



367th Fighter Group newsletter – Issue # 4 - July 2012

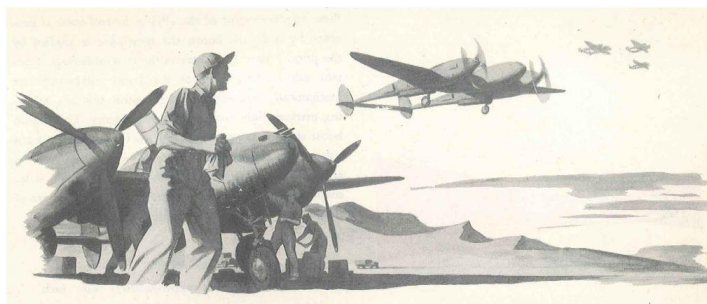


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Dear Friends, Families and 367th Fighter Group members,

This newsletter contains only one article. The information I have concerning the first missions of the 367th Fighter Group make that I did not want to cut this article in too much parts. I think that I will use 2 additional issues to give you all the information. Nevertheless, I have added the missions list for May 1944 in this issue. I will add the missions list for June 1944 in issue # 5, missions list for July 1944 in issue # 6 and so on.

I still expect to be able to publish soon the articles related to Stoney Cross and Ibsley, the airfields used by the Dynamite Gang in UK. Any picture or information you have on these 2 airfields would be very welcome. I wish you all a great summer.

The first missions of the 367th Fighter Group

The month of training, between the beginning of April and the beginning of May 1944, was turned towards one aim, the first missions. All the personnel, ground crews, ground officers, cooks, medical staff, etc, did their best for that purpose. But first the most important thing was that the pilots had to master their new plane, the powerful P-38 Lightning. Most of them had little or no experience on twin engine planes. Some had already flown on the Bobcat that the Group had in the States but piloting a twin engine fighter is another thing. To add to this difficulty the number of commissioned P-38s was pretty low. The lack of spare parts or new modifications asked by Lockheed were the main complains of the pilots and ground crews.

The narrative in the monthly report of April 1944 of the 392nd FS was : "shortly after we arrived here (Stoney Cross) we were informed that we would be flying P-38 planes. This was a complete surprise to everyone as the pilots and ground crews spent most of

their time in the United States flying and working on single engine planes. It was on 11 April that Cap. Joe Rettig made the first local training flight. The rest of the month was spent in training and in maintenance and becoming accustomed to life in England".

The narrative in the monthly report of April 1944 of the 394th FS was : "on April eighth, twenty P-38s (one J-5, nine J-10 and 10 J-15) were assigned to the squadron of which only one was "available" for training on delivery. As no one had worked on these planes for some time, many modifications were necessary. In addition to the delay caused by the conditions of the planes, parts were lacking, manifold ventures in particular. The officers and men in engineering and supply worked unceasingly to make the planes available. April thirtieth saw the squadron with fifteen planes available for training with nine planes out. Five of these were waiting engine changes.



Cap. Ed Rettig in Stoney Cross. He was KIA while strafing a German convoy near Rennes, France, on June 18, 1944 (archive 367th FG)



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In view of the other squadrons' records, this was of particular credit to the 394th. While things were made ready the pilots attended group ground school. This training program was started on the seventh of April. Among the subject taught were geography, recognition, tactics, flak and weather. Classes were conducted by the group and squadron Intelligence Officers and officers outside of the group who had special training or experience in particular field. At the close of the month, the pilots attended the demonstrations of a mobile P-38 Mobile Unit".

