th FS, 325th FG. Die wohlbekannte schwarz-gelb karierten Schwanzfloss wurde erst später eingeführt. Eine RAF Halifax ist auch zu sehen.

21 Eine der vielen alliierten Flugzeuge, die nach Anzio vorgeschoben wurden war diese P-51(F-6A) vom 111th TRS hier wird sie in eine explosionsichere Futtermauer eingeführt. 22 Die 31st FG erkämpfte 192 Luftsiege mit Spitfires im Frühjahr 1944; eine davon war diese Mk IX vom 309th FS. 23 Eine Spitfire (es waren drei im ganzen) die Notlandungen im Feindesgebiet um Borgotaro am 19. Dezember 1943 machen müsste. Diese war eine Mark IX vom 4th FS, 52nd FG.

24 Bis Frühling 1944 waren nur einige Einheiten der 12. AF mit den neuen Blasenkanzelhelmen für P-47D Thunderbolts ausgerüstet. Die zweite Gruppe an der Reihe war die 79th; hier eine Gruppenmaschine vom 85th FS. 25 Die ältere 'Razorback' P-47s wurden durch neuere ersetzt und gingen nach den A-36 Gruppen über. Diese Alten Maschinen sind vom 524th FS, 27th FG. 26 Diese P-47D ist von der 86th FG (rote Schwanzflossstreifen); das Rumpfspitzenemblem heisst: '526th FS'. 27 Vier Nachtkampfstaffeln der 12. AF waren mit Bristol Beaufighter VI Maschinen in der MTO ausgerüstet. Die hier gezeigte Maschine, V8694, war eine davon. Da keine Staffelerkennungsmarkierungen zu sehen sind, bleibt eine zuverlässige Identifizierung aus.

28 Das 'Fighting Cock' Emblem und die schwarz umrandeten gelben Schwanzflossstreifen deuten an der Tatsache hin, dass diese P-47 ein Veteran der 57th FG's 66th FS ist. 29 Zwei Spitfiregruppen der 12th AF wurden im Frühling 1944 mit den neuen P-51 Mustang Jagdmaschinen ausgerüstet und nach der 15th AF übersetzt. Diese Maschine mit dem gelben Schwanzfloss ist vom 5th FS, 52nd FG. 30 Als die Mustangs die Begleitrolle übernahmen, waren die P-38s für das Bomben und die Bodenunterstützungsaufgaben eingesetzt. Diese P-38L vom 96th FS, 82nd FG macht hier einen Bombeneinsatz im Tiefflug.

31 Die US Jagdgruppe mit den meisten Luftsiegen der MTO was die 31st FG. Hier ein Mustang vom 308th FS,

Pilot der Kommandeur—Col. William A. Daniel. 32 Ab September 1944 waren die P-47s der 305th FG auf Jaboaufgaben eingesetzt; diese Maschinen sind vom 347th FS. Das Flugzeug nächst der Camera gehört dem Gruppenkommandeur Lt. Col. John Robertson. 33 Diese P-47Ds der Brasilianischer 1° Grupo wurden im Spätherbst 1944 der 4. Staffel der 350th FG. Man sieht hier eine schwerbewaffnete Maschine der 1° Grupo. 34 P-47Ds vom 346th FS, 350th FG, mit Zusatzwegwerftriebstoffbehälter um die Reichweite möglichst zu steigern. 'Torrid Tessie' wurde vermutlich vom Chef selbst geflogen. 35 Ein quartett P-51Ds der 31st FG, spät 1944. Die zweite Maschine wird vom 308th FS Staffelfler, Maj. Leland P. Molland, die hinterste von Lt. Voll (dessen Flugzeug auf Farbtafel fünf erscheint) geflogen.

#### Farbtafeln

Seite 25: 1st Lieutenant (Flieger) Mittelmeer, Frühjahr 1943. Dieser Pilot trägt die olivgrüne Bodenmechanikerkombination in leichtem Stoff, die im warmen Klima bevorzugt war. Die leichte Kasernenmütze wurde oft als Kopfbedeckung im Dienstanzug getragen. Die Lebensretungsweste ist vorschriftsmässig; der Segelstoffgürtel trägt den Halfter für die, 45 Kalibrige automatische Pistole.

Seite 26 Oben: Eine Curtiss P-40F vom 65th Fighter Squadron, 57th Fighter Group, 9th Air Force, Ägypten 1942. Das Farbschema hier zeigt war nur eine von vielen Möglichkeiten, die in dem MTO zu dieser Zeit zu sehen waren. Die Erkennungsmarke war das RAF-Schwanzflossesblem. Staffelerkennungsmerkmale waren die Getrennte Rumpfnnummer (40-69) und die roten Rumpfspitzenemblem. Die ungewöhnlichen, gechromten Auspuffröhre beachten!

