

SA-FJ-66-H-1 15 Jan. 1941 — — 1949 +	RETURN TO: Director Research Studies Institute Attn: Archives Branch Maxwell AFB, Alabama
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316-7 HISTORY HISTORY

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SELECTED HISTORICAL DATA PERTAINING TO THE 66TH FIGHTER SQUADRON OF THE
57TH FIGHTER GROUP

The 66th Fighter Squadron was activated as a part of the 57th Fighter Group on 15 January 1941 at Mitchel Field, Long Island, New York.

During the war years the 66th Fighter Squadron was assigned as follows: (1) U.S. Army Middle East Air Force from July 1942 until establishment of the Ninth Air Force on 12 November 1942 (2) Ninth Air Force 12 November 1942 to 22 August 1945 (3) Twelfth Air Force 22 August 1945 until the close of the war. (At the beginning of August 1945 the Group was making preparations for transfer to the Pacific.)

On 1 July 1942, P-40's and pilots of the 66th Fighter Squadron, were taken aboard the U.S.S. Ranger for transport to West Africa. Eighteen days later, the carrier had reached a point about 100 miles from the Gold Coast. The planes were launched from the ship and proceeded along the trans-Africa airway to Cairo, Egypt and thence to stations in Palestine. Completion of the trip with negligible loss of aircraft was made possible, in part, by the efforts of ground crews that followed by air transport. After landing on the same field as the fighters, these men would spend the night putting the P-40's into condition for the next leg of the flight. The excellent record made in the trans-African crossing led to commendations from both Maj. Gen. Russell L. Maxwell, who commanded the U.S. Army Air Forces in the Middle East, and Maj. Gen. Lewis H. Brereton, commander of all AAF units in that area. Upon arrival in the Middle East the Unit joined the RAF for desert flight training. The 66th Fighter Squadron was a part of the first American outfit to see action in Africa.

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The 66th Fighter Squadron reached the Middle East at a time when the Axis forces at El Alamein threatened to sweep toward the Nile Delta and Suez Canal. In order that orientation in the theater might be effected without delay, pilots of the 66th soon began to fly with RAF squadrons. The ground echelon arrived on 17 August. By this time the fighter pilots had acquired much valuable experience and already had engaged the Luftwaffe in combat.

In mid-September the 66th moved to a landing ground in the Western Desert, about 35 miles southwest of Alexandria to prepare for an Allied offensive. The 66th, 65th and 64th Fighter Squadrons were placed under the operational control of the RAF--an arrangement that was to continue for some months. After acting as a reserve unit for a short time, the 66th began active operations over the enemy lines in early October. The first aerial victory for the Group came on 9 October, when one ME-109 was destroyed, another probably destroyed, and one ME 202 damaged.

In the air offensive that preceded the Battle of El Alamein, the 66th along with the 64th and 65th Fighter Squadrons of the 57th Fighter Group were credited with one tenth of all the sorties flown by the Desert Air Force. With the opening of the engagement proper, on the night of 23-24 October, the 66th cooperated closely with the British Eighth Army, in bombing and strafing enemy airfields, lines of communications, and troop concentrations. "It was during this phase of the Battle of Egypt that the major portion of the German and Italian Air Forces supporting Marshal Rommel were put out of action. A large portion of this destruction was accomplished as a result of new fighter-bomber tactics introduced by the 57th Fighter Group. The tactics employed consisted of flying to the target on the deck

thus eluding detecting apparatus and then making the initial strike at dawn thus taking the enemy by complete surprise." As Rommel's divisions fell back, P-40's of the 66th harassed his retreating armies with such intensity that a regrouping of his disorganized forces was out of question.

During succeeding months as the tide of battle swept across Tripolitania and into Tunisia, the 66th Fighter Squadron continued to coordinate its operations with those of the British. This co-operation was especially pronounced during the battle of the Mareth Line, when the Group dispatched repeated bombing and strafing missions to eliminate opposition against Allied ground forces. After the breaching of the Mareth Line and the withdrawal of the Axis forces, aircraft of the 66th hovered over enemy columns in the Gabes area, disrupting traffic and destroyed military equipment that was being shifted to new positions.

