

315th FIGHTER SQUADRON



MISSION

LINEAGE

315th Fighter Squadron constituted, 24 Jun 1942

Activated, 6 Jul 1942

Inactivated, 7 Nov 1945

STATIONS

Mitchel Field, NY, 6 Jul 1942

Philadelphia, PA, 6 Jul 1942

Grenier Field, NH, 23 Oct 1942-31 Jan 1943

El Kabrit, Egypt, 29 Mar 1943

Tunisia, 14 Apr 1943

Kairouan, Tunisia, 2 Jun 1943

El Haouaria, Tunisia, 18 Jun 1943

Menzel Heurr, Tunisia, 3 Oct 1943

Cercola, Italy, 27 Oct 1943

Pignataro Maggiore, Italy, 10 May 1944

Le Banca Airfield, Italy, 7 Jun 1944

Montalto Di Castro, Italy, 15 Jun 1944

Corsica, 19 Jul 1944

Le Luc, France, 22 Aug 1944

Istres, France, 1 Sep 1944

Amberieu, France, 6 Sep 1944

Tavaux, France, 17 Sep 1944

Luneville, France, 2 Jan 1945

Stuttgart, Germany, 3 May-20 Oct 1945
Camp Shanks, NY, 6-7 Nov 1945

ASSIGNMENTS

324th Fighter Group, 6 Jul 1942-7 Nov 1945

WEAPON SYSTEMS

P-40, 1942-1944

P-47 1944-1945

P-40F

P-40L

P-47D

COMMANDERS

HONORS

Service Streamers

None

Campaign Streamers

Tunisia

Sicily

Naples-Foggia

Anzio

Rome-Arno

Northern France

Southern France

Rhineland

Ardennes-Alsace

Central Europe

Air Combat, EAME Theater

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

Distinguished Unit Citations

North Africa and Sicily, [May-Jul] 1943

Cassino, 12-14 May 1944

French Croix de Guerre with Palm

EMBLEM



The Patches of the 315th -- The original patch of the 315th, at left, was designed in Manchester, New Hampshire, and worn by the squadron until Italy. Bugs Bunny reclining on a cloud cradling a 50-caliber machine gun was conceived in recognition of Capt. George Armstrong, squadron commander, whose remarkable ability to imitate cartoon character voices could lighten any social occasion. Thus, the 315th was unofficially known as the "Bugs Bunny" squadron until March, 1943, when squadron commander Major Edward Sanders had the designation changed to the "Crusaders," at right, which most agreed better fitted the seriousness of the outfit's mission and accomplishments.

MOTTO

NICKNAME

OPERATIONS

THE 315TH FIGHTER SQUADRON was activated at Philadelphia Municipal Airport on July 6, 1942. The 324th Fighter Group along with the 314th Fighter Squadron were already activated at Baltimore, Maryland and the 316th Fighter Squadron at Norfolk, Virginia. In late October, the 315th moved to Grenier Field at Manchester, New Hampshire, for training. At about the same time, the other two squadrons and the 324th Fighter Group headquarters moved initially to Kabrit in Egypt near Great Bitter Lake through which passes the Suez Canal and then shortly up the North African coast to join the 57th and 79th Fighter Groups in support of the British 8th Army, which, under General Montgomery, was fighting in the Libyan desert against the German and Italian forces under the command of General Erwin Rommel.

The 315th didn't deploy when the others went overseas because more than half our pilots were transferred out at midsummer to form a squadron to provide replacement pilots for the 33rd Fighter Group. So we got in the new pilots to replace those who had been transferred out. So training continued at Philadelphia and at Grenier Field at Manchester, New Hampshire, after we moved there.

Three months later, in late January, 1943, at Grenier Field, we received orders sending the Squadron overseas. The first orders said destination undetermined. Later secret orders said we were going to Cairo, Egypt. Of course, we actually went to Kabrit, Egypt, where the 57th and 79th had already been.

WE WENT IN TWO SEPARATE GROUPS. Each group took a different route. Departing Grenier on January 31st, 1943, the ground echelon went by train to Camp Stoneman at San Francisco, California. There, on February 14th they boarded the USS West Point, formerly the luxury liner America, which had been converted to a troop ship.

The next day, February 15th, the West Point steamed out under the Golden Gate Bridge and headed west across the Pacific Ocean. There were more than 10,000 troops and a 2500-man crew on board -- not exactly a luxury cruise. Two meals a day.

The first stop was Melbourne, Australia. Three days in port with one day ashore for the troops. Then on to Bombay, India, with another day ashore.

Next continuing on through the Indian Ocean and up through the Red Sea to Suez, Egypt, docking on March 29, 1943 -- forty three days after leaving San Francisco. Then from Suez by train up to destination, the British Air Field at Kabrit on the Suez Canal, east of Cairo. The ground echelon had gone more than halfway around the world!

The 315th Squadron flight surgeon, Captain Robert McLaughlin, with pilots Lieut. Ken Scheiwe and Lieut. Don Kristufek at West Palm Beach, Florida, waiting for a flight to South America and across the South Atlantic to West Africa.

