

## 459 FLYING TRAINING SQUADRON



### MISSION

### LINEAGE

459 Fighter Squadron (Two-Engine) constituted, 2 Aug 1943

Activated, 1 Sep 1943

Inactivated, 5 Nov 1945

Redesignated 459 Flying Training Squadron, 25 Feb 2009

Activated, 17 Apr 2009

### STATIONS

Karachi, India, 1 Sep 1943

Kurmitola, India, 5 Nov 1943

Chittagong, India, 4 Mar 1944

Rumkhapalong, India, 1 Feb 1945

Dudhkundi, India, 11 May-8 Oct 1945

Camp Kilmer, NJ, 3-5 Nov 1945

Sheppard AFB, TX, 17 Apr 2009

### ASSIGNMENTS

80 Fighter Group, 1 Sep 1943

33 Fighter Group, 12 May-5 Nov 1945

80 Operations Group, 17 Apr 2009

### WEAPON SYSTEMS

P-38, 1943-1945

T-6, 2009

## **COMMANDERS**

Unkn, 1 Sep 1943  
Cpt John E. Fouts Jr., 1 Nov 1943  
Maj Verl D. Luehring, by 22 Mar 1944  
Maj Hampton E. Boggs, by 1 Mar 1945  
Cpt John W. Sognier, 11 Jun 1945  
Maj William M. Shelton, 26 Jun 1945-unkn  
Unkn, 1 Sep 1943; Capt John E. Fouts Jr., 1 Nov 1943  
Maj Verl D. Luehring, by 22 Mar 1944  
Maj Hampton E. Boggs, by 1 Mar 1945  
Capt John W. Sognier, 11 Jun 1945  
Maj William M. Shelton, 26 Jun 1945-unkn  
LTC Scottie Zamzow, 17 Apr 2009  
Lt Col Scottie Zamzow, 17 Apr 2009  
Lt Col Allen Nolan, 6 May 2011  
Lt Col Markus Meidenbauer (GAF), 26 Apr 2013  
Lt Col Nikolaus Nanasi (GAF), 5 Jun 2015  
Lt Col Andrea Cerri (ITAF), 10 Dec 2015  
Lt Col Fabio Martin (ITAF), 13 Jun 2017  
Lt Col Steven Norris, 28 June 2019

## **HONORS**

### **Service Streamers**

### **Campaign Streamers**

World War II  
India-Burma  
Central Burma

### **Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers**

### **Decorations**

Distinguished Unit Citations  
India-Burma, 11 Mar-19 May 1944  
Assam, India, 27 Mar 1944

### **Air Force Outstanding Unit Award**

1 July 2010-30 June 2012  
1 July 2013-30 June 2015  
1 July 2017-30 June 2019

## **EMBLEM**



459 Fighter Squadron emblem Over and through a white disc, border yellow orange, a caricatured, three-headed, light green snake with mouths open, having black wings, entwined about a red lightning flash issuing from base and striking toward sinister chief, edged yellow orange, forming simulated fuselage and characteristics of a P-38 aircraft, and having small, jagged, red lightning forks, edged yellow orange, issuing there from. (Approved, 28 Nov 1944)

459 Flying Training Squadron emblem: On a disc Sable, a lightning bolt per fess Gules fimbriated Or charged overall with a double headed dragon lindworm Vert, horned and scaled of the third, langued of the second, eyed Argent and Azure, all within a narrow Green border. Below the disc, a White scroll edged with a narrow Green border and inscribed "459 FLYING TRAINING SQ" in Green letters. Ultramarine blue and Air Force yellow are the Air Force colors. Blue represents the sky, the primary theater of Air Force operations. Yellow refers the sun and the excellence required of Air Force personnel. The "Twin Dragons" allude to the Squadron's primary mission of training combat pilots for US and NATO Air Forces. The menacing dragons represent the warriors that the 459 Flying Training Squadron trains to defend the nation--warriors who, like the dragon, fight from the air. The lightning bolt signifies the Squadron's history as a Lockheed P-38 Lightning equipped combat unit. (Approved, 13 Apr 2009)

## **MOTTO**

## **NICKNAME**

## **OPERATIONS**

Combat in China-Burma-India (CBI) theater, 14 Nov 1943-c. 6 May 1945. Credited with 66 aerial victory credits (AVC), 1 Dec 1943-13 Jan 1945. Awarded a Distinguished Unit Citation (DUC) for destroying 119 enemy aircraft between 11 Mar- 19 May 1944. Received a second DUC for defending an allied oil refinery at Assam, India on 27 Mar 1944.

