

## 356 TACTICAL FIGHTER SQUADRON



### MISSION

#### LINEAGE

356 Fighter Squadron constituted, 12 Nov 1942  
Activated, 15 Nov 1942  
Inactivated, 31 Mar 1946  
Redesignated 356 Fighter-Day Squadron, 28 Sep 1956  
Activated, 19 Nov 1956  
Redesignated 356 Tactical Fighter Squadron, 1 Jul 1958  
Inactivated, 30 Jun 1992

#### STATIONS

Hamilton Field, CA, 15 Nov 1942  
Tonopah, NV, 20 Jan 1943  
Santa Rosa AAFld, CA, 3 Mar 1943  
Salem AAFld, OR, 3 Jun-5 Oct 1943  
Greenham Common, England, 5 Nov 1943  
Boxted, England, 13 Nov 1943  
Lashenden, England, 17 Apr 1944  
Cricqueville, France, 17 Jun 1944  
Gael, France, 15 Aug 1944  
Orconte, France, 21 Sep 1944 (operated from St Dizier, France, 14-25 Nov 1944)  
Rosieresen-Haye, France, 25 Nov 1944  
Ober Olm, Germany, 8 Apr 1945  
Ansbach, Germany, c. 30 Apr 1945  
Herzogenaurach, Germany, 18 May 1945-15 Feb 1946

Bolling Field, DC, 15 Feb-31 Mar 1946  
Myrtle Beach AFB, SC, 19 Nov 1956  
Misawa AB, Japan, 29 Nov 1965-15 May 1971  
Myrtle Beach AFB, SC, 15 May 1971

#### **DEPLOYED STATIONS**

Aviano AB, Italy, 18 Mar 1959-17 Sep 1959  
Aviano AB, Italy, 13 May 1960-12 Sep 1960  
McCoy AFB, Fla, 21 Oct-1 Dec 1962

#### **ASSIGNMENTS**

354 Fighter Group, 12 Nov 1942-31 Mar 1946  
354 Fighter-Day Group, 19 Nov 1956  
354 Fighter-Day (later Tactical Fighter) Wing, 25 Sep igp

#### **WEAPON SYSTEMS**

P-39, 1943  
P-51, 1943-1944, 1945-1946  
P-47, 1944-1945  
P-39L  
P-39D  
P-39F  
P-39N  
P-39Q  
P-51B  
P-51D  
P-47D  
F-100, 1956  
F-100D  
F-100F

#### **COMMANDERS**

Capt Charles C. Johnson, 17 Nov 1942  
Capt Richard D. Neece, 10 Feb 1943  
Capt James H. Howard, 24 May 1943  
Capt Richard E Turner, 12 Feb 1944  
Maj Robert Brooks, 7 Oct 1944  
Maj Frank Q. O'Connor, 20 Oct 1944  
Maj Earl. G Depner, 7 Nov 1944  
Lt Col Robert Pasqualicchio, #1957  
Lt Col Richard E. Turner

#### **HONORS**

**Service Streamers**

None

**Campaign Streamers**

Offensive, Europe

Air Normandy

Northern France

Rhineland

Ardennes-Alsace

Central Europe

Air Combat, EAME Theater

**Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers**

**Decorations**

Distinguished Unit Citations

ETO, [Dec] 1943-15 May 1944

France, 25 Aug 1944

French Croix de Guerre with Palm

1 Dec 1943-31 Dec 1944

Air Force Outstanding Unit Award

1 Oct 1962-31 Dec 1962

**EMBLEM**



356 Fighter Squadron



On a black disc fimbriated white, edged red, a devil's head, shades of green, with gray and black shadows and white teeth, eyeballs and highlights, red eyes and tongue; in sinister of disc, four white horizontal dart-like shapes pointing to the sinister arched as an increscent moon.

**SIGNIFICANCE:** The emblem is intended to represent the characteristics and mission of the 356 Fighter Day Squadron, dominating the field is a devil's head in green, the official squadron color. The fierce head of Satan portrays the tenacity and determination inherent in the spirit of the squadron. The circular shape of the emblem signifies the unbroken, combined strength of the various sections of the squadron, such as operations, maintenance, supply, administration, which unites with a singleness of purpose to accomplish the unit mission, that of supremacy of the air. The four white abstract shapes on a black background symbolize a flight, the basic combat element common to fighter squadrons. The swept back effect of the design of the figure represents the supersonic capability of the unit aircraft. The black background signifies the dangers of the unknown into which this flight is forged ahead with confidence. (Approved, 25 Jun 1957)

#### **MOTTO**

Red Asses

Green Demons

#### **OPERATIONS**

Air defense in US, 1943. Combat in ETO, 1 Dec 1943-8 May 1945.

