

THUNDER BUMS
396TH
FIGHTER SQDN.

R E S T R I C T E D

SQUADRON HISTORY
396TH FIGHTER SQUADRON
368TH FIGHTER GROUP

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FOREWORD

This history is dedicated to the Officers and Enlisted Men of the 396th Fighter Squadron; one grand bunch of fellows, whose aim during this great struggle shall be to do their utmost in effort and skill to defeat the enemy whenever he is met. As these pages shall unfold themselves, so shall the deeds of the men who go forward to make this history.

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THE ORIGINAL MEMBERS OF THE 396TH

Squadron C.O.-----	Maj. P.P. Douglas
Executive Officer-----	Maj. Wernli
Operations Officer-----	Capt. Sparks
Assist. Ops. Officer-----	Lt. Benton
Adjutant-----	Lt. Kessler
S-2 Officer-----	Lt. Dick
Assist. S-2 Officer-----	Lt. Thaler
QM Supply Officer-----	Lt. Carr
Communications Officer-----	Lt. Smith
Flight Surgeon-----	Lt. Cox
Armament Officer-----	Lt. Ward
Ordnance Officer-----	Lt. Russel
Engineering Officer-----	Lt. Olson

Green Flight

Henry
Loughary
Greene
Larsen
Ryerson
Loeb

Blue Flight

Myers
Olson
Rice
Hamilton
Gamblin

Yellow Flight

Romine
Kerchner
Ostuw
Carter
Jasper

Red Flight

McLachlan
Parrish
Robbins
Quilty
Haughton
Kennedy

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The 396th Squadron of the 368th Fighter Group was activated 1 June, 1943 at Westover Field, Mass. with Maj. Paul P. Douglas assuming command two days later. On the 5th June the Squadron moved to Orlando, Fla. for a 30 day course in Air Defense and the 24th of Aug. saw a permanent change of station to Republic Field, Farmingdale, L.I. From the date of activation until 20th Dec. 43, the Squadron was engaged in a vigorous training program in preparation for the job ahead overseas.

On 29th Dec. the day finally came; the Squadron left their POE, Camp Miles Standish, on board the S.S. ARGENTINA for the European Theater of Operations. They arrived in Scotland the 8th Jan. 44 and debarked at Gourock and Greenock for transportation to the new A.A.F. station at Greenham Common, Berks, England, where they found they were assigned to the 9th Air Force.

At Greenham Common the Squadron pitched in to make "homes" out of the Nissen Huts, and soon the Thunderbolts started coming in. On 1 Mar. Lt. Julian Loshin was assigned to the Squadron as Personal Equipment Officer. During the first half of March the Squadron continued its training, and the only mishap was Lt. Frank S. (Kerch) Kerchner having to belly in while slow-timing his plane. On 14 Mar. the big day arrived--the first operational mission for the Squadron, which was a fighter sweep over France. The mission was uneventful in itself, but that didn't mar the thrill of having begun their part in the show.

On 15 Mar. the Squadron moved to Chilbolton, England, and flew their 2nd mission. Two of the pilots on this mission became thoroughly familiar with flak--Parrish had to land at Maston because of a hit in the oil line, and Joe Ostuw brought back a couple of holes in the tail of his plane. By this time the boys were getting anxious for "Jerry" to send up some of his "Super-Pilots", but it wasn't until the 10th mission that the Squadron made its first kill. They met 25 Me-109's and FW-190's on the way home, and Myers, Gamblin, Henry and Larsen each got one.

The weather grounded our pilots the first few days of April and this time was devoted to training and maintenance. On the 7 April, Capt. John W. Baer, still on D.S. to the R.A.F. Gunnery School at Catfoss, was transferred from Group Operations to our Squadron, and Capt. Henry went to Group Ops. as Assistant Opsl Officer. On the 11th Lts. Spencer,

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Howie and F/O Ruhl joined the Squadron, and on the 18th Lt. Jerry Newman was assigned as Personal Equipment Officer, taking the place of Loshin. The end of April saw the 28th mission chalked up for the 396th and on the 29th Lts. Fox and Glazier became members of the Squadron.