The 459 Fighter Squadron (TE) was activated on paper in C.B.I, and Sept. 1, 1943, as a fourth squadron in the 80th Fighter Group (SE) which was at that time fighting the war from Assam. It was not until November 1st, that wheels turned and personnel from the 80th Group, 311th Fighter Bomber Group, and operational training units in the states commenced to assemble at

its new base in Eastern Bengal . . . the 459 had broken out of its shell.

Then, as now, the squadron was truly representative of the United States, officers and men came from 43 states in the Union and some of the territories, including men from all walks of life. It was first commanded by Major John E. Fouts Jr. of Texas, holder of the Air Medal, Distinguished Flying Cross, and a veteran of 34 months overseas service. Second in command was Captain Verl D. Luehring of Leavenworth, Kansas, with seven months of operational flying over Burma to his credit.

Efforts to secure supplies and equipment were undertaken at approximately the same time. Mid-November was set as the operational starting date, and in approximately three weeks, an outfit that has given the Jap many headaches was whipped into shape.

Willingness to work and interest in the squadron's welfare by officers and key enlisted men of the cadre did much to accomplish the many little things that can make or break a unit. This same effort also provided a strong foundation for the hectic days ahead, offsetting, to a great extent the lack of experience in crewing P-38s. It was this same spirit which made our pilots, inexperienced in twin engine fighters, successful in combat.

The entire squadron was bending its full efforts to the task of changing from a single engine to a twin engine outfit. The performance characteristics were tried and discussed; ideas were sifted. On November 1943 the "Twin Dragons" came of age.

In later weeks, the Lightenings shot up various enemy strong points on the Irrawaddy. Points which were centers of communication and supply. The "Twin Dragons" followed up these raids by escorting mediums to important targets along the Rangoon-Prome rail line. The excellent example of the air discipline prevailing in the unit was given when four flights of 38's overcame the urge to leave the bombers in an effort to attack two enemy fighters observed.

The pattern of 38's operations was complete when the squadron dive-bombed two bridges on the Prome-Taungup road. One bridge was knocked out, the other damaged. All this was incidental to the damage affected by the strafing job. The wraps were taken off as they attacked buildings and installations along this important road. Some idea of the havoc created can be gained when you find that the Prome-Taungup road was the main line of supply for enemy troops in the Akyab area and from Taungup north to other equally vital positions. The glowing satisfaction at the good job well done was clouded by the loss of the more popular pilots. In addition, an engine of one P-38 was shot out and the pilot forced to fly 300 miles over enemy territory on a single engine.

Yes, those first few missions might be considered mild enough for simple escort work, dive-bombing, and strafing targets just beyond the Chin Hills. But the succeeding missions into Burma marked the Squadron's entrance into big time. In the series of raids against Rangoon in late November and early December, the Squadron was called upon to meet the enemy's best while still attempting to master its growing pain.

These raids were the longest known fighter escort operation at the time . . . 1200 miles to the target and return. In addition, the "DRAGONS" were outnumbered and forced to protect bomber formations twice as large as their own. With only a few minutes gas for actual combat they still flew on to meet the enemy's crack squadrons from Thailand and Indo-China. That they acquitted themselves well is shown by the official figures of two enemy fighters destroyed and one probably destroyed . . . that many less to attempt breaking thru to the bombers. For several days after these missions, our efforts were the usual escort jobs that are so tedious to perform and yet require constant vigilance. Then a rush call from headquarters sent all available aircraft on a fighter sweep to an enemy airdrome in an effort to catch them on the ground after completing a raid over India. No aircraft were found but the boys took it out on the Japs by shooting up the airfield plus a large number of personnel. That, in addition, to sinking several supply boats on the Irrawaddy. Following this the squadron returned to routine operations enlivened only by contact with Jap planes near Mandalay, resulting in damaging of one enemy plane without loss to ourselves. Plus a strafing mission to Kanbalu railroad yards . . . important repair and servicing point for the Man-dalay-Myitkyina rail line.

