

## 353<sup>rd</sup> COMBAT TRAINING SQUADRON



### MISSION

### LINEAGE

353<sup>rd</sup> Fighter Squadron constituted, 12 Nov 1942  
Activated, 15 Nov 1942  
Inactivated, 31 Mar 1946  
Redesignated 353<sup>rd</sup> Fighter-Day Squadron, 28 Sep 1956  
Activated, 19 Nov 1956  
Redesignated 353<sup>rd</sup> Tactical Fighter Squadron, 1 Jul 1958  
Redesignated 353<sup>rd</sup> Combat Training Squadron

### STATIONS

Hamilton Field, CA, 15 Nov 1942  
Tonopah, NV, 19 Jan 1943  
Santa Rosa AAFM, CA, 2 Mar 1943  
Portland AAB, OR, 4 May-6 Oct 1943  
Greenham Common, England, 4 Nov 1943  
Boxted, England, 13 Nov 1943  
Lashenden, England, 17 Apr 1944  
Cricqueville, France, 17 Jun 1944  
Gael, France, 11 Aug 1944  
Orconte, France, 16 Sep 1944 (operated from St Dizier, France, c. 14 Nov-3 Dec 1944)  
Rosieres-en-Haye, France, 3 Dec 1944

Ober Olm, Germany, 7 Apr 1945  
Ansbach, Germany, 1 May 1945  
Herzogenaurach, Germany, 15 May 1945-15 Feb 1946  
Bolling Field, DC, 15 Feb-31 Mar 1946  
Myrtle Beach AFB, SC, 19 Nov 1956-22 Apr 1966  
Myrtle Beach AFB, SC 15 Jul 1971

### **DEPLOYED STATIONS**

Aviano AB, Italy, 17 Sep 1959-15 Jan 1960

### **ASSIGNMENTS**

354<sup>th</sup> Fighter Group, 12 Nov 1942-31 Mar 1946  
354<sup>th</sup> Fighter-Day Group, 19 Nov 1956  
354<sup>th</sup> Fighter-Day (later Tactical Fighter) Wing, 25 Sep 1957

### **WEAPON SYSTEMS**

P-39, 1943  
P-51, 1943-1944, 1945-1946  
P-47, 1944-1945  
P-40F  
P-39D  
P-39L  
P-39N  
P-39Q  
P-51B  
P-51C  
P-51D  
P-47D  
F-100, 1956  
F-100F

### **COMMANDERS**

Maj Owen M. Seaman, 26 Nov 1942  
Cpt Richard A. Priser, 26 Dec 1943  
Cpt Jack T. Bradley, 26 Jan 1944  
Cpt Don M. Beerbower, 30 Jun 1944  
Cpt Wallace N. Emmer, 9 Aug 1944  
Capt Felix M. Rogers, 9 Aug 1944  
Maj Jack T. Bradley, 1 Oct 1944  
Cpt Glenn T. Eagleston, 26 Oct 1944  
LTC John H. Brown, #1957  
Maj Felix Rogers

### **HONORS**

### **Service Streamers**

None

### **Campaign Streamers**

Offensive, Europe

Air Normandy

Northern France

Rhineland

Ardennes-Alsace

Central Europe

Air Combat, EAME Theater

### **Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers**

### **Decorations**

Distinguished Unit Citations

ETO, [Dec] 1943-15 May 1944

France, 25 Aug 1944

French Croix de Guerre with Palm

1 Dec 1943-31 Dec 1944

Air Force Outstanding Unit Award

1 Oct 1962-31 Dec 1963

### **EMBLEM**



Over a red disc a black wedge pointing downward surmounted by a sky blue disc edged black; springing through the blue disc from a yellow field behind it, a ferocious black panther, pupils of eyes black, tongue red, eyeballs yellow, claws teeth, and highlights white; jagged, broken parts of disc turned back, lined white; on upper edge of red disc six white stars, three on either side of the