During May the 396th struck repeated blows at the enemy all along the French coast and also participated in training missions as top cover for practice invasion forces. On 6 May "Little Olie" (our fighter pilot and congressman) flew his first operational mission. Major General Quesada presented decorations on the 8th of May, and everyone got a laugh out of his little chat with Quilty (The Kid). The General asked Quilty how old he was, "Twenty, Sir." "How did you happen to get into this racket?" The Kid hesitated for a moment and then answered, "I don't know, Sir." Lts. Fox and Glazier flew their "first" on the 10th of May and on the 15th four new pilots were assigned; Lts. Strickland, Waegener, Ohlman and Busenbark. While returning from an escort mission to the Villa-Coubly Airdrome south of Paris, Larsen's oil pressure kept falling off and when he was over the channel his engine cut out completely forcing him to bail out. He was in the drink only a short time before a British Walrus from the Air-Sea Rescue picked him up. In fact, the 45 min. which elapsed from the time he bailed out until he was picked up is one of the shortest rescue times in the history of the Air-Sea Rescue. And so another month passed in the ETO. It was indeed a busy one both in training and operations. The missions accomplished during the month had our pilots hitting rail facilities of the enemy both in Belgium and France. They had their deepest penetration into Germany proper by escorting Big Friends past Hanover. They divebombed hotspots such as Calais and many airdromes and fuel dumps, and all began to sense the tension growing around the possibility of D-Day coming in the near future.

June 3rd F/O Leslie Hansen joined the Squadron and the following day Lt. Gerald Grace came to us from the 395th. "A" party, or the Advanced Echelon, was alerted to be ready to move at any time. Then came 6 June 1944--a marked day for the history of the world--D-Day--H-Hour! The pilots were awakened at 0330 for briefing but our Squadron didn't get its first mission until that afternoon. A new phrase was used for the first time that day--"Bomb-Line"--but it was to become a thoroughly familiar one later on. On D-Day plus one the boys flew armed patrols over the beachhead in close

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support of the ground forces. On D+2 they flew patrols over Utah beachhead and the Squadron received the following TWX from General Brereton:

THIS FOLLOWING MESSAGE HAS BEEN RECEIVED FROM THE COMMANDING GENERAL NINTH AIR FORCE AND APPLIES TO THE 365TH, 366TH, AND 368TH FITER/B GPS! THE SPIRIT WITH WHICH THESE GROUPS ACCEPTED AND PERFORMED THEIR MISSION REFLECTS GREAT CREDIT TO THEM AND I AM MOST GRATEFUL FOR THEIR EFFORTS! IT IS POSSIBLE IF NOT PROBABLE THAT THEIR EFFORTS WERE IN A LARGE PART RESPONSIBLE FOR THE ATTACK ON OMAHA BEACH CONTINUING. HISTORY MAY SHOW THAT THEY SAVED THE DAY. QUOTE:"ON SEVENTH JUNE GROUPS OF YOUR COMMAND FURNISHED CLOSE CONTINUOUS SUPPORT TO THE OMAHA BEACH-HEAD AREA PERIOD CONTINUOUS SUPPORT RENDERED BY YOU RESTORED A DELICATE SITUATION PERIOD PLEASE PASS MY PERSONAL CONGRAT-ULATIONS TO THE GROUP COMMANDERS CONCERNED FOR THEIR FINE WORK BRERETON" UNQUOTE-----QUESADA-----

On the 10th of June the boys flew patrols from 0350 until dusk, and on the 3rd mission Lt. Ed. Houghton went in near the small town of Le Ham on the Cherbourg Peninsula. Houghton was the first pilot the Squadron lost in action. On the 11th Howie was hit in the engine by flak and had to belly in on the continent near an unidentified strip that was believed to be well within our lines. On the 12th Maj. Wernli led the Advanced Echelon on their little "invasion" to get the ball rolling at the new base the Squadron was moving to on the continent. Thus was born a phrase never to be forgotten by the members of this Squadron: "Strip 3--Normandy--on the Beachhead!" The German A.F. Bounced the boys returning from a mission on the 12th and "Chuck" Romine got 2 Me-109's. On the 13th the Jerries were at it again and this time Parrish, Larsen and Little Olie each got an FW-190. Olie had to land at a strip on the continent and while there met General Quesada. June 14th brought another loss to the 396th--Rice bailed out over Stockbridge and his chute failed to open. On the 2nd mission that day, Little Olie scored again claiming one FW-190. On 20th June, after brushing up on their French, the pilots flew the planes over to the new base at Strip 3 near Cardonville on the ALG. We lost two more pilots on the 22nd of June--Gamblin and Jasper, and on the 27th Robbins went in which brought the total up to five. Five more new pilots were assigned to the 396th--Lts. Cox, Schnedler, Steward, Taubert and Waggoner. The month ended with the rear echelon of the Squadron ready to move across the channel to join the rest of the Squadron already operating from the Strip. The Squadron deeply regreted the loss of those pilots who served their country well and contributed to the history of the world.

