

STARS & STRIPES

FEATURE SECTION,

March 9, 1944

63 British-based Americans in most exclusive Fighter Pilot organization of them all; no ribbons, no rules, they're just aces.

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ALL a flying man has to do to become a member of the world's most exclusive organization of fighter pilots is destroy five enemy aircraft.

Five pilots did that during the Berlin raid on Monday, swelling the total of American Thunderbolt, Lightning and Mustang aces in the ETO to 63.

And only one of that number—the top scorer at this writing (Tuesday), Walter Beckham—has been reported missing in action.

The Monday mission when American fighter men escorted Fortresses and Liberators to, over and away from the Reich capital, was a typical ace-making battle.

Robert Johnson and Walker Mahurin continued their nip-and-tuck tie for active lead of ETO aces when each shot down an Me109, bringing both their scores to 17.

Glenn Duncan, the Thunderbolt dive bomber leader, accounted for two Germans, his 14th and 15th, and Hubert Zemke, the live-wire leader of the now-famous "Zemke Group" destroyed three Germans and showed the kind of dash that made his outfit the top scoring fighter team in the ETO.

Newcomers to the aces ranks that day were Joseph Icard, Nicholas Megura, James Wilkinson, Lowell Bruland and Glenn Eagleston.

There was no special ceremony to welcome the new aces into the high class organization, which doesn't really exist. At some stations the successful pilots were dunked in the nearest stagnant pool. At others the only notice taken of their success was that sent to their hometown papers by the Public Relations Officers.

Old timers like Col. William Stovall, who shot down seven Germans in World War I, recall that the ace system, which never has been set up officially, was started by the French in the second year of World War I

The British quickly took up the idea, and soon it even spread to the Germans and Austrians.

In almost no time the exploits of people like Rickenbacker and Richtofen became legends that spread and grew like the tales of King Arthur's Knights And when the American, A. R. Brooks, single-handedly took on over a dozen Germans and shot down most of them, the account of his battle, in which at first the greatly superior enemy circled and played with him like a cat with a mouse, spread like wildfire, and his Spad was brought back to America and put in the Smithsonian Institute for everyone to see and marvel over.

Today the British-based top rankers, the Johnson's, Mahurin's and others, are continuing the tradition.

No war story yet told is more exciting and thrill-packed than that of James Morris, who in a half-crippled P-38, accounted for four of the Luftwaffe's prize aircraft in one day; and there are few accounts of devotion to duty and plain heroism that can match the record of James Howard's lone Mustang fight with about 30 German fighters on Jan. 11.

One fighter unit commander, recalling that some people consider his aces "cockey," points out that if that is the word for what they are. "God Bless 'em...I'll take all of that kind of cockiness I can get."

Like others intimately acquainted with American fighter men, this commander knows that the aces of Eighth and Ninth Fighter Commands are probably among the "uncockiest" combat people in The ETO.

The common concept that successful fighter pilots are small, wiry, nervous individuals who always jump about and fight only in the rough and tumble manner isn't so.

There are, perhaps, no more able tacticians in the world than the leaders of American fighter teams over here.

The missing Maj. Beckham was a classic example.

Fellow fliers tell how he deployed his units of Thunderbolts carefully and quickly, and how he in his ship sat out in front of all the rest, like a general on a white horse.

Beckham always was two or three jumps ahead of his next move.

On his last mission, after his ship was hit and he knew he couldn't make it back to base, Beckham quietly called his wingman, instructed him in course he should take back to England, and apologized for not being able make it back himself.

Mahurin is an ace of somewhat the same type.

Calmly, he once reported running into 25 German fighters in this manner: "... as we approached . . . we sighted many condensation trails coming from a southerly direction....upon investigation they turned out to be nine or ten Me-109's and about 15 FW-190's."

Then the battle:

"At this time these enemy aircraft were slightly above us, but they attempted to get up-sun on us. Naturally, since all of our aircraft and all the enemy aircraft were pulling very dense condensation trails, there was no element of surprise on either side. We started to climb. The enemy aircraft were flying in a group of vee's, with a tail-end man weaving behind the unit. When we began our climb we rapidly climbed above them, and by the time we got into position to bounce we were all about 1,000 feet above them. One of our flights was acting as top cover, approximately 2,000 feet above the whole show at all times. By this time the enemy aircraft were in a turn to the left. We bounced and they began to split up. I fired several large deflection shots. Finally, one enemy aircraft straightened out and headed down for the clouds about 500 feet below us. This enabled me to work in a shot from dead astern.

"I hit this Me-109 in the cockpit. There were the usual flashes, coupled with a fairly large flash and a dense cloud of black smoke. The ship fell off, belching smoke, and headed for the clouds in an extremely erratic manner. I am claiming this Me-109 destroyed. "By this time the other two flights were in the scrap. I looked over the left side of my ship in time to see a pilot in my flight shoot down an Me-109 which exploded.

"We were all in the same turning circle, but we found that we could easily out-turn and out-run the Jerry. In fact, the whole enemy force was definitely panicky and not aggressive. After a short while the enemy aircraft all disappeared into the clouds and we again set course to pick up the bombers. We spotted another Me-109, but were only able to make an ineffective pass at it because it rolled into the layer of clouds.

"Shortly after the last engagement we were given a recall sign by the Group CO. We turned, and in the turn my engine quit. I was forced to drop down. My wingman started down with me. By the time we reached 16,000 feet I spotted a flight of six Me-109s above me and off to my left. They came from the rear, passed over in front of me, and then started a turn to the left. I called to the wingman to climb back into the clouds, but before he could get there the enemy aircraft had passed over me again, and had started to attack him. Another flight then came into play. This flight bounced the enemy aircraft and, after a short turning engagement, forced the enemy aircraft to break off and hit the deck. At the conclusion of these engagements we all started out.