wedge. **SIGNIFICANCE:** emblem symbolizes our squadron's mission. Red is the squadron color while blue represents the sky, our theater of operations. The black wedge symbolizes the driving force of the TAC team while the three stars on either side indicate the triple threat of the TAC team; strafe, bombing, and rocketry. The panther represents aggressiveness, symbolizing the squadron's striking force through air power. The yellow background is significant of the explosive firepower developed by the aircraft's weapons. The four claws on the panther's left paw represent four aircraft in close formation, and the five claws on the right paw stand for the five phases of our combat effectiveness. The nine teeth represent the nine phases of striking power which we are capable of delivering; medium altitude, high altitude, low angle strafe, high angle strafe, low angle rocketry, high angle rocketry, skip bombing, low angle dive bombing, and high angle dive bombing. (Approved, 27 Aug 1957)

## **MOTTO**

## **NICKNAME**

## **OPERATIONS**

Air defense in US, 1943. Combat in ETO, 1 Dec 1943-8 May 1944

The 353rd Fighter Squadron was activated at Hamilton Field, California, November 15, 1942. The First Commanding Officer was Major Owen M. Seaman. By December 7, 1942, the squadron had reached a total strength of 3 officers and 29 enlisted men, among whom were 1st Lt. William M. Schubert and 2nd Lt. B.M. Thompson, the latter being assigned as squadron adjutant. Corporal Charles W. Decker was selected to be acting First Sergeant and the squadron was getting under way.

Almost daily groups of enlisted men were received in the squadron, with the principal sources of personnel being Hammer Field, California and Paine Field, Washington. Organization Day as decided by a meeting of the squadron staff personnel, was set for December 7, 1943 and at the same date for each year following as long as the squadron was in activation.

Seven officers and 189 enlisted men entrained at Hamilton Field on January 18, 1943 for Bombing and Gunnery School at Tonopah, Nevada. During this time 2nd Lts. Don M. Beerbower, Jack T. Bradley, James Canon and John Montijo, all flying officers, joined the squadron. Lt. Bradley was appointed Operations Officer, and the rest as Flight leaders. The squadron passed through its training period with a remarkably low accident rate for which achievement they received a letter of commendation. One incident of note occurred on May 30, 1943 while the squadron was participating in gunnery practice, 1st Lt. D. M. Schultz found it necessary to bail out of his ship. The parachuting pilot landed atop the hospital which was to be his home for several weeks.

The squadron left the staging area at Camp Kilmer on October 20, 1943 at full strength. It is possible that those who arranged for the transportation placed them on the right ship. Embarkation, however, was SNAFU in every respect. Landing in England, the squadron finally found its dubious way to Boxted, the pilots having previously checked out in P-51s. Here much sweat and

tears altered the face of the base. Areas were cleaned up, fences erected, parking areas designated and roads cleared of inches of mud.

One morning, the squadron sent out its first combat mission. Our squadron was led by Major Owen M. Seaman with Lts. Jack T. Bradley, Don M. Beerbower, Wallace N. Ernmer, Buford M. Eaves and James W. Kerley. The date was December 1, 1943. This group mission was led by Lt. Colonel Donald M. Blakeslee and marked the first use of Mustangs by the USAAF Units in the ETO.

A "First" was recorded in this squadron when 1st. Lt. Glenn T. Eagleston attacked an ME 110, killing the rear gunner and knocking out the right engine thereby earning the squadron's and the group's first claim as a probable. Another "First" for Lt. Eagleston was recorded when he was the first pilot to "hit the silk." His oil line had been shot away and he nursed his plane back over the channel as far as England where he was forced to leave his ship.

On December 16, 1943, Major Owen M. Seaman, the squadron C.O., was lost in the North Sea and was replaced by Captain Robert L. Priser, transferred from the 355th Fighter Squadron. He was in turn succeeded by Captain Jack T. Bradley, who assumed command of the squadron after Captain Priser was lost in combat over the Brussels area.

