

363rd TACTICAL RECONNAISSANCE GROUP

MISSION

LINEAGE

363rd Fighter Group constituted, 11 Feb 1943

Activated, 1 Mar 1943

Redesignated 363rd Tactical Reconnaissance Group, Sep 1944

Redesignated 363rd Reconnaissance Group, Jun 1945

Inactivated, 11 Dec 1945

Activated, 29 Jul 1946

Redesignated 363rd Tactical Reconnaissance Group, Jun 1948

STATIONS

Hamilton Field, CA, 1 Mar 1943

Santa Rosa AAFld, CA, Aug 1943

Sacramento, CA, Oct-3 Dec 1943

Keevil, England, 23 Dec 1943

Rivenhall, England, Jan 1944

Staplehurst, England, Apr 1944

Maupertuis, France, 1 Jul 1944

Azeville, France, Aug 1944

Le Mans, France, Sep 1944

Luxembourg, Luxembourg, 1 Oct 1944

Le Culot, Belgium, 29 Oct 1944

Venlo, Holland, Mar 1945

Gutersloh, Germany, 15 Apr 1945

Brunswick, Germany, 22 Apr 1945

Wiesbaden, Germany, May 1945

Eschwege, Germany, Aug 1945

Darmstadt, Germany, Sep-2 Dec 1945

Camp Kilmer, NJ, 9-11 Dec 1945

Brooks Field, TX, 29 Jul 1946
Langley Field, VA, 20 Dec 1947
Shaw AFB, SC, 2 Apr 1951

ASSIGNMENTS

Ninth Air Force

WEAPON SYSTEMS

P-39
P-51, Jan 1944
F-5
F-6
RF-80
RB-26
RF-84
RB-57

COMMANDERS

LTC John R. Ulricson, 1 Mar 1943
Cpt Dave H. Culberson, 8 Apr 1943
Maj Theodore C. Bunker, 27 Apr 1943
Col John R. Ulricson, 5 Jun 1943
Col James B. Tipton, 7 May 1944
Col James M. Smelley, 1 Sep 1944
LTC Seth A. Mize, May 1945-unkn
Col Russell A. Berg, 29 Jul 1946
Col John R. Dyas, 23 Aug 1946
Col James M. Smelley, 5 Nov 1947
LTC Walter W. Berg, 30 Jun 1949
Col Willis F. Chapman, 31 Oct 1949
Col Benjamin G. Willis, 7 Sep 1950
Maj Charles N. Keppler, 13 Mar 1951
Col Willie O. Jackson, Jr., 2 Apr 1951
LTC Robert R. Smith, 1 Nov 1951
LTC Robert R. Evans, 5 Mar 1952
Col John M. McNabb, 17 Mar 1952
Col Robert R. Smith, 4 Mar 1953
Col Paul A Pettigrew, 16 Mar 1955

HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

Air Offensive, Europe

Normandy
Northern France
Rhineland
Ardennes-Alsace
Central Europe

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

Cited in the Order of the Day, Belgian Army

1 Oct 1944

18 Dec 1944-15 Jan 1945

Belgian Fourragere

EMBLEM

Quarterly, first quarter chequy, argent and gules; second and third quarters, azure; fourth quarter gules, a lion rampant or, armed and langued azure, all within a diminutive of the border or. Wreath of the colors, argent and gules. (Approved, 16 Jun 1952)

MOTTO

VOIR C'EST SAVOIR—To See is To Know

NICKNAME

OPERATIONS

The "Checkerboard" Group, originally a Fighter Group commanded by Colonel John R. Ulricson, went overseas to the E.T.O. on 13 December 1943 aboard the transport "Queen Elizabeth". There it operated as part of the Ninth Air Force which was based at Keevil and Rivenhall, England.

Entered combat in Feb. Escorted bombers and fighter-bombers to targets in France, Germany, and the Low Countries; strafed and dive-bombed trains, marshalling yards, bridges, vehicles, airfields, troops, gun positions, and other targets on the Continent. Supported the invasion of Normandy in Jun 1944 by escorting troop carriers and gliders and by attacking enemy positions near the front lines, and moved to the Continent at the end of Jun to take part in the Allied drive to the German border.

After the Big Push in France on 6 June 1944, the 363d Fighter Bomber Group made up 380, 381, and 382 Fighter-Bomber Squadrons went to the main-land to sustain the Allied Landing Forces, and operated from A-7 Montebourg Strip on the Cherbourg Peninsula. This was followed in September, 1944 by the redesignation order which transferred the Group into Reconnaissance and assigned the 160th, 161st and 162d Tactical Reconnaissance Squadrons as sub-ordinate units. Shortly after, the Group, now commanded by Colonel James M. Smelly was sent to the Le Mans base and then to Luxembourg, where they remained from the 10-31st of October. As part of the 29th Tactical Air

Command, 9th Air Force, it coordinated and furnished tactical and photographic recon-naissance to the United States Ninth Army of Lieut. General Simpson. The "Checkerboard" Group's main task was to supply dawn to dusk coverage of the entire Ninth Army Front. The F-6 aircraft, (P-51 Mustangs) equipped with two cameras, a vertical and an oblique; and armed with 6 x .50 caliber guns cruised over the German areas on two hour missions. They also performed artillery adjustments, weather reconnaissance and escorted bombers to targets. P-38 mapped the German front lines daily, making special coverage of the Loire, Moselle, Maas, Mouse, Rhine, and Ruhr, plus vital rail and communications centers.