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The Rear Echelon didn't complete its move until the 3rd of July and when they reached the new site, they found that Lt. Carter had been missing since the 2nd of July when his engine failed. On the 6th of July, four new pilots were assigned to the Squadron--Lts. Maxwell, Knauss, Kielgass and F/O Wilcox. On the 7th the GAF bounced Blue Flight; Little Olie and Howie shared an FW-190 and Myers damaged one. By this time everyone had his fox hole as comfortable as possible, which isn't saying too much! The pilots continued their close support missions just back of the bomb-line, and on the 15th Bill Hearst, the famous correspondent, stayed with the Squadron quite some time getting a story which later appeared in the Collier's magazine. It was at this time that the 396th became known as the THUNDER BUMS--a name that was to become well known among other Groups as well as back in the States. On the 17th Schnedler, Steward and Taubert flew their first operational mission, and Schnedler insisted on the Purple Heart when brought back a couple of flak holes in his plane.

On the 18th Spencer was evidently hit during his bomb run on a bridge south of Caen and went straight in. Waggoner and Wilcox got their first mission on this one, and later on during the day Kielgass flew his first. On the night of the 19th the now Lt. Col. Douglas gave a little party in celebration of his promotion. It was broken up once by AA fire, but all in all the fellows had a pretty good time. The night of the 22nd was spent getting in and out of the sack due to numerous gas alarms and gunfire coming from the guards every 30 minutes. On the 23rd the Thunder Bums received five more new pilots; Lts. Dixon, Miller, Johnson, Stevens and Brizendine. On the 24th the Squadron pounded the enemy near St. Lo and though E/A were encountered near there, no kills were made. This was the first mission for Maxwell. On the 26th Capt. "Bone" Myers went in while strafing near Tessy Sur Vire, and the plane exploded on hitting the ground. On the 6th mission of the 26th Col. Douglas had to bail out when his plane was hit by flak, but he landed in friendly territory. On the 27th the Squadron flew 11 missions and on the first one Greene was seen to bail out after pulling up from a dive bomb run. On the 4th mission Capt. McLachlan had to bail out, but he was seen to gather his chute up and run for some of our tanks in the distance so it was fairly certain that he would be safe. This hope was confirmed the next day when Mac returned to the Squadron--a little scratched up but with a story to tell about being caught between a crossfire of our forces and the enemy.

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The month ended with the Allies pushing south, west and east from their original front along the Periers-St. Lo road. Our army was given the closest support from the air, with our Thunderbombers working hand in hand with the ground forces. July was costly to the Squadron, too, for we lost Carter, Johnny Spencer, Bone Myers and G.Y. Greene--all of them helping to make this history and doing a splendid job. The pages are turning now, with the progress of the part which this Squadron is playing in the war effort showing itself by the work and willingness of all concerned. Thunder Bums they may call themselves, but great guys all.

During the first part of ~~April~~^{August} the following TWX was received from General Quesada:

THERE IS NO USE EXPRESSING MY APPRECIATION FOR WHAT YOU ALL HAVE DONE THESE PAST THREE DAYS BECAUSE THE RESULTS I FEEL ARE A JUST REWARD! A REAL BREAK THROUGH HAS BEEN ACCOMPLISHED AND BY GOSH! BY GUM! YOU HAVE ALL DONE MORE THAN YOUR SHARE. I JUST CANNOT EXPRESS MY GRATITUDE IN WORDS AND JUST SAY A SIMPLE THANKS TO EVERY ENLISTED MAN AND OFFICER IN THE COMBAT UNITS, SERVICE UNITS AND AUXILIARY UNITS FOR WHAT THEY HAVE DONE! MY APPRECIATION GOES TO EVERY MACHANIC, COOK, MP, CREW CHEIF, RADIO OPERATOR, ARMORER, INTELLIGENCE OFFICER, WING COMMANDER CONTROLLER, BOYS IN THE AIRCRAFT WARNING SERVICE, VHF OPERATORS, TELEPHONE OPERATORS, GROUP COMMANDERS, SQUADRON COMMANDERS AND TO THE BOYS WITH THE STICK IN HIS HANDS. YOU HAVE ALL DONE A GRAND JOB!

