

355 FIGHTER SQUADRON



MISSION

The 355 Fighter Squadron is tasked to provide mission ready A/OA-10s as well as search and rescue capability, in Alaska and deployed sites worldwide. With a dual role A/OA-10 squadron commitment and night vision goggles, the squadron has the ability to deploy forward air controllers with attack aircraft for a complete day and night employment capability. The 355 FS also provides air liaison officers for the 172d Stryker Brigade Combat Team (SBCT), providing advice, as ground forward air controllers, on the use of fighters and the tactical employment of close air support assets.

LINEAGE

355 Fighter Squadron constituted, 12 Nov 1942
Activated, 15 Nov 1942
Redesignated 355 Fighter Squadron, Single-Engine, 21 Aug 1944
Inactivated 31 Mar 1946
Redesignated 355 Fighter-Day Squadron, 28 Sep 1956
Activated, 19 Nov 1956
Redesignated 355 Tactical Fighter Squadron, 1 Jul 1958
Inactivated, 30 Sep 1970
Activated, 1 Nov 1970
Redesignated 355 Fighter Squadron, 1 Nov 1991
Inactivated, 31 Mar 1992
Activated, 20 Aug 1993

STATIONS

Hamilton Field, CA, 15 Nov 1942
Tonopah, NV, 20 Jan 1943
Hayward AAFld, CA, 4 May 1943
Portland AAB, OR, 3 Jun–6 Oct 1943
Greenham Common, England, 4 Nov 1943
Boxted, England, 13 Nov 1943
Lashenden, England, 14 Apr 1944
Cricqueville, France, 18 Jun 1944
Gael, France, 14 Aug 1944
Orconte, France, 21 Sep 1944 (operated from St. Dizier, France, c. 18 Nov–1 Dec 1944)
Rosieres-en-Haye, France, 1 Dec 1944
Ober Olm, Germany, c. 4 Apr 1945
Ansbach, Germany, 1 May 1945
Herzogenaurach, Germany, c. 15 May 1945–15 Feb 1946
Bolling Field, DC, 15 Feb–31 Mar 1946
Myrtle Beach AFB, SC, 19 Nov 1956–5 Jul 1968
Phu Cat AB, South Vietnam, 5 Jul 1968
Tuy Hoa AB, South Vietnam, 15 May 1969–30 Sep 1970
Myrtle Beach AFB, SC, 1 Nov 1970–31 Mar 1992 (operated from Korat RTAFB, Thailand, 10 Oct 1972–16 Mar 1973 and 15 Oct 1973–26 Apr 1974; King Fahd, Saudi Arabia, 15 Aug 1990–2 Aug 1991)
Eielson AFB, AK, 20 Aug 1993

DEPLOYED STATIONS

Adana AB, Turkey, 15 Jul–26 Oct 1958
Aviano AB, Italy, 19 May–17 Sep 1959 and 10 Sep 1960–16 Jan 1961
Hahn AB, Germany, 5 Sep–19 Nov 1961
Aviano AB, Italy, 7 Jul–14 Oct 1962
McCoy AFB, FL, 21 Oct–1 Dec 1962
Elmendorf AFB, AK, 6–20 Feb 1963
Incirlik AB, Turkey, 3 Jul–17 Sep 1963
Orland, Norway, 8–15 Jun 1964
Aviano AB, Italy, 15 Jun–28 Aug 1964 and 2 Jul–25 Sep 1965
Incirlik AB, Turkey, 4 Dec 1965–23 Apr 1966
Phu Cat AB, South Vietnam, 3 Feb–4 Jul 1968

ASSIGNMENTS

345 Fighter Group, 15 Nov 1942–31 Mar 1946
354 Fighter-Day Group, 19 Nov 1956
354 Fighter-Day (later, 354 Tactical Fighter) Wing, 25 Sep 1957
113th Tactical Fighter Wing, 22 Apr 1968
37 Tactical Wing, 5 Jul 1968
31 Tactical Fighter Wing, 19 May 1969–30 Sep 1970
354 Tactical Fighter (later, 354 Fighter) Wing, 1 Nov 1970–31 Mar 1992

354 Operations Group, 20 Aug 1993–.

ATTACHMENTS

Seventeenth Air Force, 15 Jul–26 Oct 1958, 19 May–17 Sep 1959, 10 Sep 1960–16 Jan 1961, 7 Jul–14 Oct 1962, 3 Jul–17 Sep 1963; 8 Jun–28 Aug 1964, 2 Jul–25 Sep 1965, and 4 Dec

