

## 86<sup>th</sup> FIGHTER INTERCEPTOR SQUADRON



### MISSION

#### LINEAGE

86<sup>th</sup> Pursuit Squadron (Interceptor) constituted, 13 Jan 1942  
Activated, 9 Feb 1942  
Redesignated 86<sup>th</sup> Fighter Squadron, 15 May 1942  
Inactivated, 15 Jul 1947  
Redesignated 86<sup>th</sup> Fighter Interceptor Squadron, 11 Sep 1952  
Activated, 1 Nov 1952  
Inactivated, 1 Mar 1960

#### STATIONS

Dale Mabry Field, FL, 9 Feb 1942  
Morris Field, NC, 1 May 1942  
Hillsgrove, RI, 23 Jun-28 Sep 1942  
Egypt, 12 Nov 1942  
Libya, 24 Jan 1943  
Tunisia, 13 Mar 1943  
Malta, 4 Jul 1943  
Sicily, 18 Jul 1943  
Southern Italy, 15 Sep 1943  
Salsola, Italy, 5 Oct 1943

Madna Airfield, Italy, 19 Nov 1943  
Capodichino, Italy, 16 Jan 1944  
Pomigliano, Italy, 1 May 1944  
Corsica, 11 Jun 1944  
Southern France, 22 Aug 1944  
Iesi, Italy, 4 Oct 1944  
Fano, Italy, 5 Dec 1944  
Cesenatico, Italy, 21 Mar 1945  
Horsching, Austria, 26 Jul 1945-25 Jun 1947  
Langley Field, VA, 25 Jun-15 Jul 1947  
Youngstown Mun Aprt, OH, 1 Nov 1952-1 Mar 1960

### **ASSIGNMENTS**

79<sup>th</sup> Pursuit (later Fighter) Group, 9 Feb 1942-15 Jul 1947  
4708<sup>th</sup> Defense Wing, 1 Nov 1952  
502nd Air Defense Group, 16 Feb 1953  
79<sup>th</sup> Fighter Group, 18 Aug 1955-1 Mar 1960

### **WEAPON SYSTEMS**

P-40, 1942-1944  
P-47, 1944-1947  
F-84C, 1952-1953  
F-86D, 1953  
F-86L  
F-102A, 1957-1960  
P-47D  
F-84C  
P-40E  
P-40F  
F-86L

### **COMMANDERS**

#### **HONORS**

##### **Service Streamers**

None

##### **Campaign Streamers**

Egypt-Libya  
Tunisia  
Sicily  
Naples-Foggia  
Anzio  
Rome Arno

Southern France  
North Apennines  
Po Valley  
Air Combat, EAME Theater

### **Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers**

#### **Decorations**

Distinguished Unit Citations  
North Africa and Sicily, Mar-17 Aug 1943  
Italy, 16-20 Apr 1945

#### **EMBLEM**

On an Air Force blue disc, bordered Air Force golden yellow, a white cloud issuing from base; from behind the cloud a caricatured Comanche Indian with his left foot raised in an attitude of climbing over the cloud, flesh tone reddish brown, scalp lock and long braids black, wearing bracelets and leather trousers Air Force golden yellow; over his left shoulder a bow red; over his right shoulder a quiver of arrows Air Force golden yellow with red strap and trim on arrows; from his scalp lock, three feathers red, white, and black; the Indian's right hand outstretched in a beckoning gesture, his left hand grasping a tomahawk with dripping red blade; outlines and details black throughout. (Approved, 20 Jan 1959)

#### **MOTTO**

#### **NICKNAME**

#### **OPERATIONS**

On April 6, General "Monty" launched a frontal attack on Von Arnim's Wadi Akarit position near the sea and once again the Hawks were called on to strafe a path through for the Highland Division. The attack was delivered with precision and utmost courage by the 86th and 316th Squadrons in the face of the same terrific ground fire encountered at El Hamma. Once more the roads behind the enemy's lines were littered with burning trucks, tanks and armored cars, but this time the Highlanders were unable to pierce the extensive mine fields and strong points along the Wadi, and the enemy held. Once more the brave Hawks paid the price of strafing for the 86th Squadron lost Lt's George I. Harris, Ober N. Leatherman and Donald McKay, and the 316th lost Lt. George W. Gilpin. Lt. Gilpin's and Lt. Leatherman's graves were later found by their wrecked planes. Lt. Harris and McKay were missing.