Unfortunately the monthly report of the 393rd FS is unreadable. But the diary written by Cap. Jack Reed, the 'C' flight leader of the 393rd FS at this time is really interesting : *"We have a terrific amount of work to do as far as flying is concerned. I check out in a P-38 this P.M (April 10, 1944) and it is entirely different from a single engine ship as we have been used to, so we are going to have to do a lot of work in a short time. Frankly, my impression of a 38 is like pushing around a big truck. You really know you have hold of a heavy ship. But some practice should cure that.../...We are trying to get parts to get our ships in commission but so far they haven't managed to get any. But whether yes or no we go operational May 1st".*

This training had to be performed in a very short time as every Fighter Group already in United Kingdom had a role to play for the invasion of France. To add to the difficulties, the pilots were pretty rotten after more than one month without flying. They paid a heavy toll during this training, as 6 accidents occurred before the first mission. IN the narrative of the 392nd FS one can read : *"On the 20th Lt. Henry Gillespie bailed out of his plane when an engine caught fire (he suffered no injury). The following day, Lt. Frank Leppin made a dead stick belly landing and on the 24th Lt. Milton 'Milty' Jaeger, while landing his plane on one engine was unable to lock his wheels and the left wheel collapsed causing minor plane damage".*

"On April tenth, the 394th FS suffered a great personal loss. Cap. James S. Peck, first Commanding Officer of the squadron, crash fatally while landing. Admire by and the friend of every officer and man of the squadron and group, his departure came as a stunning blow. It was a privilege to have known Cap. Jimmy Peck.

Two other accidents occurred during April. On April fourteenth the plane test-hopped by 2nd Lt. Dueron. H. Robertson received a major damage while being landed. 2nd Lt. Ross. P. Lazie caused major damage to his ship on taking-off on April twenty-first. Neither Lt. Robertson nor Lt. Lazie was injured".

The 394th Fighter Squadron's narrative added : *"by the eighteenth, all pilots of the 394th Fighter Squadron had checked out in P-38's. Complying with a directive from the 100th Fighter Wing, a thirteen phase flying training program was inaugurated. Before the close of the month the squadron pilots had logged hours in eight of the phases, namely transition, navigation, formation, R/T (radio transmission) procedures, aerobatics, combat practice and familiarization of terrain. From the tenth to the thirtieth the pilots flew an average of thirteen P-38 hours per man".*



2nd Lt. Henry T. Gillespie in Stoney Cross before P-38-J-15 43-28342. Troy was shot down and KIA on June 17, 1944. He is buried in the American Cemetery in Colleville sur Mer, France (archive 367th FG)



Lt. Dueron H. Robertson. He was KIA during the fateful mission on June 22, 1944. His name is on the Wall of Missing in the American Cemetery in Colleville sur Mer, France (archive 367th FG)



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Experienced pilots were sent to operational units to fly true missions over Europe and gain experience in order to lead the Gang after the first few missions. Maj. "Mo" Crossen and Cap. Joe Griffin, as part of the advanced echelon, flew some missions in an outfit equipped with P-38. Maj. Crossen shot down two Jerries during his first sortie, a Junker 88 and a Me 109. On the 28 of April, Major Kelley, C.O. of the 392nd FS, flew with the 338th FS, 55th FG. On his first combat mission he flew top cover in a fighter bomber mission near Amiens, France. His second mission with the 55th FG was on the 30th but this time with the 343th FS on a bomber escort to Brussels, Belgium.

The narrative for the first mission in the monthly report of the 394th FS was : *"on April twenty-eighth and again on May first Major Robert E. Smith flew Bomber Escort missions with the 55th FG. These missions carried him deep into France. The reported results of the missions were excellent"*.

The narrative for the first mission in the monthly report of the 393rd FS was *"in order to gain combat experience at first hand, a number of pilots included our commanding officer Maj William A. Jones were placed on T.D. (temporary duty) with operational units and flew combat missions with them. The experience will be invaluable as they lead their gallant warriors to meet the foe"*.

The first week of May was spent in routine training missions and ground school. These series of "would be" missions came to an end and it was on the 9th that the 367th FG plunged into the fray after Field Order 228 had been received. The first two missions were lead by Col. Dale of the 55th Fighter Group. The radio call signs were respectively 'FIDO', 'REBEL' and 'ITMAR' for the 392nd FS, 393rd FS and 394th FS.