1965–23 Apr 1966

50 Tactical Fighter Wing, 5 Sep–19 Nov 1961

2 Air Division Provisional, 21 Oct–1 Dec 1962

Alaskan Air Command, 6–20 Feb 1963

3 Tactical Fighter Wing, 3 Feb 1968–4 Jul 1968

354 Combat Support Group, 15–16 Aug 1990

Tactical Fighter Wing Provisional, 354, 20 Dec 1990–2 Aug 1991

WEAPON SYSTEMS

P–39, 1943

P–51, 1943–1944, 1945–1946

P–47, 1944–1945

F–100, 1956–1970

A–7, 1970–1977

A–10, 1978–1992

COMMANDERS

Capt George R. Bickell, 26 Nov 1942

Capt Robert W. Stephens, 12 Apr 1944

Maj Maurice G. Long, Sep 1944

Maj Marshall Cloke, 19 Oct 1944

Maj Gilbert F. Talbot, 26 Feb 1945

Lt Col Quentin Rideout

HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

World War II

Air Offensive, Europe

Normandy

Northern France

Rhineland

Ardennes-Alsace

Central Europe

Air Combat, EAME Theater

Vietnam

Vietnam Air Offensive, Phase II
Vietnam Air Offensive, Phase III
Vietnam Air Ground
Vietnam Air Offensive, Phase IV
TET 69/Counteroffensive
Vietnam Summer-Fall, 1969
Vietnam Winter-Spring, 1970
Sanctuary Counteroffensive
Southwest Monsoon
Vietnam Ceasefire

Southwest Asia
Defense of Saudi Arabia
Liberation and Defense of Kuwait

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

Distinguished Unit Citations
ETO, [Dec] 1943–15 May 1944
France, 25 Aug 1944

Presidential Unit Citations
Southeast Asia, 1 Jul–31 Dec 1968
Southeast Asia, 10 Oct 1972–30 Apr 1973

Air Force Outstanding Unit Awards
1 Oct 1962–31 Dec 1963
3 Feb–30 Jun 1968
1 Nov 1970–31 May 1972
1 May 1974–30 Apr 1976
1 Jan 1978–31 Mar 1979
1 Jul 1985–30 Jun 1987
1 May 1990–15 Mar 1992

French Croix De Guerre with Palm
1 Dec 1943–31 Dec 1944

Republic of Vietnam Gallantry Cross with Palm
22 Jan 1968–31 Aug 1970

EMBLEM



Over an Air Force Blue disc fimbriated White, bordered Silver-Gray, edged White, a peregrine falcon swooping downward to attack, wings up, head and underwings White, leg feathers, and backs of wings Black, beak and talons Air Force Golden Yellow, eyes Red, breast and face around eyes Silver-Gray; on the border between the wing tips in chief four stars and below wing tip in sinister one star, all in perspective White shaded Black; White outlines and details on leg feathers and back; Black outlines and details on head, wings and talons. **SIGNIFICANCE:** The falcon literally and figuratively conveys a sense of the attack, symbolizing to all members of the squadron the single-minded attention to the primary mission for which they must strive. The object of the attack is not shown, suggesting thereby the limitless range of fruitful targets for our efforts in peace and war. The circular background represents the unity of purpose to which our squadron is dedicated, with each part equally important to the whole. The blue disc suggests the sky where our power holds sway. The gray unknown and the stars represent the individuality, in contrast that something the squadron encompasses within the framework of the united team. The Air Force blue and Air Force yellow colors indicate we are a unit of the U.S. Air Force. (Approved, 25 Jun 1957; replaced emblem approved, 10 Apr 1943)

MOTTO

Pugnacious Pups

OPERATIONS

When he was given the assignment of organizing and training fighter-pilots and men for combat, the nucleus of the 355 Fighter Squadron, at Hamilton Field, California. Captain George R. Bickell was looking toward the Land of the Rising Sun. He hoped that through his leadership, his pilots would make a name for themselves in smashing back at the Jap. This month of November, 1942 was less than a year after the Pearl Harbor disaster. . . Captain Bickell had seen that holocaust and had flown P-40 aircraft off Navy carriers during the Battle of Midway. But there was another Big League shaping up in the skies of Europe in which he was to play a major role. "Uncle George", Commanding Officer of the 355 Squadron, was slated to eventually be Group Commander of the Pioneer Mustangs, not only in the latter days of the Air Battle over Germany, but as the Pioneers supported the Army in the invasion of France. He would stand before this Group on May 7, 1945 to announce to his men the Victory in Europe.