----QUESADA---

On the 2nd of Aug. Johnson and Dixon flew their first mission and on the 7th and 8th the GAF again came up to meet our boys. McLachlan, and Benton each got one and Parrish got two. On the 13th C.H. Olson (Big Olie) had to bail out near Leffard and his chute was seen to hit the ground. Spike Jones brought his City Slickers to the Strip the 15th and the show was enjoyed by everyone. On the 21st the Advanced Echelon got ready to move to the new base at Chartres the 23rd and three new pilots were assigned to the Squadron: Lts. George Myers, Newhart and Pace. On the 28th Steward Went in near Beiz bringing the total to 11 boys lost from the Squadron. On the 29th Gradie was hit by flak and had to belly in but got out o.k. Another month has gone on its way in France. From the Operations Cobra, we saw the breakthrough which started at the end of last month take its large proportions, cut the Brest Peninsula, and then swing east to gain more momentum. Our boys continued their fine job, aiding the ground forces who were on the

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move from Meaux toward Soissons.

On the 1st of Sept. Grace returned, having been rescued by a group of Frenchmen after bellying in on the 29th of Aug. Also on the 1st the Squadron received two new pilots--Capt. Dennis Crisp and 1st Lt. Jerry Tullis. Sept 3rd was spent bombing and strafing the retreating enemy near Mohns--Joe Ostuw making sure of 3 of them! On this day our troops reached Brussels and on the 6th the bomb-line moved into Germany near Saarbrucken. The Squadron was notified of its expected move to Laon. On the 8th our boys worked with the 29th Infantry Division who were laying siege to the city of Brest and on the 9th went back to its old friend, the 3rd Armored Division--knocking out German 88's behind the bomb-line. On the 11th the pilots landed at our new base A-69 at Laon for continued operation from there until the next move. The Thunder Bums flew their first mission over the Siegfried Line the 12th of Sept.--bombing and strafing locomotives and M/T around Aachen. Nine of our planes were flown to England on the 13th to be fitted for rockets. The Thunder Bums continued with their close support of the ground forces during the remainder of the month--bombing and strafing such targets as Metz, Aachen, Köln and Coblenz. On the 29th the Advanced Echelon moved on to our new base at Chievres, keeping up with the advancing front lines.

On the 1st of Oct. six new pilots joined the Squadron--Lts. Boss, Dunbar, Hammett, Schindling, Gennoy and Holiman. On the 2nd the move to Chievres, Belgium was completed, and the missions consisted of rail-cutting along the Rhine. On the 6th the Squadron strafed the Breitscheid airdrome, destroying 19 E/A, with 9 probables and 2 damaged. After a very successful day on the 7th, the boys gave a party for McLachlan, Romine and Larsen who having done a swell job, were on orders to go home. On the 11th the Squadron flew a mission to Aachen which had received the ultimatum ordering the troops in the city to surrender or suffer the consequences. On the 20th the boys tangles with the GAF again, Col. Douglas getting 3, Pap Kennedy 1, Howie 2 and Little Olie 1. Much to our regret the Jerries scored on this mission also, setting fire to Maxwell's plane and forcing him to bail out. On the 21st the Squadron flew more close support and Lt. Jim Philbrick joined us as our new Assist. Engineering Officer. The remainder of the month brought bad weather which kept the pilots on the ground most of the time.

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On Nov. 2nd Gennoy flew his first mission which went out to destroy a railroad bridge over the Erft canal in the vicinity of Kenten. Capt. Baer led the Group on a mission to Euskirchen on the 6th which was Boss' first. On the 9th Nov. Lt. Col. Douglas left the Squadron to take on the duties of Group Flying Executive Officer and Assist. C.O., and Capt. Crisp became our new Squadron CIO. with Capt. Baer getting Squadron Ops. On the 12th Soderlund joined the Squadron and two days later Parrish left for the Z.I. Three more pilots were assigned to the 396th on the 15th; Lts. Campbell, Breuer and Hunt. Campbell had only been with us one day until he started beating out that particular brand of "Boogy" of his on the piano. On the 17th 1st Lt. Jones joined the Squadron. On the 18th Knauss went in while strafing Tiger tanks near Heistern.