Seventeen more bomber escort missions followed in the next two days, a total of 240 sorties directed at further softening the enemy's Akarit positions and maintaining our control of the air. On April 8, the 8th Army struck again, a quick thrust around the left flank similar to that at El Hamma with the Indian Division spearheading. A synchronized attack by the American 2nd Corps was launched on Gafsa with the objective of making contact with the 8th Army and helping the latter flank the Afrika Corps out of the Wadi Akarit position. The 79th was to

support by strafing the enemy's transport and artillery in the rear. The task was assigned to the 85th, 87th and 316th Squadrons with the 86th flying top cover. The Hawks pressed the attack home with the same fury as at El Hamma choking the roads in the enemy's rear with flaming trucks and armored cars and annihilating many gun crews.

On April 20, a good day was recorded when Capt. Borsodi and Lt. Bedford, of the 86th "Comanche" Squadron, flying as an element, put on their famous team act by shooting down a Ju 88 and an ME 109 each.

The next day, April 21, 85th Squadron was on a fighter-bomber mission against enemy shipping off Cape Bon with 87th Squadron flying top cover, when jumped by 18 ME 109's. In the ensuing dogfight Lts. Berinati and Fitzgerald of the 87th "Skeeters" and Lt. Kelly of the 86th each shot down an ME 109, and Lt. Bolack, of the 85th, damaged another.

On April 29th when 86th Sqdn. Was jumped by 15 plus MC 202's and ME 109's, and shot down 3 Macchi's and 2 ME 109's, besides 1 Macchi and 1 ME 109 probably destroyed. Major Watkins, Commanding Officer of the "Comanche", Lts. Hanson, Kaufman, Conly, and Capt. Turner all got 1 destroyed each, and Lts. Conly and Brewer each contributed 1 probable. It was a field day for the 86th as they suffered no losses.

On 30 April, 85, 86, 87 and 316th Squadrons all went out and dive bombed a destroyer carrying troops out of Tunis Harbor, the 86th and 87th each getting direct hits with 500 lb. bombs, which seriously damaged the destroyer—credit for which was later shared with another Group. While reforming after their bombing runs, the 86th was jumped by 15 plus ME-109's, and in the dogfight that followed, Capt. Turner and Lt. Rhynard each shot down an "Me". Lt. Allard probably destroyed one and Lts. Rhynard, Hutt and Minnett each damaged another. In the dog fight, two Comanches collided while chasing the same ME 109 and the debris fell on a third below them, the triple collision causing the tragic loss of Lts. Perry E. Bailey, Thomas H. McCarty, and William D. Hansen of the 86th. 2 parachutes were seen to open and Lt. Bailey was later reported, from home, to have been picked up, uninjured, by an American freighter and taken to a place of safety. Nothing has been heard from McCarty and Hansen.

On May 5th, Lt. Ryburn shot down another ME 109. Lt. Cahill was shot down by AA over Tunis on May 6 while on another fighter bomber mission, belly landed, and was seen to emerge from his plane, so it was hoped he became a P.O.W. On the following mission, the same day, 87Squadron bombed a destroyer full of men, in the Gulf of Tunis, which blew up from direct hits and sank. Then on May 8, while still patrolling the "strangle hold" route around Cape Bon, the 86th, 87th and 316th Squadrons bombing formation with 85th as top cover, was jumped by 30 plus ME 109's and FW 190's. In this dogfight Capt. Dempsey, of the 316th Sqdn., Capt. Say, Lt. Hoagland, and Lt. Hale of the 85th Sqdn., each shot down a Messerschmitt, besides which, Lt. Hale shot down a Fiesler Storch, all without loss to any of our pilots. This was the last challenge by the Luftwaffe in the Tunisian Campaign for we had the air to ourselves while we swept his evacuation shipping from the sea, up to the end of hostilities on May 12. From the 13th through the 23rd the 79th then ran a series of 63 missions escorting friendly destroyers

which were patrolling the waters around the Cape for stragglers, and also covering the first convoys coming through the Sicilian narrows, all without incident.

The Pantelleria campaign was short but furious. Beginning on June 4, a series of 59 umbrella and bomber escort missions were run over the island during which the Hawks had a field day at the expense of the luckless Italian and German fighters, who attempted to break their "umbrella". On June 7, the 85th was jumped by 8 enemy fighters and Lt's Clark and Bunker each shot down a Macchi 202. The following day, the same squadron was jumped by 10 plus ME 109's over Pantelleria, and this time Lt. Bolack and Lt. Martin each shot down a Macchi 202 and Capt. Cimaglia shot down a Macchi and an ME 109. Lt's Clark and Ryburn also shot down a Messerschmitt each, Lt. Hoagland got an ME 109 probable, and Lt. Abbott damaged another. Major Watkins, of 86th Sqdn., damaged an additional MC 202, making a Group total of 6 destroyed and 1 damaged and 1 probable for the day, without loss.