Organization at Hamilton Field was completed by the middle of January 1943. An advanced detail of officers and men were sent to the Tonopah, Nevada, Bombing and Gunnery Range for training in P-39 Airacobra aircraft.

Second Lt. Bowers Espy, Squadron Adjutant, established a working administrative system and basic training program for the enlisted men of the squadron. During this transition period, in the lonely, barren desert country, new friendships sprang up; the new Squadron insignia, the "Pugnacious Pup," stamped an individuality of intrinsic value into the growing 'esprit de corps' of the 355 Squadron.

On the first of March, with gunnery training completed, the officers and men of the 355 Squadron, now better acquainted, moved on to another station. The new set-up at Hayward Army Airdrome, Hayward, California developed within the outfit a rich personality. The 355 was to continue as a very separate and distinct entity for awhile . . . on its own. It was an unique opportunity to operate 80 miles apart from the parent Group and affiliated squadrons at Santa Rosa, Calif. At Hayward the Squadron attained the Group's highest training efficiency record, proving that the almost laissez-faire policy of Group was actually an incentive to the men of the 355 Squadron. Americanly, freedom was appreciated obvious by the outstandingly superior work accomplished at Hayward.

By the first of June our personnel, ready for final training, moved to Portland, Oregon Army Air Base. Many new pilots were joined to train for combat. By intense work, loyalty and cooperation in every department an impressive and highly commendable record was attained by the Pugnacious Pups as they readied themselves for the big job ahead. Flights were being made to all points in Oregon and some missions even took the pilots out to sea. We were a part of the defense set-up in the Northwest, being on the alert for possible attacks by units of Emperor Hirohito's dishonorable fleet. On the 18th of August the Squadron moved to

Troutdale, Oregon, for maneuvers to simulate combat conditions. With this experience, the junior pilots had completed the last course in the training program qualifying them for combat.

September was the month of parties and goodbyes. Wondering, speculating as to whether crossing the Atlantic or the Pacific was in the offing. On October 6th we departed from Portland, Oregon, by train, making our way across the United States to Camp Kilmer, New Jersey. On October 20th, after being refitted at Kilmer, we walked up the gangplank into the liner Athlone Castle. We were headed for England, a large number of merchant ships made up convoy, we were protected by men-of-war. Everyone was glad to see Liverpool. After two weeks at sea in crowded, uncomfortable quarters, stepping on solid earth was quite a satisfaction.

Greenham Common was the first stop, affording a slight orientation to life in England before we journeyed to Colchester, in East Anglia, the site of one permanent station, Boxted Airdrome.

Scarcely two weeks after getting settled in the cold, damp Nissen huts at Boxted, the pilots of our Squadron had completed transition training with a new type fighter, the P-51B. Our first mission was flown on the first of December. Led by Lt. Col. Don Blakeslee of the 4th Fighter Group, the Group flew over St. Omer airdrome in France. The 355 Squadron line-up, headed by Major Bickell, included Lts. M.G. Long, "Deacon" Talbot, "Bob" Stephens, "Cousin" Lasko, "Peter" Nacy, Crocker, Dieterich and Pate.

On December 13, just a month after the first pilots had checked out in the Mustang fighter, we made history by escorting bombers all the way to Kiel, Germany. On the 16th of December, near Bremen, Germany, Lt. Charles F. Gumm shot down the first enemy plane to be destroyed by the P-51B Mustang.

In the first month of 1944, our pilots were probing even more deeply Krautland, with missions being flown to Frankfurt, Brunswick and the Halberstadt-Oschersleben area. Lt. "Red" Emerson's plane got very badly shot-up over Kiel. "Red" brought it back safely, although the Mustang looked like a sieve. A piece of shrapnel had made an ugly gash on his neck; his parachute harness had been severed by another hunk of steel. Dazed and weakened by loss of blood, Emerson flew his plane across the North Sea to England, landing his craft without the aid of brakes, in extremely poor visibility.

By the end of February "Uncle" George Bickell's "Bulldogs" had gained confidence in combat experience. Some of our friends had not returned from the long missions into Germany. March first marked another tragedy which clouded our spirits. Lt. Gumm first ace of our Group was killed at the little Village of Nayland, not far from our field. He experienced engine trouble while on a training flight. While avoiding crashing into the town, his aircraft struck a tree, was thrown out of control and destroyed.