The Squadron flew leaflet missions on the 19th and Joe Ostuw flew his 100th mission. Col. Douglas took a public relations officer up in X, our piggy-back P-47, in which they made a recording of an operational mission. This recording was to be relayed to the States over one of the networks later. On the 21st all the fellows were glad to hear that the status on Robbins had been changed from MIA to POW. On the 26th the Squadron was bounced by 3 Me-109's and one of them got Johnson, setting his plane on fire. Johnson bellied in safely, however, and returned to base the next day. On the 28th Loeb's plane was hit by flak and he bellied in safely near Aachen. Lt. Col. Douglas had this to say about the close support work the Squadron had been doing during the month: "It can be likened to a rock under which some busy ants are working. When the rock is removed, the ants start to move about in many directions, finding more freedom of movement instead of the confined space they have sensed before. So it is with our fighter-bombers working in close support with the ground forces--we blast targets holding them up and fly reconnaissance of the area immediately in front of them; thus keeping the "rock" from over them."

On the 1st of Dec. the boys spotted their first V-1 while on a mission. Jones flew his first mission on the 5th which was a dive bombing mission north of Echtz. The bombing was so good that the first two bombs put out the smoke marker in the center of the target which was a gun emplacement. On the 8th Bert Loughary was notified he was on orders to go home for a 30 day leave with the Col., and the inevitable party was scheduled for that night. On the 10th the boys carried rockets for the first time and also carried them again the next day.

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Lt. Thorough joined the Squadron the 11th and on the 17th the German counter-offensive began in the 9th and 78th Division sectors with our pilots flying missions up that way to help them out. They were bounced by E/A that day, 20 FW-190's, and Pace was shot down. The Thunder Bums took their toll on the Jerries--Benton getting 1, Kerchner 2, Davis 1, Johnson 1, and Hansen 1 damaged. This mission was Breuer's first one. On the 18th the German counter-attack had gained momentum and had come to be known as the "break-through". The Squadron flew its 300th mission on the 18th with Capt. Baer leading and again scored against the GAF. Capt. Baer shot down 2, R yerson 1, and Dunbar got a probable. On the 19th the weather kept the planes on the ground and the German counter-attack continued. Late that afternoon Capt. Crisp was notified that he was now authorized a gold leaf in lieu of his railroad tracks. The pilots didn't get off the ground until the 13th when a mission led by Capt. Baer encountered 20 E/A and knocked down 13 of them! The final results were: Capt. Baer 2, Tullis 3 and Kerchner, Grace, Newhart, Brizendine, Dixon, Hansen and Dunbar each got one, making it quite a day for the Thunder Bums. On the 25th we found out that our scheduled move to A-79 near Reims had been changed to Metz, France, and on the 27th the Squadron moved to Juvincourt before going on to Metz.

The year 1944 has gone by. During this last month the Squadron hit Jerry's Air power and did its share in shooting down 21 enemy aircraft, probably one more and damaging 6 others. The German planned their Operations "Greif", with the break-through in the St. Vith area. The Squadron flew their missions in this area to help wherever possible. The Luftwaffe was up in strength with the Thunder Bums in three fights with them. As of the 23rd of Dec., the Group came under the XIX TAC and towards the end of the month we were back in France once again, ready to go on to Metz. The unit has been overseas one year as the curtain raises on 1945.

The new year opened with the Advanced Echelon leaving for Y-74 at Metz and the Squadron pounding targets in the Trier sector. The afternoon of the 1st we were notified not to send any more equipment to Metz for E/A had attacked and strafed planes already on the field. On the 3rd Jan., 1945, the planes landed at our new base; this was Hunt's first mission. Weather grounded the Squadron until the 10th when they bombed and strafed Bitburg. On the 14th both Campbell and Huff became operational and that afternoon it was learned that Greene's status had been officially changed from MIA to POW.