On November 15, 1942, at Hamilton Field, California, the 356 Fighter Squadron was created as a unit of the 354 Fighter Group. Captain Charles C. Johnson, a veteran fighter pilot, who had but recently recovered from wounds received in action at Port Moresby, was appointed Commanding Officer of the unit while its birth was still in the paper stage. The formative weeks at Hamilton Field were spent in a painfully slow, red-taped process of culling membership from schools and organized fighter units from all over the country, and when, on the 20th of January, 1943, the entire Group was sent to a bombing and gunnery range at Tonopah, Nevada, the 356 Squadron had barely attained fifty percent of its required complement. As the remaining

strength continued to dribble in, a training program for pilots and enlisted men was put into effect under the capable supervision of Captain Johnson. For most of the men it was a period of transition from theory to practice, and an introduction to the bonds of friendship and acquaintanceship that were to be realized for several years to come. On February 6th, the Squadron felt its first tragedy, in the loss of its Commanding Officer, when Captain Johnson was killed while test-piloting a new P-39 type aircraft. In the few weeks of his command he had won from the squadron a respect and an admiration that were not to be diminished by time and that were to be given to few men after him. His successor, Captain Richard D. Neece, assumed command shortly afterwards and continued the program of training and building the squadron.

The early, cold months of 1943 were spent on that desert training range, and in the first week of March the squadron, now at full strength, was shipped to Santa Rosa, California to undertake a new phase of training. Lectures, demonstrations, hikes and bivouacs were doled to the men in large quantities, and their minds and bodies were tempered to the conditions anticipated in actual warfare. It was at this time and place, May 24th, at Santa Rosa, that Commanding Officers were once again changed, and Captain Neece was replaced by Captain James H. Howard.

James Howard's fame had already preceded him from his days as a pilot in the U. S. Navy and, later as a Squadron Leader of the American Volunteer Group in Burma under General Chennault. The qualities, both personal and military, which had accorded him this recognition in his previous fields, resulted, from the first days of his new command in a steadying and consolidating influence upon the men, who were still in moldable states of military life.

On June 3rd the squadron was moved again and this time to Salem, Oregon, where it was put through the entire combination of training phases it had experienced at the last two fields. But this time the outfit was separated from its parent unit, and the policy of isolation was found to be favorable in several respects. If forced the organization to become self-sufficient and independent of the need of constant and close supervision, and it bred within the squadron the sense of individuality which was to become a marked factor in its eventual success as a fighter unit. Three months at this field keyed the men to a raw-nerved pitch of eagerness and expectation, and in that ill-contained spirit they were moved to Camp Kilmer, an East Coast Embarkation point, where they were examined, stenciled and stamped for shipment overseas. The two weeks aboard H.M.S. Athlone Castle will remain forever in the minds of the men as a symbol of the rigors of war, and if was a beaten an exhausted squadron that set foot on a Liverpool dock in early November 1943.

At Colchester, England, the 354 Group was the first in the ETO to be presented with the P-51 Mustang which was to be its vehicle to fame, and from which it derived its formal title of the Pioneer Mustang Group. From that place, also, actual long-range combat missions to Germany were begun, and the Red Ass Squadron, so christened in honor of what might be termed an industrial affliction suffered by the pilots on the long-range missions, immediately began laying the foundation for the enviable record it was to enjoy throughout the war. On January 11th, James Howard, then a Major, provoked further acclaim from an already respectful world by

engaging in a one-man attack on a group of thirty enemy aircraft that were jeopardizing the safety of a box of bombers under his protection. The attack would have been phenomenally successful if he had succeeded only in driving the enemy aircraft from the vicinity, but he ensured for himself a place in the legends of warfare by accounting for six of the planes before his ammunition was exhausted and he was forced to retire from the attack. It was not long after that spectacular achievement that the 356 was deprived of the honor and prestige of his direct command, for on February 12th, Lt. Colonel Martin, the Commanding Officer of the Group, collided with an enemy aircraft and went down over Germany and James Howard was promoted to Lt. Colonel and put in Command of the Group. Captain Richard E. Turner, one of the original pilots of the 356 was appointed Commanding Officer of the Squadron and very soon proved himself a fitting substitute for the man whose place he had taken. Like his predecessor, Captain Turner's claim to the right to command a fighter unit was evinced by his record of missions flown and enemy aircraft destroyed, for they stood as a tribute and testimonial to his qualities of ability and leadership in combat. And, also like Major Howard, his rule of the squadron was gentle but firm and, most valuable of all, just.