The first super-long distance escort missions to Berlin, five and more hours at a stretch, were very tiring for our pilots. They soon toughened to the long grinds, however, and managed to

keep their nightly dates in Colchester at the "Red Lion" and the "George."

On April 10th, Captain "Bob" Stephens was elected to be our new Commanding Officer. Lt. Col. George Bickell was promoted to Assistant Group Commander. We were preparing for a move to Southern England, to an advanced landing strip. The invasion of France was imminent and, as we were the most experienced Fighter Group in the Ninth Air Force, the Tactical Air Force we were sure to be given an important part in supporting the invasion. The lull before the storm . . . spent at Lashenden Advanced Landing Strip near Headcorn, Kent was enjoyable in most respects. Of course there were times when we were restricted to the post but we had plenty of work to do and clubs and sports to keep our minds occupied. When we did get off the base, Maidstone and the surrounding villages afforded much social material.

The "storm" broke on the night of June 5th. The "gen" on the invasion of France . . . our part in the landings was given to us in a briefing. Our pilots took off that night and escorted the first C-47's and their gliders to the Utah beach section of the proposed landings. After the ice was broken our pilots were flying very long hours, the maintenance crews were right in there pitching every minute. We were carrying bombs to hit marshaling yards, bridges, convoys destroying the enemy's supply lines.

Our advance party had left for France and were to land on Omaha Beach on June 17th. The night before our first landings a strange phenomenon occurred back at Lashenden, our rear echelon was startled and amazed by the appearance of the V-1 flying bomb. Ack-ack crews went berserk (trying to knock down the strange weapons) seriously menacing the "health" of the Base in their wild firings. Then, too, the bombs came over our area, headed for London, on all too numerous "trolley lines". Three of our pilots went up to chase them one night. "Joe" Powers took off first at 1845 and destroyed 2 and 1/2 buzz-bombs before landing at 2330, dusk (one of his victories was destroyed over the field creating quite a thrill for the men, making them dash for their fox-holes).

The 355 Squadron area was all setup for operations at A-2, near Criqueville, Normandy, long before the rear echelon arrived. The boys really sweated to arrange dispersal and living areas for efficient operation. What a terrific inspiration we had now! Everyone felt part of the machine, a cog in the machinery of the largest and strongest invasion force the world has ever seen. The esprit de corps of the "Pugnacious Pups" was at its very highest ebb, at A-2, morale problems were completely absent. Our pilots were flying constantly . . . taking advantage of the excellent weather to smash all German communications that appeared in their gunsight. Some really terrific aerial combat with Jerry aircraft occurred at frequent intervals. Much of the flying at A-2 was patrol work, however.

We left the "dust-bowl" in Normandy, three weeks after the breakthrough at St. Lo, to set up camp at Gael Airdrome, a rather beat-up Jerry base, on Brittany. Brittany's welcome was the warmest our Squadron would experience in all its traveling. There was good food to be had in Brittany, and beautiful girls to "promenade" with soldiers on Sundays. The "Bulldog" Squadron had the best location for camp at A-31. Weather was still ideal for camper outers. We were

close to our fight line, on rather high ground.

Flights off A-31 took our pilots to the outskirts of Paris to support General Patton's Third Army in its drive on Paris. Brest was a hard nut to crack many strafing missions and dive-bombing missions were aimed at weakening resistance of the strongly held French port.

The 355 Squadron made history on the 25th of August. In two terrific aerial battles, 25 of our aircraft destroyed as many Jerry planes to set a theater record for in-the-air kills for one squadron in one day. Major Stephens and Capt. Emerson each led Squadron formations as the Jerries apparently browned-off at Patton's success in breaking through the Paris defenses sent up huge gaggles of FW-190's and Me-109's. Capt. Emerson, Lt. King and Lt. Foye each claimed three Krauts destroyed in-the-air; Capt. Long accounted for 2 and 1/2 enemy fighters; Major Stephens, destroyed two and Lt. Davis one and 1/2 Jerry planes.

On the 15th of September we moved from A-31 to an airstrip called A-66, on the bank of the Marne River, near St. Dizier. Our Squadron erected its tents among long rows of poplar trees between meadows in which cows and sheep grazed. Being close to the river, our men took advantage of the cool waters of the Marne swimming was popular. Before long, weather soured up missions became infrequent. Our new C/O, Major Maurice G. Long started a few building projects to keep the men occupied, time was hanging a bit heavily, and this lack of activity was somewhat of a let down.