Maj. Wendell J. Kelley, place and date not known. He was assigned to the 55th FG, 8th AF, in June 1944. Cap. Robert 'Buck' Rogers took command of the squadron (archive 367th FG)



Lt. Col. "Mo" Crossen, place and date not known. Note the two victories (archive 367th FG)



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The narratives of each squadrons for the first missions are the following :

- 392nd Fighter Squadron

"These would-be missions soon came to an end and it was on the 9th that we learned the difference between a training and an operational squadron. The change was unmistakable – eleven months of training, in addition to the previous training the men had received before the activation of the squadron and now the day had come. The men on the line checked their work with minute scrutiny; The S-2 and S-3 officers buzzed with activity. At 1300 (real time was 0900) a flight of 14 airplanes took off on a fighter sweep into France. The rest of the squadron waited with strained anxiety. Finally all the planes returned but with one casualty, Lt. Eberhardt. Fortunately, but most uncomfortably, he needed no medical care, but just a change of underwear, a shower and a cleaners. The second mission of the day, also a sweep into France involving 12 aircrafts. On returning home from this mission, Lt. O'Donnell's port engine conked out and in attempting a one-engine landing at home base, his landing wheels failed to operate correctly and he was ordered to attempt another landing; in doing this, he was unable to gain sufficient altitude on the one good engine and crashed into the trees. Immediately the plane caught fire and witnesses claimed that no man could escape from such an accident; the flames had ultimately consumed the entire plane. As yet we have not heard Lt. O'Donnell complain about the small bump he received in the forehead while crawling out of the cockpit. Lt. O'Donnell miraculously escaped the death (he finished the war as POW)".

- 393rd Fighter Squadron

"The squadron dispensed 12 p-38s on a group fighter sweep over France. There was (unreadable) apprehension and tension prevailing (unreadable) at the pilots prior to take off. The hangar line was crowded by interested crew chiefs and other squadron personnel as the ships left the ground and circled to gain altitude and assemble before they set a course which took them into the continent at Cabourg and followed a rectangular course passing over Alençon, Avranches and making landfall out at the Pointe de la Percée from there to base; a flight of two hours. Thus the first operational time was logged in the squadron record excepting two missions flown by Major Jones while observing in another Group. . Lt. Col. J.D. Dale of the 55th Fighter Group lead the Group on its initial mission as he did on the two following missions from which time on Group personnel controlled the flights....."

- 394th Fighter Squadron

"On May 9, 1944, the 394th flew two, high altitude fighter sweeps over the Cherbourg and Brest Peninsula, France. That morning as fifty planes of the Group thundered off the runways the taxi strips were lined by clerk and crew chief, paddlefoot and pilots all realizing that this was it. ...One mission became five, then ten, and by the thirty-first we had completed twenty".



2nd Lt. Gerald M. O'Donnell in front of a P-39 probably in Sacramento in February or March 1944 (archive 367th FG).

