

369TH FIGHTER SQUADRON
SQUADRON HISTORY REPORT FOR MONTH OF DECEMBER

During the month of December 1943 one of the stars to which our wagon was hitched was finally reached. The Squadron became operational, and as the events of December 31st, during which we received the commendation of our big friends for excellent fighter support, showed the careful preparation during the past year was not time spent in vain.

On 1 December the strength of the Squadron was 38 Officers and 252 enlisted men with Major William H. Swanson in command.

Major Swanson, Capt. Cranfill, Capt. Pezda, Lt. Taylor and Lt. Broach received the opportunity to draw first blood when they, their planes together with ten enlisted men were sent to the 78th Fighter Group at Duxford on 4 December 1943 to receive operational training. Capt. Ettlesen, during their absence was in command. On 8 December Capt. Ettlesen went to sick in quarters and 1st Lt. Rodeheaver assumed command until Capt. Ettlesen's return to duty on 10 December. On 11 December Major Swanson and the others on Detached Service returned to duty. During their stay at Duxford they had participated in a Bomber Escort mission from which all returned safely.

The 13th of December afforded the Squadron its initial acid test. During the morning a practice mission was held. While the planes were in the air, Field Order #200 came in assigning us a high altitude Fighter Sweep over France. Gasoline facilities being primitive, we were unable to get more than eleven planes regassed and into the air for participation in the mission. 10/10 cloud prevented any ground observation and as no bandits were sighted the mission was without incident. All planes returned safely.

On 15 December 1943 a Warning Order was received by the 359th Fighter Group at approximately 2000 providing that the Group be ready with 75 gallon belly tanks for Bomber Escort Mission for following day.

When the Field Order came in it provided that we rendezvous with the 1st Air Task Force at Zero hour (1030), plus 157 minutes equaling 1307. The place of rendezvous was in the vicinity of 52 degrees, 55 minutes -- 0610 East. The duties to be performed by the Group were to take up Escort Duty at rendezvous point and provide Withdrawal Support to the limit of endurance for the 1st Air Task Force.

The 369th Fighter Squadron was to be led by Major Richmond, as Group Leader and Lt. Col. Tacon to fly as Flight Leader of Blue Flight.

Briefing held at 1015 and was conducted by Major Richmond.

At 1105 all times were set back 1/2 hour due to the Bombers being late. At 1200, 15 minutes before engine warmup the mission was scrubbed.

The Bombers and some other Groups went through with mission as planned despite bad weather conditions. Actual weather conditions at time of scrubbing were low haze, visibility one mile, and 1000 feet ceiling. Conditions over Continent were 10/10 cloud throughout entire Bomber Route.

A Christmas party for the enlisted men was held on the 17th of December. "Sciarrillo's" Thunderbolts furnished the music to which a limited, because of lack of girls, amount of men were able to trip the light fantastic. Despite the fact that the beer supply was exhausted early a good time was had by all.

The first Squadron Bomber Escort mission was held on 20 December. We served as penetration support to the 1st 4 Combat wings of the 1st Air Task force bombing Bremen. Escort was taken up over Tessel and continued to Annen. Weather again was poor as 8/10 cloud prevailed. The mission proceeded without incident all planes returned safely.

On 21 and 22 December Bomber Escort missions followed in rapid sequence. No special incidents were observed, all planes returned safely.

A touch of Christmas spirit was afforded the enlisted men of the squadron on the 23rd. School children from Thetford were brought in and given the view of the post. Enlisted men were detailed to each child as foster parents for the day. The day proved a success illustrating the amount of pleasure a simple thing such as this can afford.

The most important mission that was participated in by the Squadron was ordered on the 24th of December. We provided area support to the B-17's over the North West coast of France. No bombers or fighters were lost. The mission was a complete success.

Christmas was celebrated by one of the best meals ever given the Squadron. Colonel Tacon was on hand to say a few words of appreciation of the enlisted men's efforts.

A Squadron Officers party was held on Christmas night. Despite a few initial difficulties the occasion was a success. The meal of rabbit and pheasant was enjoyed by all.

On 29 December two new pilots, 2nd Lts. Robert W. Campbell and Harry E. Cuzner, were assigned and joined the squadron.

December 30th and 31st were busy days during which we partook in Bomber Escort missions against Ludwigshaven and Paris respectively. Major Swanson led on the 30th and Major Gray on the 31st. Both missions were highly successful the consensus of opinion being that the Paris operation, in which we escorted the bombers over the target, was the most interesting mission to date.

New Years Eve celebrated without any coordinated effort at a party was quite a success.

The strength of the Squadron on the 31st was 251 enlisted men and 40 Officers.

The month, eminently successful, was closed by receiving from Bomber Command word that there were no bombers lost on the mission on the 31st and that Fighter Support furnished by the Group was excellent.

The words of Bomber Command brought to mind Maj. Gen. Kepner's two scores "We have two scores to be aiming at -- first the number of bombers we bring back safely and the second, the number of German fighters we destroy". We have to date shown ourselves quite capable of performing the 1st score.

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