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On the 15th Capts. Baer, Ostuw and Ryerson found out they were on orders for a 30 day leave in the States. Two new pilots were assigned on the 17th--Lts. Citro and Winchester. On the 22nd the pilots had a field day when they found German mixed vehicles trying to get out of the remnants of the Ardennes salient north of Viaden on both sides of the Our River. The grand total for the day was 124 M/T destroyed, 77 damaged. On the 23rd the Squadron was notified that the Group had received the Presidential Unit Citation for work done near Mons the 3rd of Sept. 1944. One more pilot joined the Squadron this date--Lt. Sheedy. The Citation read as follows:

BATTLE HONORS

"The 368th Fighter Group. For outstanding performance of duty in action against the enemy on 3 September 1944 in the execution of an air-ground effort in conjunction with units of the ground forces in the vicinity of Mons. In the face of a withering barrage of antiaircraft and small arms fire, flights of the 368th Fighter Group bombed and strafed enemy targets. The group destroyed 262 motor transports and damaged 30 more. In addition, 230 horse-drawn vehicles were destroyed as well as an undetermined number of enemy personnel in the target areas. The group was further successful in seeking out, strafing and bombing targets of opportunity that impeded the advance of the ground forces. To accomplish their assigned task, eighty-three P-47 aircraft were dispatched on seven missions to strike a devastating blow in disrupting and battering the German defenses. The victorious exploits of the pilots of the 368th Fighter Group who struck a staggering blow to the enemy's supply of armored vehicles and motor transport, displaying that leadership, teamwork and flying skill which is in keeping with the highest traditions of the Service.

----BY COMMAND OF GENERAL VANDENBERG----

Jan. 1945 brought with it the first anniversary of the unit's arrival in the ETO. The German's attempt to stab into our lines in the now famous "Ardennes Salient" was a failure and our pilots did a marvelous job of bombing and strafing enemy vehicles leading out of the salient. As the Battle for Germany continues, the Thunder Bums will demonstrate their important role in the joint air-ground action against the enemy. By this time the Germans had come to justly fear the "Jabos" as they called our Thunderbolts.

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The 1st of Feb. saw the beginning of "Toss Bombing" in connection with the Squadron. We learned we were to be the first and only Squadron in the A.A.F. to experiment with this new secret type of bombing. On the 12th Louis Hamilton departed for the ZI and the Squadron flew a Napalm mission to an ammo dump near Rheinbach. On the 21st Henry went in while strafing tanks near Bastogne. On the 22nd Pap Kennedy, "The Oldest Living Fighter Pilot in the ETO" ldft us for the ZI. On the 23rd Schindling had to bail out in enemy territory near Feuerschied and Winchester flew his first mission. On the 24th as on the 23rd, the Squadron flew 4 ship missions in close support of the XII Corp near Bitburg.

A total of 54 missions were flown by the Squadron during the short month of February. The missions varied from armed recces, attacking airdromes, trying to knock out a bridge near Dusseldorf, escort and attacking trains in the Ruhr industrial region. They also included a part in the TAC's all-out effort with the mediums in disrupting the enemy's rail and communication network. The armies up north jumped off in a race to the Rhine and the Group was part of the participating air support in helping reduce the German bulge south of Prum, plus rendering close coordination with air strikes in front of our troops as they closed up to the Prum, then the Nims and were closing up to the Kyll river on their march eastward as the month ended. The month was very eventful as the tempo of the Battle for Germany increased.

On March 2nd the Squadron flew its first "Toss Bomb" mission getting fair results on a bridge near Saarbrucken. On the 3rd the boys flew 12 missions in the Badem area, hitting enemy rail and motor transportation and gun emplacements, and the following commendation was received from the 5th Division:

"The last three flights assigned for the day (3rd Mar.) consisting of 396 Blue, 396 Green and 396 Yellow, did an outstanding job of cooperating with the Division troops. The flights attacked a woods at L-2057 today when our troops were but 200 yards away. Before the attack the division (10th Infantry) had received three artillery concentrations of 100 rounds, 40 rounds and 30 rounds. After the aircraft attacked the woods no more fire was received. The weather was 7/10 cover with 1500 feet ceiling at that time. Two tanks were observed burning after the attack. BADEM was strafed by the aircraft at the request of the Division whereby three AA positions were silenced. Our troops were 150 yds. away from the target disposed in a horseshoe patter, complicating the safety factor for the fighter bombers. As a result

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of the assistance of the bombing and strafing, the troops moved into the town with very little resistance after the attack. A division artillery observer in a Cub plane stated that the work of the aircraft was magnificent."