After about four months at Colchester, the group, which had remained intact since leaving Salem, Oregon, moved about sixty miles southeast of London, near a small town named Headcorn. All throughout the States the accommodations of each field had included wooden barracks, concrete runways hangars and office buildings. Colchester, likewise, had provided those conveniences, except in the one instance of Nissen Huts being substituted for wooden barracks. So it was that the field at Headcorn necessitated the initiation of the group to foxholes, pyramidal tents, grass runways and hardspot workshops. But the bivouac excursions undertaken in the States had prepared the men to some degree, to those conditions, and, within a week of the, squadron's arrival things were being run with their normal efficiency. At about that time, too, it was finally decided which Air Force the Group was to serve under. For some time the reins had been changing hands between the Eighth and Ninth Air Forces, and now it was announced that the Ninth was going to keep them. So it was as a unit of the Nineteenth Tactical Air Command, under the Ninth Air Force, that the Pioneer Mustang Group joyously greeted the news of the invasion of France on June 6th 1944.

On June 14th, the first echelon of men left Headcorn, via a miscellany of vehicles, and proceeded to Portsmouth, the South England Marshaling Area, where they were made ready to cross the English Channel. The crossing, made in LST's, was rough enough to justify, in the minds of the men, the notorious reputation of that body of water and the enormity of the Allied Naval forces engaged in the work of invasion, was enough to awe the most, phlegmatic person. Landing was made on Omaha Beach after a period of awaiting the caprices of tide and weather, and immediately a short trek was made to A-2, field boasting a steel-mat runway, and situated about three miles inland near the town of Criqueville-en-Bassin. The squadron move from England to France was made in three echelons, with the first two going over by LST, and the last one by C-47; and it was not till July 3rd that the entire squadron was once more assembled.

From the time this foot-hold was gained in enemy territory, the long-range missions to Germany became interspersed with fighter patrol missions over more immediate vicinities. That factor, combined with the advantage of long, early summer days, considerably augmented the destructive power of the P-51 on the enemy and the Red Ass Squadron justifiably claimed a reasonable share of the credit for driving the Germans through France and towards the German border. From Normandy to Brittany, to Marne, the Group followed the push through France, and, with the advent of the year 1945, the success of the invasion had long been assured and the final stage of the war in Europe was in sight

It was while the Squadron was in the Province of Marne that the Germans effected a surprise counter-attack in the area between Duren and Trier. It was a short-lived hope for the Germans, for it is a matter of history that within six weeks the push had not only been repulsed, and the bulge deflated, but that sector of the enemy front had been driven back even beyond their original position. And again the Red Ass Squadron stood modestly in line for at least a crumb of the acclaim. From the first days of the counter-attack, the pilots had been relieved of their normal mission routine and assigned in a protective and assisting capacity to the 20th Corps Area of the Third Army in the vicinity of Trier. The record chalked up by the squadron previous to that new assignment, although impressive enough to justify commendation from the highest military office, became as a mere bagatelle to the list of destruction which continued to come daily from the Trier Area. When the onslaught was over, and the German line once more under control the reversion to normal combat flying was like a vacation to the pilots and the rest of the squadron who had been straining at their maximum capacity for weeks without relief. It was not long after that period that the Third Army initiated the last phase of the war by establishing a footing on the west bank of the Rhine River. The Third Army was soon followed by other Allied Armies, and they, in turn, were soon followed by the Pioneer Mustang Group. The Group could very well have been in Germany several weeks before it actually was, but the delay in going there was caused by the fact that, as fast as a field was selected for occupation by the Group it would become outdistanced by the front lines, and a new and closer one would have to be picked. One was finally decided upon just outside Mainz, and the squadron realized a two-year dream of occupying German territory. Living and working conditions were slightly improved at that field, but the men had little time to appreciate the difference, for, within three weeks they were moved again. This time to Ansbach where accommodations as closely approximated those of a country club as any Air Corps unit could hope to encounter. Three-story stone buildings, rambling for acres and divided into large wings, provided commodious apartments for the men; and hangars, which expressed the final word in modernity, housed all the offices and workshops for the squadron. But the wallowing in comfort was a minor pleasure to the joy which was daily experienced from the sources of war news.

