

# 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 aircraft with Lt Stell being wounded and his plane damaged 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 Lacia, 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.

Unit air-crew losses continued heavy during this phase of Air Operations. However, the many missions flown by the 86th and her Sister Units enabled the Ground Forces to expand the beachhead area by many miles. Thus allowing for new Unit moves from Salerno to Pomigliano Air Field near Naples, Italy on 12 October 1943

The 86th Ftr/Bmr Gp missions were becoming very successful as the Unit gained combat experience. A typical combat day as taken from the Unit History can be stated as follows:

"One of our good days today. We ran nine missions, destroyed many enemy aircraft on the ground, strafed many trains and motor vehicles, all destroyed. Attacked by German fighters and shot down two FW 190's and one unknown monoplane. Later attacked by 4 FW 190's and two ME 210's. Got an ME 210 and damaged a couple 190's".

Major Command efforts were to continually move the combat units as near the front lines as possible to cut down on flying time from Base to the combat zone. This enabled many of the pilots to make 3 and 4, 45 minute flights each day, bombing and strafing, while getting a one mission credit. Some of these short flights were used to deliver food, coffee and ammunition to front line troops trapped on mountain sides. It was something to see the poor little A-36 trying to get off the ground with two big eight foot long, two foot in diameter canvas container bags hanging from the bomb racks of each wing. Often the para-drop chutes popped open in flight, making the aircraft a candidate for quick and violent contact with the ground. Most were lucky enough to jettison the whole bag before crashing. Others didn't make it.

Leaving Pomigliano on 30 April 1944, the Unit moved a few miles north to Marcianise Airfield near Caserta, Italy. Such moves sound easy and common place but no one just came in and moved us. It took lots of packing and creating work by Unit personnel, by engineers preparing a "battered" airfield for combat use, or building a new airfield out of farm land, and our troops setting up our assigned areas for combat operations. Such moves took much planning, preparation and hard work by all unit personnel, and is a task that should be recognized.

Much Unit activity during this period was flown in support of the Anzio Beachhead just southwest of Rome. This was a bloody battle and Unit losses were heavy during this offensive. It was common to see the Squadron troops counting the returning aircraft, only eight or ten out of the flight of twelve that departed. These air operations continued for about two weeks until the Allies took over the area south and west of Rome.

On June 11th the Unit moved up to Ciampino Airfield just south of Rome. In a few days the Allies took over the City and the celebrations ran "out of control" while Headquarters granted a general "stand down" of Air Operations. Most of the 86th personnel ventured into town and were greeted with a robust welcome by the People of Rome. It is noted that Rome