The next few days were spent in close support up and down the Rhine River and on the 10th Loeb left for the ZI. On the 11th the boys were told by the ALO of two more bridges having been put up across the Rhine in anticipation of a crossing in the near future by the 3rd Army. On Mar 14th a dance was held in celebration of one year of combat and on the 15th Lts. E.D. Storms, M.B. Nichols and F/Os H.M. Hansen and D.O. Harriman joined the Squadron. Dixon got an FW-190 near Weisbaden on the 16th. Joe Ostuw returned from the States to start another tour of duty on the 19th and the four new pilots continued their training by flying practice toss bomb missions. On the 23rd the Squadron flew armed recces in the Darmstadt area while the 3rd Army made its Rhine crossing. Nichols and Harriman flew their first mission this date and Storms and Hansen got theirs the next day while flying continuous armed recces over the Rhine crossing. On this day the Squadron flew an all time record of 64 sorties! The last mission for the day was composed of "8 Hot Rocks" with all the old boys participating. On the 25th the Squadron got off at 0600 to toss bomb a railroad bridge northeast of Lohr. On the 26th Myers bailed out while on a training mission and his chute failed to open. Also on this date the Squadron had some trouble with the Germans jamming our radio. On the 28th Citro had an exciting tale about the ammo dump he blew up and Grace and Howie left for their 30 day leave in the States. On the 30th a new pilot joined the Squadron--Lt. Mitchell, and on ammission that afternoon, Schnedler provided a little amusement when he chased a German on a motorcycle trying to strafe him.

March showed what the increased tempo for the Battle of Germany led to. The Squadron flew close coordination with the XII Corps in the early part of the month at which time excellent air strikes and teamwork was displayed. The commendations which came through were manifest of the Thunder Bums' part in the Air-Ground team. General Patton's men swept across the Kyll River towards the Rhine, then south to clean out the Germans west of the river. During this phase, our boys flew against targets in front of the troops. The Remagen Bridgehead was secured by the 1st Army and the 3rd crossed later in the month south of Mainz. The Battle kept gaining more momentum with the rush into Germany east of the Rhine, and we were finding it pretty hard to keep up with the rapidly changing bomb line.

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On the 5th of April the Squadron flew a very successful mission to the vicinity between Bayreuth and Nurnberg where they found and destroyed 46 M/T. Four new pilots were assigned on this date--Lts. Shoenberg, Austin and the twins, Bob and Jack Sharp. On the 7th Joe Ostuw shot down his first E/A, a trainer (Fiesler Storch) and the boys kidded him a lot about it. On the 8th Nichols was hit by flak while strafing near Gotha, severely damaging the elevator, wing and aileron and starting a fire in his left wing. He had to belly in back at the base. Mitchell flew his first mission on the 9th and Ohlman, Quilty and Glazier left for the ZI. Tullis who was on the same orders, returned from the Riviera in time to follow them the next day. On the 13th we heard the tragic news of the death of our Commander-in-Chief. Wilcox got an Arado 96B after strafing the marshalling yards at Chemnitz with Major Crisp leading the mission. On the 15th the Squadron flew an escort mission to Lake Geneva and landed at our new base at Frankfurt. Everyone was very pleased with the quarters--two-story cottages with all the conveniences of home for each flight. On the 16th Jones led a mission the the Prague airdrome and the score of the mission was as follows:

Jones-----	1 Ju-88 destroyed-----	4 Ju-88s damaged
	1 Me-410	"
Storms-----	1 Ju-88	" -----1 Ju-88 "
Dunbar-----	1 He-11	" -----4 FW-190s "
Citro-----	1 Ju-88	" -----4 Ju-88s "
Miller-----	1 Ju-88	" -----4 Transports "
Gennoy-----	1 He-111	" -----4 SE fighters "
Wilcox-----	1 DO-217	" -----2 Ju-88s "
Shoenberg-----		" -----1 Ju-88 "