As the Allied tide of victory moved East the group transferred to Y-10 air strip at Beauvechaine, Belgium on the 1st November 1944 to keep near the battle front. Before leaving Luxembourg, the Group was joined by the 33d Photo Reconnaissance Squadron which replaced the 162d Squadron (transferred to the 7th Army Front in Southern France). While at Beauvechaine, the 363d Group participated in the Bulge Engagement, when the 160th and 161st Flight echelons went to Jarney, France and spent three weeks (22 Dec. 44 to 10 Jan. 45) attached to the 10th Reconnaissance Group covering General Patton's units. March 11, 1945 found the 363d moving again, this time to the German airfield adjacent to Venlo, Holland. There, the Group had the rather unique distinction of "Being the first AAF unit to be stationed on German soil", with the 161st Squadron flying the first mission.

The pace increased and the 363d Reconnaissance Group, under the new commander, Lt. Colonel James B. Tipton, took over a German strip and barracks at Gutersloh, Germany, after passing through the defeated Ruhr basin. From this field, they helped the ground troops moving into Hanover, the last large town on the way to Berlin. The latter part of April, the unit moved to the former German barracks area at Braunschweig, airfield, and flew their first missions to the falling "Unter den Linden City—Berlin", continuing until V-E day. May 8, 1945.

The end of May brought another change of station, this time to Weisbaden where Lt. Col. Seth Mize replaced the U. S. bound Colonel Tipton. The group meanwhile prepared its equipment, aircraft and personnel for redeployment to the Pacific. They also did photo reconnaissance missions for the Allied survey and evaluation boards in the local German area. Another move was made to Eschwege, Germany, the last—since V-J Day had arrived, and the personnel not eligible for discharge were assigned to the 370th Fighter Group along with the intact 33d Reconnaissance Squadron. The 363d Group, 160th and 161st Squadrons being void of manpower, 13 September 1945 were inactivated.

The 363d Reconnaissance Group was activated at Brooks Field, Texas on 29 July 1946, during the Interim Period of the Air Force; and was comprised of the 12th Reconnaissance Squadron Photo (Jet-Propelled) stationed at March Field, California, and the 161st Reconnaissance Squadron Night Photographic at that base. These units, which were given Regular Army status, kept alive the principles and concepts of tactical and photographic aerial reconnaissance. Meanwhile the plans for the continental United States military forces were formulated and the "Checkerboard" Group moved to its present permanent base in December 1946 with the 161st and 162d Reconnaissance Squadrons.

Then on the 15th August 1947, the 363d Reconnaissance Group was assigned to the 363d Reconnaissance Wing, newly organized at Langley Field, and the 160th Reconnaissance Squadron was added to the group; the 12th Squadron was lost to serve as a nucleus for a reconnaissance unit on the West Coast.

The 160th and 161st Squadrons are equipped with the speedy FP-80 modified to carry a combination of aerial cameras. A-26 altered to use aerial cameras and flash bombs are employed by the 162d Reconnaissance Squadron Night Photographic. As part of the Tactical Air Command, the "Checkerboard" Group (which takes its nickname from the distinctive checkerboard markings of its aircraft) is responsible for filling the aerial photography requirements of govern-mental agencies. Thus, missions are often flown in the far corners of the United States; however, the Eastern Coastal areas are the locale most frequently covered by the group airplanes.

363d Reconnaissance Group has flown 59 photo missions. This task evolved the processing of 73,890 feet of exposed film and required the pro-duction of 47,482 finished photographic prints. The 363d flying time on aircraft totaled 15,427 hours and the pilots of the Fp-80 and A-26 aircraft logged 19,750 hours of individual 'flying time.

One interested in the background and experience of our fliers can appreciate the figure of 89,007 hours of flying time amassed by the fliers since their first fledgling ride. The total of 2017 months overseas gives the group officers an average of 16 1/2 months away from the U. S. during World War II.

Air Force Order of Battle

Created: 22 Feb 2012

Updated:

Sources

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

Unit yearbook. *Langley AFB, VA, 1948*. Newsfoto Publishing Co. San Angelo, TX. 1948.

Unit yearbook. *Shaw AFB, SC, 1956*. Army and Navy Publishing Company of Louisiana. Baton Rouge, LA. 1956.