Before we had been settled a month at our new location, the Marne River threatened to engulf our living area so we were obliged to wallow through the mud to slightly higher ground.

On November 9th the Marne River decided to flood us out properly. Everyone pitched in to salvage equipment for a third location on the so-called airfield. Our airstrip was out of commission the whole site was a sticky sea of mud. Some operations, supporting the Third Army's drive into the Siegfried line defenses were flown from A-64, St. Dizier, an airfield already crowded with every type of combat plane imaginable. Trucks transported men back and forth the eight miles from the flight line.

Nasty rumors made their way into camp around the latter part of November. The rumor became a reality. Our Squadron and the whole Group was to fly P-47 Thunderbolts. Spirits of both crew-men and pilots dropped to a low. It was quite a come-down at first to an outfit whose whole core, had been formed around the P-51 Mustang. We took this change-over in stride, however, and by the time we moved into our new tent-city at A-98, Rosieres, near Nancy, France our pilots were well on the way to becoming expert throttle-jockey's on the new "thunderbuckets." Armament had a tough job to accomplish in changing over to P-47s but they soon had a smoothly running bomb-up and re-arming section. Our pilots were right in the thick of the fight to throw the hatred Krauts back into Germany during Rundsted's Ardennes offensive. Flying in poor visibility, we pounded the attacking columns with all the bombs and 50-caliber shells we could muster into the air.

It was extremely cold and windy at A-98, snow had fallen and the airfield was in the throes of winter when Christmas time came along. Jerry happened by on many a night in December, strafing and bombing sporadically, indirectly causing our fox-holes to become deeper each night.

Dances for officers and men were plenty and popular. Many romances resulted from our association with the friendly French native folk.

In February our Squadron defied "Ole Man Winter" to stage a show, variety type, in which many of our Squadron personnel came forth with hidden talent. This month was coldest of them all. Over a foot of snow lay about . . . icicles hung from tent ropes and mess-hall buildings. It was biting chilling to make that trip out to the little tarpaper covered building about 50 yards from the tent area. Stoves were keeping tents and line shacks warm. The pilots had an ex-circus tent in which to keep their flying equipment the mess-halls were the most civilized of all the buildings. Our missions were taking us up north of Trier and along the Moselle River, smashing at the retreating stubborn German armies. Direct cooperation with Armored Force and Infantry units gave the pilots first-hand views of the current situation

The pilots were living out at Saizerais, stacked two-deep in rooms of an old house in the nearby village. On the 17th of February, P-51s came back with a bang, making pilots and crewmen happy, even those who didn't work directly with the plane felt the "old thrill" as the Mustangs screamed in for a peel-up. Our C/O, Major "Deacon," Talbot, was happy to see the morale of his personnel pick up 200%.

On March 23, Major Talbot's formation covering the Rhine crossing at Gernsheim, attacked and destroyed 7 of 15 Jerries who came into the area to attack the Third Army as it pushed over the river.

Soon after the first of April, we packed up again and headed for Airstrip Y-64, at Mainz. Our Mustangs were flying deep into Germany 'clobbering' Kraut convoys, rail-movements, and airfields. 355 Mustangs attacked an airfield near Czechoslovakia on the 15th of April, claiming 29 aircraft destroyed and 30 damaged, on-the-ground claims. Y-64 was rather a novelty, being our first location on an ex-Jerry base in the Fatherland. Every other man had either a motorcycle, a motorbike, an automobile or a bicycle. At times the roads looked like speedways. Men were bunked in barracks and the officers of the Group all lived together in one huge house.

Our last move before the end of the war took us to the luxurious living quarters at Ansbach, R-45 Airstrip where the hangar space was large enough to park most of our aircraft indoors. By the first days of May we knew that the so-called super-race had "had it." Our missions took us into Austria where the last remnants of transportation that Jerry could muster were being smashed. Some of our pilots journeyed down to Friedberg, near Munich, where they found some of our ex-pilots in a German prisoner of war camp. The liberated men told us tales of the "goon-camps" and the forced marches in which they had participated.

On the night of May 7th, "Uncle" George Bickell, the man who had organized the 355 Squadron and trained it for the combat we were to experience in Europe, as our Group CO now announced Victory in Europe. Our officers and men celebrated the night gloriously and ingloriously but the war was terminated.