The end of the war was now computable in terms of days, or even hours, and, when, on the 7th of May, announcement was made that hostilities had ceased, the men went into a siege of celebration that would have done credit to the expiration of a ten years' war. But any doubt as to whether the squadron was entitled to such a celebration could be assuaged by a glance at the record of accomplishment which had been compiled during the two years and seven months of the squadron's organization. In that time, 560 combat missions had been flown for a

total of 18,861 hours and 20 minutes, and 298 enemy aircraft had been destroyed, exclusive of a staggering number of damaged and probably damaged. As against those figures of achievement, the Squadron's losses amounted to 22 pilots, including those killed in action, missing in action, and those killed in accidents other than in combat. All in all, it was a glorious record by an exceptional squadron, and whatever its fate was to be after the cessation of war in the European Theater, it would be to its irrevocable credit that it had caused the Germans to regret the birth of the Red Ass Squadron.

During June and July, 1977 three A-10s from Davis-Monthan toured PACAF, demonstrating the effectiveness of the Warthog, and on July 1, 1977, the first operational squadron was activated at Myrtle Beach. The 356 TFS was combat ready a record three months later.

The first Operational Readiness Inspection (ORI) was conducted by the 356 TFS at the Savannah, Georgia Air National Guard base at Travis Field, in January, 1978. Twenty-four 356 aircraft flew 319 sorties in four days, at an average sortie rate of three per day per aircraft. In target runs conducted at nearby Fort Stewart, the A-10s expended over 25,000 rounds of 30mm ammunition and 420 Mk 82 500 pound training bombs. During a validation test at Shaw AFB in South Carolina from April 17 to 24, 1978, one squadron of eighteen A-10s doubled the 356 TFS rate, flying 324 sorties in three days for an average sortie rate of six per aircraft per day. One A-10 flew twenty-two consecutive sorties without a maintenance problem, with all aircraft fully mission capable at the conclusion of the exercise.

USAF reactivated the 356 Fighter Squadron Oct. 10, in preparation for the arrival of the F-35 Lightning IIs to interior Alaska. The 356 FS is the first of two combat fighter squadrons coming to the base. "The 356 FS is reactivating to bring F-35s out to the Pacific Theater," said Lt. Col. James Christensen, 356 FS commander. "Looking back at the squadron history, the 356 Tactical Fighter Squadron was previously stationed in the Pacific for both the Vietnam conflict, and to defend Korea and Japan out of Kunsan Air Base and Misawa Air Base, respectively. We are excited to bring the squadron back to the (Indo-Pacific Command) theater."

The 356 FS's mindset will be locked in to preparing for the arrival and eventual employment of the F-35 weapons system. "We are strategically placed here in Alaska to prepare and project 5th generation stealth fighter capabilities, working with our program partners and allies in the Pacific and to be ready, if called, to deploy around the world," Christensen said. The reactivation represents a milestone toward the 354 Fighter Wing's air assets returning to operational combat status.

"The 354 FW has done an amazing job preparing for the arrival of the F-35," he said. "The transition to a combat force-provider mindset is what we will all get to learn together." Col. David Skalicky, 354 Operations Group commander and the activation ceremony's presiding officer, is confident in Christensen's ability to lead the wing's newest squadron.

"Lt. Col. Christensen is absolutely the right leader; in the right place, at the right time to bring the combat Air Force mission back on line at Eielson Air Force Base," Skalicky said. "Standing up the wing's combat mission (with) the most advanced fighter aircraft the world has ever seen, preparing the whole 354 ops, maintenance, logistics, mission support and medical enterprise to fight anywhere on the globe and being ready to project that combat power from one of the



most strategic locations on the planet is an honor, a burden and a once in a lifetime opportunity all rolled into one.”

Since the record of decision in 2016, the installation’s operational and support elements have been preparing for the arrival of the F-35 in the spring of 2020. “Lt. Col. Christensen will need to draw on the expertise and pioneering efforts of Airmen across the 354 FW to do it,” Skalicky said. “And there’s no one I trust more with that responsibility.” 2020

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DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE UNIT HISTORIES

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Sources

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

Unit yearbook. *Myrtle Beach AFB, SC, 354 Fighter-Day Wing, 1957*. Army and Navy Publishing Co, Inc. Baton Rouge, LA. 1957.