Long planned, long expected, long awaited, a squadron party took place on February 15, 1944, at Colchester's Red Lion Inn. With beer for the thirsty and food for the hungry, with an orchestra for the athletic and informality for the greater success of the affair, all present believed the party worth waiting for. Early in the evening no women were to be found (plans for escorting WACS, ATS and civilian girls having gone awry) and the pilots offered each of the first ten men to procure women a bottle of Scotch. Ten prizes were awarded in a matter of minutes. Ten men looked at their partners, then at the bottles-and decided that, after all the Scotch was worth it.

On February 21, 1944, 2nd Lt. Don McDowell emerged as the second Mustang Pilot in this theater to claim three enemy aircraft in one day, his claim being two ME-109s and one ME-110 destroyed. Briefly scanning the totals for the month of February, the squadron participated in 13 missions, claimed 29 enemy aircraft destroyed, 1 probably and 16 damaged besides numerous ground targets with the loss of five pilots.

On March 4, Mustangs flew over Berlin and two days later went back again, demonstrating the greater range and future possibilities of the P-51. Later the same month we added another first to our list when the squadron carried 500-pound bombs on a dive-bombing mission. Moving to Lashenden, Kent, the fighter did less escort work and carried bombs more and more. On the third mission in April, the squadron returned to happy hunting grounds around Brunswick for a penetration support show. In the midst of the four-hour long mission, the bomber box to which our squadron was assigned was tapped by 75 plus enemy aircraft, giving the boys an opportunity of bringing back a large collection of assorted scalps. From this encounter the squadron claimed 12 enemy planes destroyed, 1 probably destroyed and 9 damaged.

By June 30, 1944 all personnel had been moved to Strip A-2, near Criqueville, France. The squadron flew 33 dive-bombing missions to reach a new high. Rapidly the squadron was reaching its place in the sun, consistently out-flying the enemy over his own soil. An outstanding mission was accomplished on July 26 when Squadron Leader Emmer led a fighter sweep to the St. Lo area. They attacked 40 plus ME109s, odds five to one, spearheaded an intercepting maneuver to prevent them from reaching the clouds. They destroyed 8 enemy aircraft with no losses. For his leadership in this encounter, Captain Emmer was awarded the DSC.

From landing strip 31, at Gael, another memorable mission was accomplished on September 12th, when Capt. Charles E. Brown led 16 ships on a fighter sweep in the Frankfurt area. After strafing an airdrome near Limburg, destroying 7 JU-88s and a FW-190 parked about the field they attacked a formation of 40 plus FW-190s just north of Frankfurt. These enemy aircraft were supported by 20 plus ME-190s flying top cover. Our ships returned from this mission in elements of two, some landing at other fields. The final score was 32 aircraft destroyed, 8 of which were on the ground.

A quick summary of the squadron's achievements on October 21, 1944, just one year since embarking for the ETO, show that the outfit's total claims against the enemy were: 239 enemy aircraft destroyed, 14 probable and 106 damaged. Add to this untold and incalculable numbers of enemy material on the ground and it substantiates the faith in the squadron by high army officials. The ratio between our aircraft shot down and Jerries was ten to one. It was during the month of October that Lt. Colonel Jack T. Bradley moved up to Group; Captain Glenn T. Eagleston taking up his duties as Squadron Commander, while Captain James B. Dalglish became Operations Officer.

Just before moving from the dark pungent mud of A-66 to the lighter variety at A-98, the 353rd lost its Mustangs and was assigned its first Thunderbolts. It was with sad hearts, that the men parted from the slim, sleek Mustangs, bearing the proud names of "My Buddy"..... "Margie Maru", "Angel's Playmate", and "Bonnie B", which meant something all the way to Kiel and Berlin, and even Poland.

The 353rd Fighter Squadron came to a new beginning, a new year with their squadron letters "FT" painted on the bulging sides of the Republic work horses. Pilots made transition flights and ground crews toyed with their new engines, while technical talk flew around the area concerning power checks and water injection. The end of it was that a combat mission took off, found some Jerries and shot down nine of them. To the squadron there was nothing unusual about that but TAC clapped its hands with delight-no Thunderbolt Squadron had ever reached that score before.