We moved to Herzongernaurach, Airstrip R-29, on May 18th, where we were permanently assigned. Under our new C/O, Major Lowell K. Brueland, a training program was initiated for all personnel at R-29 many of our personnel attended the school at Group. But one thought overshadowed all others in the mind of the average soldier. That thought was to get home to the families and friends we had left behind. The Jerry aircraft that had been scrounged were lots of fun to work on and to fly. An athletic program, shows and parties were diversions. But the winter ahead did not appeal to the average member of "Pugnacious Pup" Squadron.

With the ending of the war in the Pacific most of those dreams of being home for Christmas were to be realized. By the 22nd September almost all of the original members of our Squadron were on their way home a mere cadre, composed of "low-pointers" remained under the direction of a few faithful men who had elected to complete some unfinished business.

Certainly none of us want to see another war, to say nothing of being an active participant. But if any of us are so unfortunate as to be chosen to have home again to take care of another messy business such as this war has been. We all hope to be lucky enough to be assigned to another outfit like the 355 Squadron, where we have met many good friends and experienced the best in fellowship, teamwork, and spirit.

The history of the 355 TFS "Fighting Falcons," from January of 1968 until June of 1969, was unique in the annals of Air Force history. During 1968 the 355 TFS changed from a regular Air Force unit composed almost entirely of recent SEA returnees to a composite squadron consisting of approximately 50 percent ANG pilots and 80 percent ANG enlisted personnel, only to change back again by mid-1969. A brief history is required to explain this unusual of circumstances and to highlight the resultant accolades of a largely forgotten ANG force.

On 26 January 1968, the 355 TFS was ordered to deploy as a self-sufficient F100D/F squadron to Phu Cat AB, RVN, for a 90 day Temporary Duty (TDY) assignment. To meet this commitment, the unit was deployed as an augmented squadron consisting of 343 maintenance personnel and 23 pilots, 18 of which had completed F-100 tours in SEA. Due to Air Force policy, the 18 returnees, plus many of the enlisted personnel who had also accomplished tours in SEA, could remain TDY in SEA for only 60 days. Therefore, a significant part of the squadron would need to be replaced by the end of March, 1968. some replacements were made at the end of March with "regular" personnel from Luke and Cannon Air Force Bases.

Further complicating the issue was the fact that on 5 April 1968 the squadron was notified that the 90-day TDY had been extended to 179 days. Additionally, the 355's parent Wing, the 354th TFW, had been temporarily retired pending assignment to Korea. Therefore, on 22 April 1968

the squadron was assigned to the 113th TFW, which had moved to the 355's "home" station of Myrtle Beach AFB, South Carolina. The 113th TFW was composed of the 119th TFS, New Jersey ANG (Atlantic City), and the 121st TFS, Washington, D. C. ANG (Andrews AFB, Maryland). These two squadrons had been activated in January in response to the situation in Korea. Consequently, starting in May further SEA pilot replacements for the 355 TFS were drawn from the federalized ANG resources.

The first two ANG aircrews, both from Atlantic City, New Jersey, arrived at Phu Cat AB on 14 May, 1968. Additional ANG pilots arrived on 22 May, 20 June, 22 June, and 24 September, 1968. The combat checkout for the ANG pilots was rapid and efficient due to their vast F-100 experience, in which they averaged 1850 flight hours, 450 of which was in the F-100. For example, special flight lead waivers were given to two ANG pilots, after 10 combat missions, because of their "vast experience and superior skill." The ANG personnel responded to their new environment with "absolute professionalism," and their transition was "flawlessly completed."

On 26 June 1968 the squadron was informed that the 355 TFS would be permanently assigned to Phu Cat and become a part of the 37th TFW on 5 July 1968. The pilots, both regular and ANG, and the enlisted personnel, all regular Air Force at this time, who had not completed a SEA tour were given the opportunity to volunteer to convert their TDY to a one year commitment in Vietnam. All 13 eligible ANG pilots volunteered to remain with the squadron for one year rather than terminate their tours at the completion of their TDY.

The enlisted personnel who could not, or did not, volunteer to stay for one year were largely replaced with ANG personnel. Therefore, by the end of December, 1968, 13 aircrews (43 percent of total) and 112 enlisted personnel (87 percent of total) of the 355 TFS were ANG personnel. Thus, of the total 162 personnel within the squadron, 125, or 77 percent, were from the ANG. From July to September, 1968, despite this huge turnover in personnel and a critical shortage of aircraft, the 355 TFS completely fulfilled its mission commitments and "equaled or surpassed" other units that were endowed with more aircraft and greater personnel stability.