On 29 April 1943, while on a fighter sweep over the Bay of Tunis, near the tip of Cap Bon Peninsula, P-40's of the 66th along with other units attacked more than 100 German transports and their escort. In the course of the engagement, at least 70 enemy aircraft were destroyed, in addition to other probably destroyed, and 28 damaged--a performance that won a Unit Citation for the group.

With the close of the Tunisian campaign plans were formulated for the reduction of Pantelleria. The 66th was one of the few units of the Desert Air Force designated for participation in Operation "GORKSCREW". In the Sicilian campaign the 66th played an active part by flying sweeps, serving as escort, and engaging the enemy in aerial combat. The Group received its second Unit Citation for participation in the Middle East Campaign, which

started with the Battle of El Alamein and terminated with the capitulation of enemy forces in Tunisia and Sicily.

Soon after the Salerno invasion, the 66th, along with other units of the Group, was transferred to Italy (16 Sep 43), where it participated in various Italian campaigns. The 66th was one of the units of the Group that pioneered the high-altitude P-47 as a low-level strafing and dive-bombing plane, developing these techniques so effectively that it was moved to Corsica temporarily, to operate as a special task force. From bases there, it participated in attacking targets in Northern Italy. The Group received its third Unit citation for conducting operations connected with the interdiction of railroads and communications, destruction of locomotives, rolling stock, and motor vehicles behind the enemy lines, especially during the period 1 to 14 April.

In June 1944, the 66th Fighter Squadron, collaborated with the French in their campaign against the island of Elba, and in August of that year participated in the invasion of Southern France. Returning to Italy with the Group, the 66th continued tactical operations. The end of the war in the ETO found the 66th stationed at Villa Franca di Verona Landing Ground in Northern Italy. Upon return to the United States, the 66th Fighter Squadron along with the other units of the group were inactivated at Drew Field, Florida, on 7 November 1946.

REACTIVATION OF THE 66TH FIGHTER SQUADRON

The 66th Fighter Squadron was reactivated with the Group at Shemya, Alaska, terminal of the Aleutian Chain, on 15 August 1946 and equipped with P-38's. These were soon replaced with P-51's which now have been replaced with P-80C's.

The primary mission of the 66th Fighter Squadron is to maintain fighter aircraft defense and fighter support for such land, air, and naval units as may be directed by higher headquarters.

In addition to its primary mission the 66th has conducted several operational tests during the past two years. The results of these tests have done much to further the Air Forces' knowledge of operating fighter type aircraft in cold weather area.

One of the most unusual missions/^{assigned}the organization was to participate in the bombing of ice clogged Alaskan rivers. Each year, spring thaws create ice jams in the rivers of the Territory and occasionally life and property are endangered by the resultant high water level. Prior to the replacement of the P-51 type aircraft by jets, bombing was done by fighters. Two 500 pound bombs, mounted on the wings, were used to break the jams. In 1949, bombing of ice jams in Alaskan rivers, was conducted by B-26's which were assigned to this Group.

The 66th Fighter Squadron is presently Commanded by Major Texas I. Popovich, The 57th Fighter Group, known as "The Guardians of The North", Commanded by Colonel B. F. Kleins of Gonzales, Texas, stand ready to guard America's most strategic frontier.

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57HAJ 514.7 (10 Jan 49) 2nd Ind.
 Subject: Unit History

OLJ/aww
 JAN 19 1950

HEADQUARTERS, 57TH FIGHTER WING, Elmendorf AFB, Fort Richardson, Alaska

TO: Commanding General, Alaskan Air Command, Elmendorf AFB, Fort Richardson, Alaska

Basic communication complied with.

FOR THE COMMANDING GENERAL:

- 1 Incl.
 1. History of 66th Ftr Sq (dup)

ORLEAN L. J. TWEDT
 1st Lt. USAF
 Ass't Adjutant

Routing	Initials
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	Adj
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	Gd Safety
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