Captain Kenneth H. Dahlberg established a unique record in that he destroyed four enemy aircraft in the air twice, on successive missions. Before he was lost as Prisoner of War near Meckel, he had destroyed 15 enemy aircraft in aerial combat, had received the Air Medal with 15 Oak Leaf Clusters, the DFC with one cluster, the Silver Star, as well as the Purple Heart.

Best news of the year came in the announcement of the return of the Mustangs to the Group. They were ferried in from England, 36 of them, circling the field before making a series of low passes, flying in flights abreast over the squadron areas and down the runways. After an intensive week of

shakedown inspections and test hops, the Mustangs got off the bumpy runway in less than eight minutes on their first mission.

Lts. Andrew J. Ritchey and Cary W. Salter participated in a more than routine weather reconnaissance. On April 2, 1945 they observed two FW-190s preparing to land at an airdrome near Erfurt, which they destroyed. Continuing on their original mission they shot down other FW-190s with belly tanks (90 plus estimated), evidently intent on bombing the roads and bridges which were jammed with Allied traffic moving in pursuit of the Jerry. They fearlessly bounced the leading elements causing them to scatter. They had to break off their attack because of fuel shortage, but not before they had vectored other groups to the vicinity. Their total claims amounted to three FW-190s destroyed by Lt. Ritchey and one FW-190, one ME-109 destroyed and another FW-190 damaged by Lt. Salter.

In succeeding missions from advanced bases in Germany, the squadron continued to add to their reputation as the leading fighter squadron in the ETO, terminating the war with a box score as follows: 400 E/A destroyed, 16 probable and 162 E/A damaged. The Squadron has produced some 20 Aces, and shares proudly its Distinguished Unit Citation and Cluster thereto with the rest of the Pioneer Mustang Group.

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In 1956 the unit was reactivated as the 353d Fighter Day Squadron, flying North American F-100 Super Sabres out of Myrtle Beach AFB, SC. where it operated until being reassigned to the 401st Fighter Wing in Torrejon, Spain. The unit converted to the LTV A-7D Corsair, when the 511th Tactical Fighter Squadron was reassigned to the 354th Fighter Wing, and later re-designated as the 353d Tactical Fighter Squadron, at Myrtle Beach AFB, on 15 Jul 71 becoming the wings first A-7 unit.

On 12 Oct 1972 the unit deployed to Korat RTAFB, Thailand, participating in combat operations in the Vietnam War. The unit returned stateside in Jan 1973 and then two months later they redeployed to Korat RTAFB and participated in operations until the bombing halt on 15 Aug 1973. The 353rd dropped the last bomb of the war on 15 Aug 1973. Returning to Myrtle Beach the unit continued operating the A-7 until 1978, when it was reequipped with A-10's.

In 1991 the unit participated in Operation Desert Shield/Storm, where it supported ground forces with attacks on enemy armor and motorized gun divisions.

February 15 1991: Two combat losses A-10S 78-0722 and 79-0130 were both 353rd TFS aircraft. The pilots; CPT Steve Phyllis was killed and LT Rob Sweet was captured.

The unit remained at 'the Beach' until the base was closed during the restructuring of the Air Force in 1992. On 20 Aug 1993 the unit once again was reconstituted along with the wing at Eielson AFB in Alaska.

In August 1993, the 353d was briefly reactivated as a fighter squadron, but a year later it was redesignated as a Combat Training Squadron. It's assigned mission was to coordinate and direct PACAF's premier training exercise, COPE THUNDER. Additionally, it was given oversight and management of the largest air training complex in the world, the 67,000 square mile Pacific Alaska Range Complex. Though the exercise has been renamed RED FLAG-Alaska, the 353 CTS mission remains unchanged

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Air Force Order of Battle

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#### Sources

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