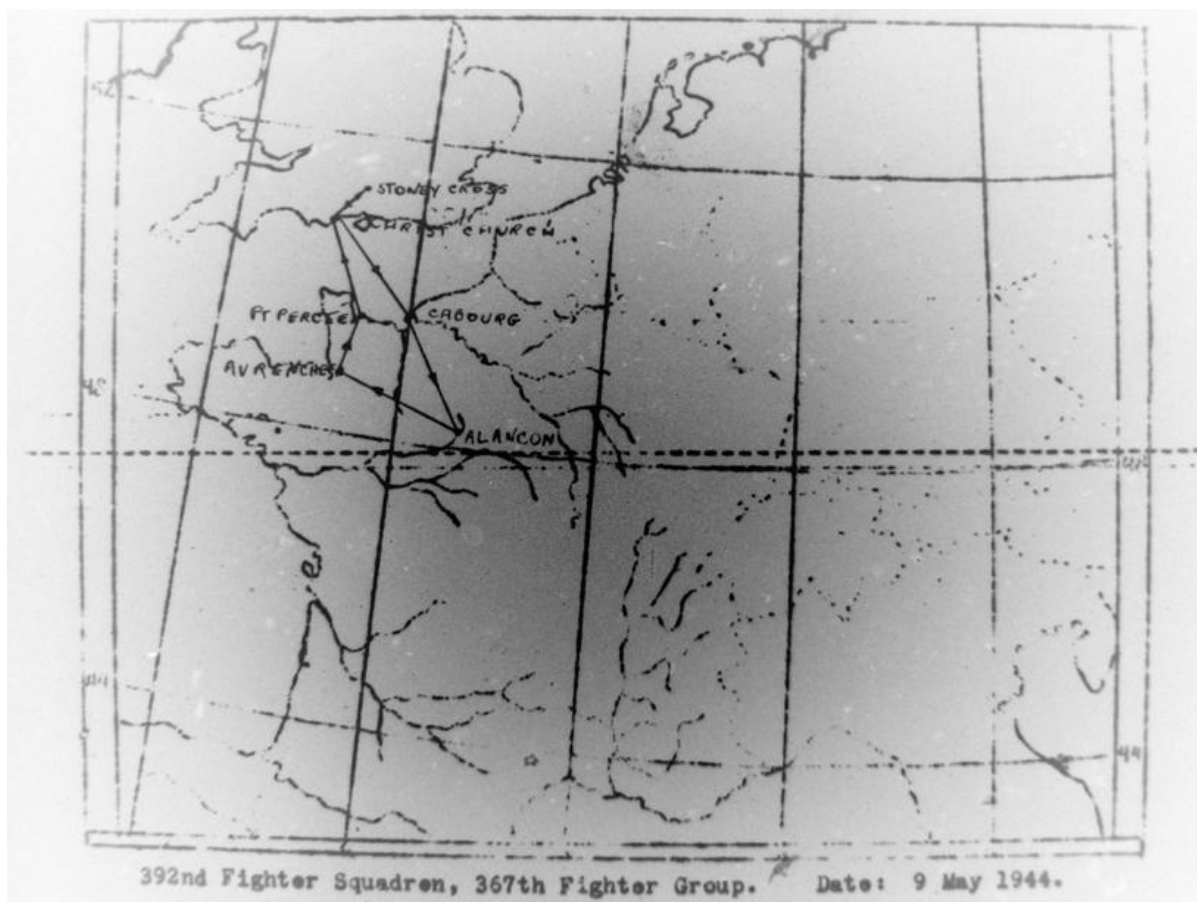


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After the first missions a lot of reports were completed at every level : Wing, Group and squadrons.

At group level

The Group narrative was : on may 9, 1944 the 367th Fighter Group went on its first operational mission, a fighter sweep which took 40 planes over the following course : Christchurch, Cabourg, Alençon, Avranches, Pointe de la Percée, Christchurch and return to base. Neither enemy aircraft nor flak was encountered, but the experience gained was invaluable. All planes returned safe. This mission was led by Col. Dale, a visiting officer. A critique was held upon return.



Map showing the course of the first fighter sweep of the 367th FG. This map was associated to the mission report (archive 367th FG).

The Operation Report was : this Group took off at 910 hours on a fighter sweep of the Alençon area. Time down was 1106 hours. Contrails were seen at 23000 around Alençon. No enemy action. No flak. Construction work was reported west of Alençon in an area covering ½ square mile. Visibility restricted by haze.

39 P-38 were dispatched. Three returned earlier : one pilot error (forgot to turn on the generator switch), one mechanical (prop run away) and one escort.

39 belly tanks of 165 gallons each were used and 43200 cal. 0.50 rounds as well as 5125 20mm rounds were loaded in the aircrafts.