The squadron transitioned seamlessly and by the end of the 3rd quarter of 1968 the 355 TFS had the highest aircrew qualifications in the Wing. 63 Over 75 percent of the pilots were qualified as flight leaders and only six were not "Night Owl" qualified as the quarter ended. The Night Owl qualification allowed a pilot to fly night attack sorties using the visibility provided by illumination flares. The squadron's experience was put to good use as approximately 70 percent of the squadron's 3rd quarter sorties were Close Air Support sorties while 25 sorties used a radar method of bomb delivery, called Combat Sky Spot. Most of these sorties were in northern South Vietnam, with some in Laos and North Vietnam. Additionally, the 355 TFS was assigned as the primary unit responsible for the defense of two Special Forces camps, Plateau Gi and Ba To.

The ANG pilots of the 355 TFS flew sorties in infamous locations and in support of well known operations, such as in the A Shau Valley and in the defense of the Duc Lap Special Forces Camp near the Cambodian border. Additionally, from July to September, 1968, the 355 TFS flew nearly 600 combat sorties for operations JEB STUART III, WHEELER WALLOWA, and MACARTHUR. Of

course, this commitment to the mission came with a cost. On 21 July, 1968, Lt Col Sherman E. Flanagan, Jr. gave his life as one of the first recalled ANG officers to die in SEA combat. Lt Col Flanagan was shot down during a combat mission near the A Chau Valley. No ejection attempt was made and he was listed as KIA.

From October to December 1968, 92.2 percent of the 355 TFS's missions were flown in South Vietnam with most of these missions concentrated in the I and II Corps areas of South Vietnam.⁶⁴ Subsequently, 39.3 percent of the squadron's missions were shifted out of country to North Vietnam and Laos. The results from the 355 TFS combined reserve/regular squadron during this quarter were strong. For example, the 355 TFS had 51 confirmed KBA, 189 structures destroyed, 187 bunkers destroyed, 42 gun positions destroyed, plus a similar number of damaged targets. The accolades for their actions were quick in coming and repeated throughout their tenure.

By spring of 1969, the 355 TFS had been awarded the AFOUA, the Presidential Unit Citation, and were key contributors in the 37th TFW receipt of the SEA Outstanding Fighter Wing Award. Additionally, praise began arriving from the field. The 37th TFW received letters from TACPs and Army HQ's that extolled the "flying skill" and "abilities to place ordnance on target" of the 355's pilots. Others praised the "total dedication and professionalism" that "undoubtedly saved their lives."

Not to be outdone, the maintenance section of the 355 TFS gained recognition by repeatedly having the lowest dud rates of the Wing and by producing 3073 effective sorties from 1 July to 31 December, 1968. The 355 set the bar high by posting an over 98 percent effective rate. By the end of March, 355 TFS ANG maintenance had "generated 8097 accident free flying hours" and by the end of April was competing with the other ANG unit for the Wing's best OR rate.

in accordance with a 7th AF directive, the 355 TFS was ordered to deploy to Tuy Hoa AB from 18 to 20 May, 1969.⁶⁸ At that time, the 355 was manned with approximately 85 percent Air National Guardsmen. Therefore, when the squadron deployed to Tuy Hoa these personnel were not eligible to make the PCS move, owing to the fact that their tours of duty were concluding. Subsequently, the 355 TFS deployed to Tuy Hoa with a handful of personnel and essentially formed a new squadron upon arrival. The ANG personnel retained at Phu Cat were returned to the United States on 27 May, 1969, for deactivation with their parent organizations.

The performance of the ANG personnel in the 355 TFS had been "truly outstanding."⁶⁹ Of the ANG pilots assigned to the 355, five volunteered to fly as F-100 FACs as part of the "Misty" program. Their subsequent contributions in that highly sensitive operation were "impressive" as evidenced by the "high success rate of the sorties under their control."⁷⁰ Not insignificantly, the SEA awards of the ANG personnel in the 355 TFS included approximately 11 Silver Stars, 12 Distinguished Flying Crosses, 20 Air Medals, two Vietnamese Gallantry Crosses (with Silver Star), 16 Bronze Stars and dozens of Air Force Commendation Medals.