Seite 26 Unten: Die Spitfire Mk VIII, die von 1st Lt. Leland P. Molland, Chef des 308th FS, 31st FG Amendola, Italien, Februar 1944 geflogen wurden. Man sieht die vorschriftsmässigen britischen Wüstenfarben. Auf der Steuerbordseite erscheinen die Buchstaben 'X-HL'; das persönliche Wappen erscheint nur auf der Backbordseite.

Nach Abschaffung der Schwanzflossesblemen, wurden amerikanische Jagdflugzeuge in der MTO lediglich durch die roten Propellorknäufe, wie hier, ausgezeichnet. Es war äusserst ungewöhnlich Standnummern auf USAAF Spitfire Mk VIII zu sehen.

Seite 27: Vier Nachtkampfstaffeln der 12th AF waren mit Bristol Beaufighter VI Maschinen in der MTO ausgerüstet. Die hier gezeigte Maschine, V8694, war eine davon. Da keine Staffelerkennungsmarkierungen zu sehen sind, bleibt eine zuverlässige Identifizierung aus

Seiten 28-29: Diese P-51D Mustang vom 308th FS, 31st FG, 15th AF, bei San Severo, Italien wurde im spät-November 1944 vom leitenden Fliegeras der USAAF im

Mittelmeer geflogen. Das ganze Flugzeug ist metallfärbig mit Schwanzflossmarkierungen von der 31st FG, rotem Knauf und Kriegsschauplatzerkennungseembleme auf den Flügeln. Die gelben Flügel- und Schwanzstreifen wurden zuerst auf Mustangs in der ETO getragen.

**Seite 27:** Eine P-47D Thunderbolt, 65th FS, 57th FG, Grosseto, Italien, Frühjahr 1944. Die olivgrüne und graue Tarnfarben sind ziemlich mitgenommen; die Metallteile der Kanzelhaube sind nicht angestrichen worden. Die Kriegsschauplatzmarkierungen sind hier sowohl auf Motorhaube und Propellorknauf zu sehen, normalerweise aber nur auf der ersten getragen. Die Flugzeugnummer ist auf den Flügelvorderkanten und auf den Rumpfsseiten (hintern Hoheitsemblem an der Steuerbordseite; vordem aber auf der Backbordseite) getragen. Zu beiden Seiten der Rumpfspitze erhebt das Staffelembem.

**Seite 31 Oben:** Staffelembeme, die auf P-40/P-47 Flugzeuge getragen wurden: (A) 86th FS, (B) 525th FS, (C) 527th FS, (D) 66th FS, (E) persönliche Wappen, P-47D, 325th FG.

**Seite 31 Unten:** Typische US Army Krankenwagen, Italien, Sommer 1944. Die Markierungen sind von der 883rd Collecting Company, Peninsular Base Sector.

**Seite 32 Links:** Captain, 15th AF in typischer Uniform. Das Schiffchen mit Dienstgradabzeichen links und schwarzem Offiziersvorstoss war eine leichtere Ausführung der Garnisonmütze. Das olivwollene Hemd ist mit Dienstgradabzeichen und Air Force Waffengattungsabzeichen geschmückt und ist hier unter der Feldjacke M 1941 (die Dienstgradabzeichen auf den Schultern hat) getragen. Das Abzeichen der 15th AF ist nur auf dem linken Oberarm getragen; die Hosen sind die vorschriftsmässigen 'Pinks' der Offiziere.

**Seite 32 Recht:** WAC Private, 1943-44. Viele Frauen wurden den U.S. Army Air Forces für Geschäftszimmer- und andere Dienste zugewiesen. Diese Frau trägt vorschriftsmässige WAAC Dienstanzug in olivgrün mit Waffengattungsabzeichnung (für 'Mannschaften' einen Adler auf einem Kreis) zu der Mütze und dem Kragen. Das Abzeichen an der linken Schulter ist das der AAF.

# AIRCAM/AIRWAR

---

A series of books written and illustrated by leading military aviation specialists, building into a connected history of the operations of the world's major combat air forces – the men, the missions, the machines, the markings.

First twelve titles:

- 1 RAF Fighter Units, Europe, 1939-42**
- 2 USAAF Heavy Bomber Units, Europe & Mediterranean, 1942-45**
- 3 Spanish Civil War Air Forces**
- 4 Luftwaffe Ground Attack Units, 1939-45**
  
- 5 RAF Bomber Units, 1939-42**
- 6 Luftwaffe Fighter Units, Europe, 1939-41**
- 7 USAAF Medium Bomber Units, Europe & Mediterranean, 1942-45**
- 8 USAAF Fighter Units, Europe, 1942-45**
  
- 9 Luftwaffe Night Fighter Units, 1939-45**
- 10 RAF Fighter Units, Europe, 1942-45**
- 11 Luftwaffe Fighter Units, Russia, 1941-45**
- 12 USAAF Fighter Units, Mediterranean & Italy, 1942-45**

**MIT DEUTSCHE ÜBERSCHRIFT  
AVEC LÉGENDES EN FRANCAIS**