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OpFlash # 1 – 09 May 1944

Field Order 228 – Fighter Sweep - 367th FG

Number and type A/C dispatched : 39 P-38

Time up : 0919

Time down : 1106

Abortive : weather : 0

Personnel : 1 Mechanical : 1 Other : 1 (escort)

Enemy reaction :

Over target : none

Elsewhere : nil

Flak :

Over target : nil

Elsewhere : nil

Vital information :

unreadable

Weather :

unreadable

At squadron level

-392nd Fighter Squadron

OpFlash # 1 – 09 May 1944

Field Order 228 – Fighter Sweep – 392nd FS

Number and type A/C dispatched : 11 P-38

Abortive : weather : 0

Personnel : 1 mechanical : 1 other : 1 (escort)

Time up : 0910

time over target : 1000

Time down : 1110

Enemy reaction

Over target : none

Elsewhere : none

Flak

Over target : none

Elsewhere : none

Result (bombing or engagement) : one bogie sighted 20,000' vicinity of Le Mesnil Mauger, headed west. Not verified. Only contrail visible.

Vital information : at isle of Saint Marcouf, noticed a large round construction similar to revetment with object similar to small building in center of slightly off center. White appearing and resembling large bomb crater (50D 30'—1 D 10'). Large area NW of Saint Lô flooded.

Weather

Over target : slight base at 5,000', Hi scattered.

On route : as briefed; hi scattered clouds.

-393rd Fighter Squadron

OpFlash # 1 – 09 May 1944

Field Order 228 – Fighter Sweep – 393rd FS

Number and type A/C dispatched : 12 P-38

Abortive : weather : 0

Personnel : 0 mechanical : 1 other : none

Time up : 0910

Time down : 1110

Enemy reaction

Over target : one unidentified A/C observed east of Alençon, contrails noted,

negative reaction

Elsewhere : nil

Flak

Over target : nil

Elsewhere : nil



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Result (bombing or engagement) : nil
 Vital information : nil
 Weather On route : hazy to 9000', trace of cirrus to 20000'

- 394th Fighter Squadron

OpFlash # 1 – 09 May 1944

Field Order 228 – Fighter Sweep - 367th FG
 Number and type A/C dispatched : 16 P-38
 Time up : 0919 Time down : 1106
 Abortive : weather : none Personnel : none Mechanical : none Other : none
 Enemy reaction Over target : none
 Elsewhere : nil
 Flak Over target : nil
 Elsewhere : nil

Result (bombing or engagement) : nil
 Vital information : bogies reported 6 O'clock, high at Barenton. Friendly shipping noted in Freshwater off Needles, 6 in number headed S.E.

Weather Over target : cloud coverage – scattered clouds, 2/10 to 4/10.
 On route : visibility unlimited – slight haze. Contrails reported high, at 1200 O'clock at Alençon. Height 23000ft.

The 392nd FS also completed a mission report. No such reports have been found for the 393rd FS and the 394th FS in the microfilm I have but it is possible that they also completed such reports. Thanks to these reports, we know the 392nd FS pilots who flew the missions and which pilots had to abort.

392nd Fighter Squadron, 367th Fighter Group. Date: 9 May 1944.
 Field Order No. 228 Type of Mission: Fighter Sweep.
 Pilots Participating: Maj Kelley, Capts Rettig, Griffin*, Hollingsworth,
 Lts Eberhardt, Gillespie, Garland, Fleming, Martin, Deavers, Ross, Moutoux.
 Abortives: Capt Griffin, Lts Deavers, Eberhardt.

List of the pilots who flew the first mission of the 392nd FS. Cap. Joe Griffin, Group Operations Officer flew this mission with the 392nd FS.

392nd Fighter Squadron, 367th Fighter Group #2 9 May 1944.
 Field Order No. 228-2 Type of Mission: Fighter Sweep.
 Pilots Participating: Maj Kelley, Capt Hollingsworth, Lts O'Dennell, Haskamp,
 Richardson, Moorhead, Hallman, Gillespie, Paschall, Ross, Fleming, Deavers.
 Abortives: None.

List of the pilots who flew the second mission of the 392nd FS.