The 86th had been leading the other 2 squadrons all through the Tunisian campaign with a score of 13 enemy planes destroyed. The 85<sup>th</sup> jumped into the lead on June 8, their day's bag running their score to 16 destroyed. On June 9, the 86th drew up close when Major Watkins shot down another ME 109, while Cap. Morrissey and Lt's Bedford and Borsodi shared an FW 190 destroyed over Pantelleria, without loss, bringing their total up to 15. The 87th, which had had poor hunting, trailed with a score of 7.

Pilots and B party ground personnel rejoined A party on June 14 at Bou Grara and the reunited Group moved, on the same day, back to Causeway L.G., where it had entered the Tunisian Campaign. This move was made to avoid the terrific dust storms at Bou Grara and to enjoy once more, the luxury of the daily bath at Causeway's artesian well. "A" party completed its invasion training and after 1 false start, moved to Tripoli, on June 25, for embarkation to Malta. "B" party and "C" party remained at Causeway until July 2 and August 13 respectively when they embarked for Sicily to rejoin A party, which had begun operations there in the meantime. This was the longest period of separation, between parties, ever experienced by the Group. Another sad accident occurred on July 16, when Lt. Lowndes of the 86th Sqdn., spun in and was killed during a practice flight at Causeway.

D.F.Cs were awarded to the Squadron Commanders, Major Jacob F. Schoellkopf of the 85th, Major Tarlton N. Watkins of the 86th and Major Benjamin F. Ulrich of the 87th Squadrons, for the inspiring leadership given their pilots. Major Watkins was ordered home for a rest after serving overseas almost constantly since Pearl Harbor. He was succeeded as Commanding Officer of the 86th Squadron by Capt. Fred A. Borsodi.

The Engineering and Ordnance men, also, rendered outstanding service and the following are mentioned for outstanding contributions: Staff Sergeants L.T. Good and George G. Drelshagen of the 86th Sqdn., who perfected an improved automatic carburetor air intake control which appreciably prolonged the life of the engine. Lt. Searcy Birdsong Jr., of the 86th Sqdn., who perfected a new method of steadying 250 lb. bombs in racks and thus solved the problem that had been vexing both the USAAF and RAF.

Penny Post was left heavily mined and some of the British detecting personnel lost their lives removing detonators on the day our own operations began, Oct. 1, 1943. Our program accelerated to a solid sheet of strafing. On Oct.6, despite adverse weather, 79 helped the ground forces to eliminate a stubborn German position which had been counterattacking for twenty four hours, threatening to cut off a number of British tanks and troops. For this achievement, General Montgomery telephoned his thanks. On this particular mission, 79th, with two squadrons, the 86th and 87th, claimed 28 motor transport flammers, 26 damaged and 30 plus personnel killed. One of our pilots, Lt. Steele of 86th, was killed in this action.

Capt. Neilson, now C. O. of the 86 Sq., and Lt. M. K. Davis of 87th, gave us a "kick" by walking back from German territory. Both spoke of the kindness shown them by the Italian peasants, who hid them from German patrols.

A series of close support targets arrived through the Air Support Control of the 8th Army. These extended from Ortona to Orsogna and as far west as Chieti. In six figure pinpoints, they became important targets because they meant defended positions, mortars, big guns or troop concentrations. They stood in the way of General Montgomery's advance up the east coast. Many of our pilots suffered ack-ack hits before their dive bombing attacks but chose to complete their missions. On December 8th, Lt. Kehr of the 86th Sq., was struck by flak and failed to return. Our losses in Italy were beginning to increase to proportions greater than anything suffered since the El Hamma strafing.

79 Group operated from Capodichino on the 18th, sending out 48 sorties to escort surface vessels shelling enemy strongholds from the Gulf of Gaeta, north of Naples. On the 19th and 20th, thirty-six sorties were flown by 85th, 86th and 87th Squadrons from Madna. This operation, while aircraft Worked from Capodichino on the 20th, using different squadron call signs, served as a decoy to the German interceptor control stations, picking up our flights. We wanted the Hun to believe we were still operating from Madna.

The next day, 86th Squadron engaged two ME 109's who dived into their formation, woggling their wings violently. This gesture of friendliness availed nothing, because one of them was probably destroyed with Lts. Skotnicky and Silsbee sharing the victory; the other was damaged by these two pilots and Lt. Austin.

The Group flew 14 missions on the 28th-battle area and Convoy lane patrols, and fighter bomber missions. 86th Sqn. dropped seven 500 pound bombs on Belmonte with favorable results. The day itself proved encouraging with the Group destroying nine enemy a/c, probably destroying two more and damaging 6.

In the mid-day show, 86th Sqn. destroyed two more FW 190's, Lt. Wall credited with one; Lts. Penar and Leuther jointly sharing another.

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Air Force Order of Battle

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Updated:

Sources

Air Force Historical Research Agency. U.S. Air Force. Maxwell AFB, AL.

The Institute of Heraldry. U.S. Army. Fort Belvoir, VA.