Returning to Myrtle Beach AFB in November 1970, the unit transitioned to the new A-7D

Corsair II aircraft before redeploying to Southeast Asia in the fall of 1972 as the first A-7 unit to fight there. In 10 weeks of combat before the end of that conflict, the squadron participated in the Linebacker II campaign, generated more than 4,000 sorties, and was credited with 22 rescues of downed airmen. The unit returned to Myrtle Beach in April 1974.

In February 1978, the 355 FS transitioned to the new A-10 Thunderbolt II, a close air support aircraft, becoming the second operational squadron in the nation's first A-10 wing.

Duty called again in August 1990 when the unit deployed to King Fahd International Airport, Saudi Arabia in support of Operations DESERT SHIELD and DESERT STORM. There, the squadron's pilots inflicted heavy damage to Iraqi armor and artillery emplacements, helped cut off enemy supply lines, and conducted search and rescue missions. The squadron contributed greatly to the 4,200 artillery, tank and other vehicle kills credited to A-10s during the war.

October 9, 1995 – An A-10A, serial number 79-0200, assigned to the 355 Fighter Squadron crashed approximately 50 miles southeast of Eielson. The pilot safely ejected.

January – March 1997 – The 355 Fighter Squadron deployed to Aviano Air Base, Italy, in support of Operation DECISIVE EDGE, the peacekeeping mission in Bosnia. This deployment marked the first time an Eielson-based fighter unit deployed to a combat environment.

December 2001 - March 2002 – The 355 Fighter Squadron, along with 12 of their A-10s and approximately 130 personnel, also deployed to Al Jaber AB, Kuwait in support of Air Expeditionary Force taskings. During their three month deployment, the Eielson A-10s flew more than 600 sorties and logged more than 1,580 hours while flying combat and combat support missions in support of Operation SOUTHERN WATCH.

On 25 February 2004, at 2031 Alaska Standard Time (0531 Zulu), an A-10A aircraft, S/N 78-0700, crashed 3.5 miles north of Eielson AFB, AK, shortly after taking off during a night vision goggle (NVG) takeoff and landing upgrade sortie. The A-10A aircraft, assigned to the 355 Fighter Squadron, 354th Fighter Wing, Eielson AFB, AK, supports combat search and rescue missions in a forward air control capacity during joint United States Army and Air Force contingencies. The mishap pilot (MP), assigned to the 354th Fighter Wing, was fatally injured in the mishap and the mishap aircraft (MA) was destroyed with the loss valued at \$12,741,131. There were no civilian casualties as the MA crashed on uninhabited property owned by the State of Alaska. The MP was the instructor pilot and formation lead for a four-ship of A-10s on an NVG takeoff and landing upgrade sortie. The mishap occurred just two minutes after takeoff. The MA gradually went into a right banking turn without correction. Shortly before impact, the MA rolled to approximately 90 degrees of bank and the nose sliced down to near vertical. The MA descended rapidly from its maximum altitude of over 4,600 feet and impacted the ground at approximately 70 degrees nose low, 95 degrees of right bank and 360 knots calibrated airspeed. The MP attempted to eject safely but, unfortunately, was too late. There is clear and convincing evidence that the MP became spatially disoriented and was unable to gain

situational awareness until it was too late to either recover the MA or eject safely. There is substantial evidence that the weather conditions the night of the mishap made it difficult to see the horizon. In addition, there is evidence that the MP may have been dealing with an unknown instrument problem based on his observed flying behavior that night as captured by the air combat maneuvering instrumentation data system. These two contributing factors severely impacted the MP's ability to fly the aircraft using either outside references or his instruments and led to his spatial disorientation. The final 23 seconds of the mishap is a classic graveyard spiral. The MP's radio calls and ultimate ejection clearly demonstrate that the MP was spatially disoriented.

March 26 - October 1, 2004 – The 355 Fighter Squadron deployed to Bagram AB, Afghanistan, in support of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM. During the deployment, the A-10s flew more than 2,000 sorties and logged more than 7,500 flying hours.

January- April 2006 – The 355 FS deployed to Bagram AB, Afghanistan in support of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM. The unit flew more than 1,500 combat sorties and 5,000 hours in the skies over Afghanistan. This marked the unit's last A-10 combat deployment.

July 31, 2007 – Lt Col Quentin Rideout 355 Fighter Squadron Commander, flew the last operational A-10 sortie at Eielson AFB.

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