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367th Fighter Group missions list – May 1944

9 May 44

Fighter sweep mission, Col. Dale (55th FG) leading. 392nd FS : 11 P-38, 393rd FS : 12 P-38, 394th FS : 16 P-38.

Fighter sweep mission, Col. Dale (55th FG) leading. 392nd FS : 12 P-38, 393rd FS : 12 P-38, 394th FS : 17 P-38 + 2 radio relays.

10 May 44

Fighter sweep mission, Col. Young leading. 392nd FS : 14 P-38 and 30 P-38 divided between 393rd FS and 394th FS.

11 May 44

Fighter sweep mission, Maj. Crossen leading. 392nd FS : 11 P-38, 393rd FS : 16 P-38, 394th FS : 14 P-38 + 2 radio relays.

12 May 44

Bomber escort withdrawal support mission, Col. Dale leading. 392nd FS : 9 P-38, 393rd FS : 16 P-38, 394th FS : 16 P-38 + 2 radio relays.

13 May 44

Bomber escort mission, Col. Young leading. 392nd FS : 10 P-38, 393rd FS : 15 P-38, 394th FS : 16 P-38 + 2 radio relays.

14 to 18 May 44

No mission.

19 May 44

Bomber escort withdrawal support mission, Lt. Col. Crossen leading. 392nd FS : 17 P-38, 393rd FS : 18 P-38, 394th FS : 16 P-38 + 4 radio relays. Losses : 2nd Lt. Richardson 392nd FS.

20 May 44

Bomber escort mission, Col. Young leading. 392nd FS : 1 P-38 (radio relay), 393rd FS : 13 P-38, 394th FS : 11 P-38.

Bomber escort mission, Lt. Col. Crossen leading. 392nd FS : 12 P-38, 393rd FS : 12 P-38, 394th FS : 16 P-38.

21 May 44

No mission.

22 May 44

Bomber escort withdrawal support mission, 392nd FS : 25 P-38 and 393rd FS : 25 P-38. The 2 squadrons were respectively led by Maj. Wendell Kelley and Major William Jones.

23 May 44

Bomber escort withdrawal support mission, Lt. Col. Young leading. 392nd FS : 16 P-38, 393rd FS : 12 P-38, 394th FS : 15 P-38 + 2 radio relays. Losses : Cap. James L. Hollingsworth and 2nd Lt. Graham B. Ross, both 392nd FS.

Sweep and dive bombing mission, Lt. Col. Crossen leading. 392nd FS : 12 P-38, 393rd FS : 16 P-38, 394th FS : 16 P-38 + 2 radio relays.

24 May 44

Bomber withdrawal escort mission, Lt. Col. Crossen leading. 392nd FS : 11 P-38, 393rd FS : 11 P-38, 394th FS : 16 P-38 + 2 radio relays.



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Dive bombing and strafing mission, Lt. Col. Crossen leading. 392nd FS : 12 P-38, 393rd FS : 12 P-38, 394th FS : 15 P-38. Losses : Maj. William A. Jones, 393rd FS.

25 May 44

Bomber escort mission, Lt. Col. Young leading. 392nd FS : 12 P-38, 393rd FS : 10 P-38, 394th FS : 11 P-38+ 2 radio relays.

26 May 44

No mission.

27 May 44

Bomber escort mission, Lt. Col. Young leading. 392nd FS : 14 P-38, 393rd FS : 18 P-38, 394th FS : 17 P-38+ 2 radio relays.

28 May 44

Bomber withdrawal escort mission, Lt. Col. Crossen leading. 392nd FS : 11 P-38, 393rd FS : 11 P-38, 394th FS : 16 P-38+ 2 radio relays.

29 May 44

Bomber escort withdrawal mission, Lt. Col. Young leading. 392nd FS : 12 P-38, 393rd FS : 17 P-38, 394th FS : 16 P-38+ 1 radio relay.