This was Shoenberg's first mission, and the highlight of the affair was when Billy Dean Dunbar destroyed an Me-109 in the air after Jones and Storms failed to get it because of lack of ammo. Austin flew his first mission earlier in the day, with the Sharp twins. On the 18th while on a recce mission east of Prague, Taubert and Dixon strafed an airdrome; Taubert getting 2 Ju-52s and Dixon getting 1. We were released for the full day on the 19th, with only local flying during the day. At about 1900 an FW-190 came over the field and approached to land. The pilot didn't make it the first time and decided to go around again. The field's AA defense opened up, but the E/A came in to land. The pilot came out of the '190 with his hands up to give himself up as a prisoner of war--the war was "kaput" for him. On the 20th Austin got clobbered near Cham and had to belly land at the base. On the 21st two new pilots came into the Squadron--Lts Noble and Storigross. On the 23rd the Squadron bombed the marshalling yards at Munich and strafed M/T south of Ingolstadt. Carder was assigned to the Squadron

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on this date. On the 24th Jack Sharp went in while strafing the open dors of concrete ammo dumps at Baar. The explosion sent debris up to 7,000 feet. On the 27th Jones led a mission to the airdrome southwest of Linz, Austria and since the weather back at base was bad, the mission had to land at R-29 near Nurnberg. Two pilots were assigned this date--Capt. Foster and Lt. Higgins.

The Squadron's 16th month in the ETO has come to a close. We moved into Germany and set up in one of the popular German airdromes. The Thunder Bums flew missions to the Czechslovakian and Austrian frontiers, then flew over Czech and Austrian territory. The Russians and Americans linked up, the city of Munich was practically in American hands and the Nazis had very little of Germany left. Our pilots hit the Luftwaffe in the air claiming 5-1-0 and dealt another blow by strafing the enemy's aircraft on his airdromes. The Nazis were being pinned in and their transportation hit hard by our boys strafing and destroying many locomotives and vehicles. The fight continued as Jerry was getting down on his knees as the Allied Forces were completing the Battle for Germany.

On the 1st of May the advanced Echelon left for our new base at B-42, Bushschwabach, Germany near Nurnberg and the next day the Squadron flew armed reces in the Ingolstadt-Straubing-Cham area and 6 new pilots joined the Squadron--Lts. Reynolds, Simon, Cook, Hohansen, Malone and Carlson. On the 4th Petrie led a mission back into the Alps south of Salzburg where the Squadron caught a convoy, destroying 48 M/T. On May 7th the Squadron was briefed for an armed recce to Passau and at 2145 that night BBC announced the surrender of the German forces to the Allies and that May 8th would be proclaimed as official V-E day. On this historical date there was very little activity; the pilots all listening to the various addresses by important leaders of the Allies. The cease hostilities order was to be given at 0001 May 9th with the unconditional surrender of Germany to the Allies. The Jerries were KAPUT! This ended a long hard road and Victory was ours. On the 13th May the Squadron moved to its new Base near Nurnberg where it found that is was to be part of the Occupational Air Force and on Aug. 15th it moved to ~~XX~~ Straubing, Germany to take up its occupational duties.

May 1945 has become history. Events turned swiftly towards the final unconditional surrender. The Battle for Germany ended officially at 0001, 9 May when all hostilities were to cease. Nazidom was crushed. There were only a few missions flown, a couple of them pretty fruitful.

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R E S T R I C T E D

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The last operational mission was flown on May 9th--a defensive patrol. The Squadron flew 551 missions against the enemy and many have been the deeds and accomplishments of the Thunder Bums, with the Squadron playing no small part in the great Victory in Europe. The air-ground cooperation has been brightly reflected by the commendations, the Unit Citation and the record which the Thunder Bums present as finally compiled to the last day of operations:

THE RECORD

E/A (air)	destroyed	probables	damaged
E/A (air)	44	7	19
(gnd)	54	12	79
Tanks	169		236
M/T	2108		970
Locomotives	217		87
Freight cars	865		604
Bridges	9		8

Total Operational Time	15,184:50 hours
Total Sorties	5,634

The following is a list of awards given to members of this organization, not including some pending at the time of this writing:

Distinguished Service Cross	2
Silver Star	9
Bronz Star	31
Distinguished Flying Cross	49 (including 6 clusters)
Air Medal	76 (excluding the many clusters)
Purple Heart	8 (including 1 cluster)
Croix de Guerre	1

The Squadron's operational casualties were:

KIA--8
MIA--5
POW--4

Thus ends the glorious combat history of the 396th Fighter Squadron, and in memory of those great bunch of guys, the THUNDER BUMS, we want to rededicate this history. A bouquet goes to Murray Thaler whose daily recording of our deeds made the whole thing possible.

----'END'----