MEANWHILE, the 315th air echelon, including Captain George Armstrong, the Squadron Commander, and 26 other pilots and the flight surgeon, Doc Laughlin, went by train to Morrison Field, West Palm Beach, Florida and after a few days there on to Miami. There we boarded a Pan American Airways, four-engined airliner. The plane took us first to South America, then across the Atlantic Ocean to Accra, Ghana, by way of a fueling stop at Ascension Island in the mid Atlantic.

From Accra we went by an AAC C-47 to the British Air Field at Lagos, Nigeria. There, a group of American civilian mechanics under contract to the Douglas Aircraft Company were assembling new P-40Fs which had been sent by ship.

After assembly, we slow-timed the aircraft. Then, in separate flight of about 7 aircraft each, we flew the airplanes across Central Africa to Khartoum, making refueling stops and overnight rest stops at Macadam landing strips laid out in the desert, mostly at French Foreign Legion posts. At each refueling the gasoline would be poured into our aircraft tanks by native workers. They would open up a wing tank, put a chamois skin over the opening to keep out the sand and pour the gasoline in by hand from five-gallon British gasoline cans. It took a lot of five-gallon tins even to fill up a P-40.

WE HAD NO MAPS and no crystals in our aircraft radios. So each flight followed an A-20. The A-20s, on their way to Russia, were flown by American Service pilots who were familiar with the route. Doc Laughlin rode in one of the A-20s.

At Khartoum, Sudan, the A-20s left us. After an overnight stop we flew north to Cairo following the Nile River, stopping at Wadi Halfa and Luxor for refueling. Although our secret orders read Cairo, we knew the destination was Kabrit, so over Cairo the flight I was with turned to 90 degrees east and shortly were landing at Kabrit air station.

AT KABRIT, WE WERE THANKFULLY REUNITED WITH THE GROUND ECHELON. The ground echelon had gone more than halfway around the world in one direction, and the air echelon went around in the other direction, and by a miracle of operational and logistical planning, we rejoined at Kabrit on the Suez Canal.

Do you remember the Bobby Shafto movie theater at Kabrit where birds flew in and out through holes where the high ramshackle walls and the ceiling came together? And people playing "chase the flashlight beam reflection" on the screen before the movie started. I remember those things and the very large bed bugs in the sleeping quarters. After training at Kabrit, we moved up into combat in April 1943 at Kairouan, Tunisia. There we flew with the veteran 79th Fighter Group. My flight records show a first combat mission flown on April 21st, 1943.

After the African campaign ended in May, 1943, we moved up to Cape Bon to the dry lake bed at El Houaria. Here the 324th Fighter Group was all together for the first time. We softened up Sicily and covered the beachhead for the Sicilian invasion, which started on July 10, 1943. The 99th Fighter Squadron (all black) flew with us as a fourth squadron at El Houarouri.

After Sicily was conquered and the Italian invasion was successful, the Group moved in October 1943 to Italy at an airstrip at Cercola, east of Naples at the base of Mt. Vesuvius.

We participated in the long and difficult Italian campaign. You'll remember that Mt. Vesuvius was kind enough to erupt for us while we were there and give us a once-in-a-lifetime show. From Cercola, the Group moved north to Caserta. After the successful Anzio beachhead landing, which we supported, we moved to a flying strip on the beach itself. We continued to support the American Army advance as they moved rapidly up through Italy.

AT NIGHT WE WATCHED GERMAN AIRCRAFT BOMBING THE AMERICAN SHIPS in the Anzio harbor as we had watched them bomb the harbor at Naples when we were at Cercola. One night I recall a German aircraft dive bombed the airfield. Everybody ducked or hit the trenches. No damage from the bombing.

After Anzio we thought we might move to an airfield just outside Rome, but no such luck. The ground forces were moving north so quickly that the Group moved to Montaldo de Castro on the west coast of Italy, 80 miles northwest of Rome.

The advance party arrived there a day after the Army ground forces had taken over the field. At Montaldo the Group continued to fly in support of the ground forces and in "Operation Strangle." On the 6th of July we celebrated the second anniversary of the Group's activation by receiving a Presidential Unit Citation and having a bang-up beach party. As I recall there was a USO show involved. A number of people got dunked in the Tyrrhenian Sea including some USO cast members.

Guests of honor were Major General John K. Cannon, the Commander of the 1st Tactical Air Force and Brigadier General Gordon P. Saviels (sp?) the head of 12th Tactical Air Command. They didn't get dunked.

ALSO IN MONTALDO IN JULY 1944, the Group converted from P-40s to P-47s. [We felt some] nostalgia for the P-40s, but the P-47s were bigger and better, with more firepower.

From Montaldo de Castro, shortly after mid July 1944, we moved across the Tyrrhenian Sea to the airfield at Gisonochia, in Corsica, which we shared with a B-25 group. We softened up Southern France and covered the successful Southern France invasion of the 7th Army on August 15, 1944.

The American Army forces moved north rapidly and we moved briefly from Corsica to an airfield northwest of Monte Carlo, Franco, then quickly to Istres, the big French Air Force base near the southern coast of France.

From Istres we moved north to Lyon, then to Dole Faveaux southeast of Dijon. I don't need to remind you that there was a lot of effort involved in those rapid moves. The next move in January 1945 was to Luneville, France and finally to Germany at a field near Stuttgart, which was the last overseas base of the 315th's long odyssey.

Air Force Order of Battle
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Sources

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