On December 26, the squadron made a belated Christmas present to the Japs when they attacked the Anisakan Airdrome near Maymyo, headquarters for the enemy forces in Central Burma. If the Jap could have gotten out of his deep slit trenches to read the nickname on one of the 38's . . . Haleakala (Hawaiian for Fire God) he would have fervently agreed to the description. For the "Dragons" catching the Jap by surprise, strafed 11 of the 12 planes observed dispersed in the airdrome area and generally "messed up" their abode. The final count showed four enemy planes destroyed, three damaged, and four others attacked with unobserved results. All of our planes returned safely. We sustained damage to one plane as a result of flying too low. This caused one admiring enlisted man to remark; "No wonder our pilots surprised the enemy . . . they flew through the forest."

The December 26th visit of the Twin Dragons provided but a hint of its future performance, but from that date until February 15, 1944, the Lightnings once again lapsed into a routine of escort, dive-bombing lines of communication and supply, and air-ground support, highlighted by occasional big missions. On the latter date, the Squadron moved to Amarda Road for gunnery training.

It is worthy of note that Wing Commander F. R. Carey DSO, Commanding Officer of the school, predicted the bright future of the Twin Dragon Squadron. In a letter of commendation to the squadron, General Howard Davidson, Commanding General Tenth Air Force, cited the Wing Commander's remarks: "The keen, speedy, and altogether satisfactory manner in which pilots absorbed all instructions; the general high standard of marksmanship displayed; and the excellent maintenance throughout the course which resulted in no flying time being lost thru unserviceability." The comments of Mayor Luehring and many of the pilots of the 459 Fighter Squadron are excellent testimony to the valuable part this schooling played in their success on missions during March, April and May of 1944.

On March 4th, the Twin Dragons moved to Chittagong and became an integral part of 224 Group (RAF), and started the unit on its "beatup" of Jap airfields. In the period from March 11 to May 26, the squadron destroyed 123 planes, probably destroyed 20 and damaged 46, in 58 combat days. The record is all the more remarkable when it is considered that until recently the squadron operated at less than half strength in planes. For every day in which the squadron operated a combat mission, it averaged destruction of two enemy planes.

January 1945 saw the transfer of the Twin Dragons from Chittagong to a more forward and advantageous base on the India-Burma border . . . Rumkhapalong. This move marked the beginning of a new phase in the campaign to drive the Japs out of Burma. The rough edges have been worn off the little "Sons of Heaven;" now it was time to polish them off.

The Japanese Air Force was no longer a threat. Thus, it is here that the change in operational needs and methods since the previous year comes evident. The fact of the matter is that, like many fighter squadrons the 459 did, of necessity becomes bombers, bridge-busters, and ground support specialists. But even in this they excelled.

During the month of February, the Twin Dragons completed one nine-day phase of bridge-busting during which 11 vital rail and road bridges were permanently put out of commission. Only one week later the squadron established another record by destroying three similar bridges in a single day.

Further reports described the extent of damage inflicted on Jap installations during the week of 1 April to 7 April when the Squadron was commissioned to attack troop concentrations and ammunition dumps on two separate instances. On both occasions bombing and strafing spread tremendous fires throughout the entire target areas, the smoke rising to 10,000 feet. Information from reliable sources indicated that well over 500 Jap casualties were effected, and essential facilities and material (including considerable amounts of petrol) were demolished. Pilots unceasingly reported, upon returning from these missions, the destruction, havoc, and panic caused by their fierce attacks.

Thus has been the story of the Twin Dragons; Captain Walter F. Duke, the Dragon with the sharpest claws, is missing in action. Before he failed to return to his base, 22-year-old Duke, destroyed 10 Japs in the air and nine on the ground to become the India-Burma Theater's leading ace. In addition, he probably destroyed or damaged nine other Nips.

Of the other "Dragons" aces, Major Maxwell H. Glenn's record of eight decisions in the air and ten on the ground is the most spectacular, for he bagged five Jap aircraft on one mission. Major Hampton E. Boggs also had nine kills in the air, three on one mission, and four aground. Captain Harry H. Sealy's total is ten in the air and on the ground. Major Willard J. Webb joined the Ace ranks with five Nips in the air and added three on the ground for good measure.

During all of the past operations, teamwork is exemplified by the willingness to sacrifice individual records while advancing that of the Squadron. On a number of occasions, deep in

enemy territory, individual pilots turned back in an effort to save a crippled teammate. That it was extremely dangerous is shown by the fact that several were shot down in the attempt. The knowledge that each could expect the maximum of aid from his fellow pilots produced the closest cooperation.

Effective leadership in the final analysis consists of proper use of material and personnel and to gain the maximum striking force against the enemy. This, the "Twin Dragons" have done.