30 May 44

Bomber escort penetration mission, Maj. Kelley leading. 392nd FS : 13 P-38, 393rd FS : 16 P-38, 394th FS : 15 P-38+ 2 radio relays.

31 May 44

Bomber escort withdrawal mission, Maj. Kelley leading. 392nd FS : 11 P-38, 393rd FS : 16 P-38, 394th FS : 15 P-38 + 2 relays.

Captain Claude Cely of the 394th Fighter Squadron – rectification

John Cely told me that I did a mistake in the caption of the following picture published in issue # 3. The pilot is not his father, Cap. Claude Cely. Any help to identify this pilot and his ground crew would be welcome.





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Aviation Art

In 2004 an exhibit had been organized in honor of Lt. Eugene L. Fleming in the village where he was killed in the crash of his P-38. The French official « Peintre de l’Air » (Air Force official painter) Francis Dartois did this painting. It had been unveiled by Carolyn Cobb, the daughter of Lt. Ray Jackson, the best friend of Lt. Fleming.

In 2007, Francis Dartois did a new painting in honor Lt. Donald K. Erickson. This painting was unveiled during a dedication in the village where Lt. Erickson lost his life after his own bomb exploded under his P-38, knocking out his two engines.

Lt. Fleming and his wingman, Lt. Ed Brydges, 392nd FS, strafing a German train on July 31, 1944 in Thésée, a village in the Cher Valley, France. A few second later, Lt. Fleming crash landed his P-38 on the other bank of the Cher river.



Lt. Erickson, 392nd FS, on July 31, 1944 in the vicinity of Sonzay, a village in the Loire Valley, France. A few second later, Lt. Erickson bailed out of his crippled P-38 but too low for his chute to open completely





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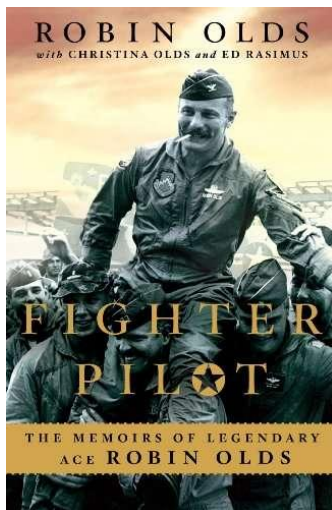
Books and Links

Robin Olds – Fighter Pilot

I had already seen some pictures of Robin Olds in books or internet and only knew that he shot down some MIGs in Viet Nam. I bought this book at the airport in Denver in last year and discovered a true fighter pilot story. Robin Olds flew P-38 and P-51 in the 8th Air Force during WWII and flew the F-4 Phantom in Viet-Nam. It is interesting to read how the Air Force was in the years after WWII but also to read that the tactical experience gained by the pilots of the 9th Air Force pilots had been lost over the years.

Thunderbolt – The republic P-47 Thunderbolt in the European Theater (Squadron/Signal publication)

This book gives a short story of each Fighter Group who flew the P-47. You can find the picture of some 367th FG's Thunderbolt like the 'Pootie too' of Jack Curtis, the 'Green Devil' of Don Gehlaus and 'Patty' of George Crocker.



http://www.homeofheroes.com/profiles/profiles_cobb.html

This site relates the story of Carolyn Cobb, the daughter 1st Lt. Ray Jackson, an original pilot of the 392nd FS. A German researcher got in touch with her after he found Ray's crash site near Trier.

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documentsonline/>

You can find in the English National Archives the combat reports of the USAAF. You can order the reports you want to for a fee of 3.5 £. Write in the QUICK SEARCH bar "air 50/357" or "air 50/358" or "air 50/359" to find the records of the 392nd, 393rd or 394th FS records respectively.

http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/imw/index_world.html

You will find on this web site maps of the US and Europe of the 50's. A good example is the map for Arizona on which one can see where are the different bases used for training during WWII like Luke Field, Williams field, etc.

Coming in the next Newsletter



- the first missions of the 367th FG, part 2
- missions list, June 1944