

369TH FIGHTER SQUADRON HISTORY FOR MONTH OF FEBRUARY 1944

The month of February ordinarily a pretty poor month for flying afforded us the opportunity to participate in fifteen missions.

Due to a shortage of planes our operational efficiency was not quite as high as in previous months.

The squadron strength on 1 February 1944 was 250 EM and 39 Officers with Major William H. Swanson in command. On this same day Major Cecil W. Henderson was assigned to and joined this squadron and assumed the duty of Squadron Executive Officer. Captain Jefferson J. Fraley was transferred to HQ. 359th Fighter Group to assume the duties of Group S-4 Officer.

The first mission was one in very bad weather. On 2 February 1944 we were called upon to escort B-26's over France with less than an hours notice. A delay of 25 minutes was granted but as a result we failed to R/V.

The next day we suffered our first combat casualty. An escort mission over Wilhelmshaven with B-17's carried White flight over Emden where flak damage was suffered by 3 of the ships. The damage necessitated a throttling back to keep Capt. Pezda in formation. 1st Lt. Cecil W. Crawford flying White 2 left the formation apparently to join with Capt. Cranfill's flight which was ahead in the distance. 1st Lt. Crawford was last seen in the vicinity of Tessel Isle flying west.

On the same mission 1st Lt. Robert C. Thomson had a destroyed, later confirmed. When he encountered a FW 190 combat took place in the vicinity of the Zuider Zee at 24,000 feet. As a result of the combat Lt. Thomson's ship was damaged necessitating a real "sweating" out as he just managed to make England.

The next day our part in the show called for a double mission. We picked up penetration escort of B-17's with the target Frankfurt. Upon return the ships took off again without belly tanks to provide Area support upon withdrawal. The two missions were accomplished without incident. Before the second mission had been completed the 67th Fighter Wing sent a congratulatory message complimenting our Group for taking off so fast.

On 5 February 1944 orders came down promoting Lester G. Taylor from 1st Lt. to Captain effective 31 January 1943.

Escort missions, all without incident followed in rapid succession on 5, 6, and 8 February 1944.

On 10 February 1944, during a escort mission Capt. Charles C. Ettlesen entered into a Luftberry and was soon on the tail of an Me 109e which he shot down. Lt. Clifford E. Carter during the same encounter damaged an Me 109.

On 11 February 1944, 1st Lt. Raymond S. Lancaster Jr. was assigned to the squadron and placed on D.S. to the 495th F.T.G. The same day during take off on runway 22 for an escort mission Lt. Carter failed to clear the trees in our area. The damage necessitated a crash landing which was made with the belly tank still on. Fortunately there were no personnel injuries.

The lesson learned was to stay out of the Pilots shack during take-offs on runway 22. The mission was accomplished without incident.

On 12 February 1944 1st Lt. Roger Van Gorder was assigned to the principal duty of Officers Mess and Billeting Officer of the Station. The results have since become apparent. The quality and quantity of food has improved immeasurably. This welcomed transfer has resulted in the alleviation of one of the most dangerous sources of the lowering of Officers morale.

2nd Lt. John E. Regan Jr. was appointed 1st Lt. on the 15th of February 1944, effective the 1st of February.

On 18 February 1944, 2nd Lt. Harry L. Matthew was appointed 1st Lt. effective the 1st of February.

On 19 February, Major Rockford V. Gray left to take up his duties with the 365th Fighter Group. While no longer assigned to the squadron he was still regarded as an integral part because of his flying missions with the squadron. His leaving occasioned great regret because of the respect everyone felt for his flying ability as well as his aggressive personality. With him gone things won't seem quite the same.

In rapid succession the 20th, 21st, and 22nd of February saw some of the greatest bombing attempts of the 8th Air Force. The amount of bombers together with depth of penetration and variety of target made all previous attempts pale into insignificance. Our teammate the 15th Air Force based in Italy also came into the picture with synchronized missions. Our part in these missions was carried out without incident.

On 21 February 1944, 2nd Lt. Frank S. Fong was assigned to the Squadron.

Once again on 24 February 1944 we were called on for a double missions. This required the use of belly tanks on both missions. The squadron landed and managed to take off again in 51 minutes.

Bomber Escort missions on 25 and 29 February were uneventfully participated in by this squadron.

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