There is no knowing what the ultimate mission and destination of the Twin Dragons would be in Southeast Asia. But based on their past performances, it seemed a safe guess that before the Allied Airforces were finished with the Japanese, the 459 Fighter Squadron would have had ample opportunity to increase the tally of 152/25/75.

Such was the "trouncing" given to the J.A.F. during these weeks that he did not attempt to continue using the SHWEBO group of strips which would be the natural and best area from which to mount operations in support of troops in the Imphal Valley. Anisakan, another very important enemy airbase, became less popular to his Air Units and even the forces at Meiktila and Heho were radically pared. By the end of May, the Japanese Air Command had been forced into the humiliating position of giving, from Air Units based on comparatively secure Rangoon strips, ineffective and fleeting support to their army 600 miles away in the Northern mountains. The Japanese air strength had been completely neutralized in Burma.

Yet another high point in the history of the Twin Dragons was their high standard of performance in providing close support for the USAAF and RAF Liberators. To quote from their own (bombers) operational report; "The fighter escort was acclaimed by all crew members to have been superb throughout the operations, and no suggestions were made for improvement. This versatile squadron, which has been distinguished for many other uses, smothered threats to the bombers, which, if allowed to get through, unquestionably would have caused many casualties."

Another similar report reads thus: "Fighter opposition was kept well in hand by the P-38 escort. Just after the bomb-run, a force of about 12 enemy fighters was seen approaching in loose formation from about 9 o'clock, 2,000 feet below. So successful were the P-38's in breaking up this threat that at no time was the enemy able to press home more than spasmodic and uncoordinated attacks. In fact, the bomber crews of the 355th and 356th credit the fighter escort with at least three destroyed, although any three probables are claimed by the P-38's.

It would be difficult to select any one factor as being responsible for the "Twin Dragon's" success. Good leadership, airplane-pilot superiority, teamwork, Jap psychology, and eagerness of the pilots to strike a blow against the Japs all enter into the picture. Neither can the superior record of maintenance consistently maintained in the face of adverse conditions be praised too highly.

Certainly the twin engine P-38 with its 20mm. cannon and 4 Cal. 50's has played havoc among

Jap planes and airfields. Its ruggedness and durability have brought back more than 20 pilots on one engine. Capt. Cox, flight leader on a beat-up of enemy airfields in the Bangkok area, established what is believed to be a world's record by flying on single engine over 600 miles of enemy territory. This was accomplished after having received a direct hit from small arms fire during a low-level strafing attack on the Jap "Dum-Dum" of Thailand.

These qualities inspired in the pilots a confidence that allowed them to utilize its qualities to the best advantage. This, combined with superior marksmanship, gave them the edge. Time and again, Jap planes had been in a position to deliver a "kill" shot at close range, but were unable to effect it before being driven off or destroyed. Rarely, when in the same relative position, would our pilots fail.

The third reason for the squadron's success is a psychological one - the fact that our belief in the superiority of the Twin Dragon 38's and its pilots is shared by the Japs. In latter weeks they (the J.A.F.) showed a marked unwillingness in combat, breaking off attacks even when in a superior tactical position. This constant admission of inferiority must have been galling to the Japs. The effect on a people who put such a high value on "face" produced a correspondingly low morale. Tormented by this knowledge of his loss of "face" both in his own eyes and those of the Burmese, he could not be at his best.

The 80th Flying Training Wing welcomed an additional squadron to the wing during the 459 Flying Training Squadron reactivation ceremony and assumption of command April 17, only one week after welcoming the 469th FTS to the wing. The 459 FTS, previously the 459 Fighter Squadron, was reactivated to ease oversight of the overcrowded 89th Flying Training Squadron. There are about 40 personnel in the average squadron, but the 89th FTS had approximately 100 people.

German air force Col. Axel Pohlmann, commander of the 80th Operations Group, said increasing leadership to the mission of training T-6 pilots will make it easier for commanders to oversee training. "The (459 FTS) has very good people working for it. They have all the necessary experience to lead the squadron into the future," he said. The first commander of the 459 FTS, Lt. Col. Scottie Zamzow, said he was glad to take command as some members of the 89th FTS transfer to the 459 FTS. "My job is to serve the people of the squadron," he said, "and I won't let the Airmen down." "I hope to make an impact on these Airmen that lasts longer than I do," he said. "I also want to leave the 459 better than it was when it started."

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USAF Unit Histories  
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#### Sources

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