

406th FIGHTER INTERCEPTOR GROUP

MISSION

LINEAGE

406th Bombardment Group (Dive) constituted, 4 Feb 1943
Activated, 1 Mar 1943
Redesignated 406th Fighter-Bomber Group, Aug 1943
Redesignated 406th Fighter Group, May 1944
Inactivated, 20 Aug 1946
Redesignated 406th Fighter-Bomber Group
Activated 10 Jul 1952
Redesignated 406th Fighter Interceptor Group, Apr 1954

STATIONS

Key Field, MS, 1 Mar 1943
Congaree AAFld, SC, 18 Sep 1943-13 Mar 1944
Ashford, England, 4 Apr 1944
Tour-en-Bassin, France, 5 Aug 1944
Cretteville, France, 17 Aug 1944
Le Mans, France, 4 Sep 1944
Mourmelon-le-Grand, France, 22 Sep 1944
Metz, France, 2 Feb 1945
Assche, Belgium, 8 Feb 1945
Handorf, Germany, 15 Apr 1945
Nordholz, Germany, 5 Jun 1945-20 Aug 1946
Manston, England, 10 Jul 1952

ASSIGNMENTS

Ninth Air Force
United States Air Forces in Europe

WEAPON SYSTEMS

A-24
A-35

A-39

P-47

COMMANDERS

LTC Bryan B. Harper, Mar 1943

Col Anthony V. Grossetta, c. 6 Nov 1943

LTC Converse B. Kelly, c. Jun 1945

LTC Robert C. Brown, 27 Sep 1945

LTC Arvis L. Hilpert, 17 Jan 1946

Col Earl H. Dunham, 6 Apr-Aug 1946

LTC Delynn E. Anderson, Jul 1952

LTC Arthur F. Jeffrey, 1952

LTC Harry G. Sanders, Mar 1953

Col William S. Harrell, Jun 1954

HONORS

Service Streamers

American Theater

Air Offensive, Europe

Normandy

Northern France

Rhineland

Ardennes-Alsace

Central Europe

Campaign Streamers

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

Distinguished Unit Citations

France, 7 Sep 1944

Belgium, 23-27 Dec 1944

EMBLEM

Azure, a bend gules fimbriated argent overall a dexter hand in spiked nail gauntlet palewise proper grasping a three-pronged lightning flash or and surmounted at the cuff by a chain of four links of the last. (Approved, 14 May 1953)

MOTTO

ASCENDE ET DEFENDE—Rise and Defend

NICKNAME

OPERATIONS

Trained with Jointed Ninth AF in England in Apr 1944 and entered combat with P-47's in May when the Allies were preparing for the invasion of the Continent. Provided area cover during the landings in Jun, and afterwards flew armed-reconnaissance and dive-bombing missions against the enemy, attacking such targets as motor transports, gun emplacements, ammunition dumps, rail lines, marshalling yards, and bridges during the campaign in Normandy. Helped prepare the way for the Allied breakthrough at St Lo on 25 Jul. Moved to the Continent early in Aug and continued to provide tactical air support for ground forces. Participated in the reduction of St Malo and Brest. Aided the Allied drive across France, receiving a DUC for operations on 7 Sep 1944 when the group destroyed a large column of armored vehicles and military transports that were attempting to escape from southeastern France through the Belfort Gap. Operated closely with ground forces and flew interdiction missions during the drive to the Moselle-Saar region. Shifted operations from the Saar basin to the Ardennes and assisted the beleaguered garrison at Bastogne after the Germans had launched the counteroffensive that precipitated the Battle of the Bulge. Operated almost exclusively within a ten-mile radius of Bastogne from 23-27 Dec 1944, a period for which the group received a second DUC for its attacks on tanks, vehicles, defended buildings, and gun positions. Flew escort, interdiction, and close-support missions in the Ruhr Valley early in 1945 and thus assisted Allied ground forces in their drive to and across the Rhine. Remained in Europe after V-E Day, being assigned to United States Air Forces in Europe for duty in Germany with the army of occupation.

After months of training at various Southern bases the 406th embarks from New York on the "Sterling Castle" arriving in Liverpool and assigned to Ashford, Kent from where it flew its first operational mission on May 9, 1944. Fighter sweeps, escort duties and dive bombing missions lead up to June 6th and D-Day, when the group provides top cover over Utah Beach. Thereafter the 406th transitions to what proves to be a most effective role — Tactical Airpower — and the ground attack for which the 406th's distinctive willingness to aggressively press home the attack and to pay for it was ideal thus leading to their effective yet unassuming success.

Assigned to a rapid succession of airfields across France, Belgium and finally Germany while living in often muddy tents and war ravaged buildings the Group felt like "gypsies" as it encounters air to air combat and provides support to thrusting armored columns and uses the emerging technique of ground controller communication to pinpoint enemy frontline positions and seemingly having a constant presence over enemy marshalling yards, rail lines, bridges, Luftwaffe installations and troop and material concentrations — made even more effective when the 406th was the first American fighter group to be equipped with rockets. Such an attack on September seventh on a massive enemy column lead to the capture of 20,000 Germans and the request of their General Elster to surrender to who he felt was primarily responsible for his defeat — the Army Air Force for which the 406th received its first Presidential Citation.

Living, moving, training and above all fighting the enemy continues with little let up through Northern France, Ardennes, Central Europe and Rhineland campaigns right into December when the 406th found itself sharing Mourmelon camp with the 101st Airborne when they were hastily

called to Bastogne with the 406th assigned their air cover at this, the Battle of the Bulge. For five days and 519 unrelenting sorties the 406th brings aerial firepower to bear both on the ground and in the air with the reappearance of the Luftwaffe, helping to stop the 101st from being overrun and blunting a potential enemy break out at a loss of 10 pilots and 40 of the 60 operational P-47's suffering battle damage leading to the Group's second Presidential Citation and visit from General McAuliffe.

The aftermath of that victory saw the 406th contribute to a crescendo of destruction on enemy troops and material clogging rear assembly areas even as strongholds along the retreating enemy lines needed to be bombed and strafed accounting for ever increasing numbers of destroyed locomotives, track and rolling stock, buildings, tanks, trucks, gun emplacements, horse drawn equipment and on ground aircraft plus the demise and capture of troops leading to Operation Flashpoint and the crossing of the Rhine where the 406th covered allied airborne landings in Germany.

The war's final home base was Handhoff airfield in Germany which saw several missions against a frantic enemy being harassed from both east and west until the operational space assigned the 406th narrowed significantly due to Russian advances- a prelude to April 20th and the last wartime mission that put a final tally on 13,612 sorties, 34,000 hours of flying time, 133 aircraft lost to enemy action, 85 men MIA/KIA, 292 enemy destroyed in the air or on the ground, tons upon tons of ordinance delivered and thousands of targets, many critical, destroyed as contribution to victory in Europe.

12/1/43 Arrival of P-47's. Up until then it was trainers followed by P-39's and P-40's. The Jug was a big change.

3/23/44 "Sterling Castle" trip to Liverpool- a floating metaphor of their entrance into war.

7/44 First tactical mission to Cherbourg as devised by Tactical Air Command's on the ground support of troops idea. Strong signs of "Distinctive willingness to aggressively press home the attack and to pay for it". Excellent results though 5 planes and 3 pilots lost.

Air Force Order of Battle

Created: 13 Oct 2011

Updated:

Sources

Air Force Historical Research Agency. U.S. Air Force. Maxwell AFB, AL.
Unit history. *406th Fighter Interceptor Wing. Manston, England. 1955.*