

# MEMORIAL BOOK

## 50th ANNIVERSARY



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## 86th Fighter Bomber Group 50th Anniversary History

The history of the 86th Fighter Bomber Group began on 10 February 1942 when the Unit was activated at Will Rogers Field, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, General Order No. 5, Hq. Third Air Force, Tampa, Florida. Following months of staffing and organization the Unit was transferred to Key Field Air Base, Meridian, Mississippi, arriving there on 7 August 1942.

On 1 September 1942, the Unit was redesignated from Light Bombardment to Dive Bomber and authorized A-24 and A-31 type Aircraft. The Unit was finally redesignated a Fighter/Bomber Unit in September 1943. Varied travel routes brought the Unit from Meridian, MS. to Camp Kilmer, NJ. and on to the POE at New York City on 27 April 1943.

The trip to Algeria, North Africa, via Army Troop Transport (the SS John Erikson) ran from 27 April to 11 May 1943. Thru 11 June 1943. the Unit settled in at LaSenia Air Base, Algeria, where Combat Operations were initiated by detached service of 86th pilots to other combat units at Kediouna, Morocco and Tafaraoui Air Base, Algeria. and finally, to North Korba, Tunisia, thru 21 July 1943.

Detached Service and Staging Areas thru 21 September included Bizerte, Tunisia, and W.Gela, Barcellona, and Milazzo, Sicily. Many Sorties were flown in the battle for Sicily and several pilot losses were incurred.

The first squadron "Sortie" was flown by Lt Wilson B. Gilliland on 3 July 43 while on detached service with the 27th Bomb Group flying over SW Sicily. The first Squadron "Mission" was lead by the Unit Commander, Capt. Reginald D. Winters, on 7 July 1943 along with Capt. Stell, Lt. Dorris and Lt. Gilliland, bombing and strafing railyards, buildings and factories at Mazara, Sicily. This flight was attack by German aricraft with Lt Stell being wounded and his plane dammaged by enemy gunfire. The record does not reflect the type aircraft being flown by the 86th pilots at the time, nor just when the A-36 Apache (Mustang) was assigned the unit, but it is assumed to be upon the beginning of operations in North Africa at Laceria, Algeria.

Combat losses were heavy during the initial phases of Air Operations, including the Unit Commander, Capt. Reginald Winters on 10 July 1943. Also:

Lt. Glen Stell	(wounded)	7 July 1943
Lt. Charles Place	(wounded)	12 July 1943
Lt. Robert Hood	(wounded)	16 July 1943
Lt. John Torland	(MIA)	18 July 1943
Lt. Francis McCarroll	(MIA)	18 July 1943
Lt. Harold Sittler	(KIA)	18 July 1943

It was a bad day on the 18th of July, 1943

First landings were made in Italy at Sele Air Field on 23 Sept 43 near the invasion beachhead at Salerno. A great number of Close Air to Ground Missions were flown in support of the Ground Forces in and around the Salerno/Naples area.