I found myself at 2,000 feet. However, I managed to pick up another P-47 from a different group. My return trip was uneventful in so far as enemy aircraft were concerned."

Charles London, who is in the States now instructing fledgling pilots, is the American Air Force's first ETO fighter ace in this war. He destroyed his fifth German on July 30.

On August 19 Gerald Johnson became the second ace, and shortly afterward Eugene Roberts became the third.

Then the ball began to roll quickly.

Zemke, McCauley, Evans, Beeson, Beckham, Robert Johnson - all accounted for enemy No. 5 within a few weeks, and as the score began to mount early in the fall. Mahurin stood out above the rest, and for several months he held his lead.

Several weeks ago Beckham caught up with, then exceeded, Mahurin's score, and, with 18 Germans to his credit, still held the ETO lead on Tuesday.

A number of British-based American fighter men came to this theater as aces.

Thomas White was in the Mediterranean. In a Lightning he saw action through all of the early Tunisian campaign, and accounted for six enemy aircraft before he was shot down. After a period of recuperation from a serious back injury, he insisted on returning to combat in a P-38.

James Howard was credited with six Japs while fighting with the AVG, and Jack Donaldson accounted for two Jap bombers and three Zeros in the Pacific.

While the average ace age is about 25 years, the high scoring pilots range from Donovan Smith, who is 21, past James Howard who is 30, and they all are equally as quick and agile as any fighter men anywhere.

Unlike many RAF pilots who set themselves off by their mustaches, most American fighter airmen have clean upper lips. But some few are different.

Beckham, for instance, came overseas with the longest, most pointed mustache in the Air Forces. The story is that he shot down his first German only after he had shaved off that mustache.

To prove that the bushy upper lip had nothing to do with his fighting results, Beckham began to nurse his mustache back to its normal size in January, and he accounted for several German aircraft while that mustache was growing.

Since the whole aces scheme is unofficial, men who hold membership don't even have a ribbon to identify themselves, but none of them seems to mind. Most high scoring aces have almost every available medal anyway.

Mahurin, for instance, has the Distinguished Service Cross, the Silver Star, four Distinguished Flying Crosses and four Air Medals. Gabreski, who flew with the Poles for a while, has a Polish Cross of Valor in addition to two American Silver Stars, five DFC's, and five Air Medals.

And the transferees from the RAF have British decorations. Peterson, who at one time commanded the converted Eagles, has both the British DSO and DFC, plus the American DSC, Purple Heart and four Air Medals, and London has been awarded both British and American DFC's and the American DSC and four Air Medals.

The ETO's 63 American fighter aces up till Tuesday afternoon alone have destroyed almost 500 German aircraft, and with the ace ranks growing daily, the American score of downed Germans shortly will be doubled.



Col. Laurence K. Callahan

Col. William H. Stovall

World War I aces. "Retreads" in this war, see experiences like their own of 26 years ago in the story's of today's ETO aces. While they don't pretend to compare their Spad's with Lightning's, Thunderbolt's and Mustang's. Col. Laurence K. Callahan, and William H. Stovall (above) figure the action they saw against Fokkers in the last war pioneered all this business of aces. Col. Callahan, of Chicago, Ill., intelligence officer for Eighth Fighter Command, was credited with destroying five Germans in World War I and Col. Stovall, of Stovall, Miss., now Eighth Fighter Command Personnel Officer, accounted for seven of the Kaiser's aircraft.



Capt. Walker Mahurin



Lt. Robert Johnson

Walker Mahurin and Robert Johnson, each credited with destroying 17 German aircraft, are at this writing (Tuesday, March 7) leading the active list of American Air Forces fighter aces in the ETO. Mahurin, 25 an apprentice engineer from Fort Wayne, scored his first combat success over Germany August 17 when he destroyed two FW190s. A couple of weeks later he accounted for another Focke-Wulf, and on Oct. 10 he and his Thunderbolt entered the select field of aces by shooting down three Mell0's, bringing his total to six. Since then Mahurin's record shows another triple-kill, three doubles and two singles. The singles were both Me109's; the triple he scored Nov. 26 when he shot down three twin-engined Mell0's in quick succession; and the doubles included a bag of two Ju88's, another of two Me109's, and one day he shot down an Me109, and an Mell0. He scored his 17th victory on the Berlin mission Monday.

Twenty-four-year-old Robert S. Johnson scored his first aerial success June 13 by shooting down an FW190. The Lawton, Okla., carpenter, who, fellow fliers say handles his Thunderbolt like an artist does his brush, piled up his score mostly in singles, but he shot down two Germans in one day on three occasions. On Oct. 10 he got an Mell0 and an FW190, on Dec. 31 two FW190's, and on Feb. 20, the opening day of the smash-the-Luftwaffe offensive, he shot down two Mell0's. He shot down his 17th enemy Monday while escorting bombers to Berlin.



Lt. Col. Francis S. Gabreski

With 14 German planes to his credit Col. Gabreski is one of the most colorful pilots in Eighth Fighter Command. He has scored three doubles in more than 50 engagements with the enemy. The colonel was at Pearl Harbor when the Japs attacked, and he later transferred to England to fly with an R4F Polish squadron of Spitfires. As a civilian the Oil City, Pa., pilot studied medicine at Notre Dame. At the outset of his operations he flew with a Polish squadron of the RAF and was decorated by the Poles.



Lt. Col. Glenn E. Duncan

Leader of the AAF's first dive-bombing P47 group in the ETO, Lt. Col. Glenn B. Duncan, of Houston, Tx., has 15 enemy aircraft to his credit. On a recent mission he destroyed an FW190 in the air, a Ju88 on the ground, and on the way home shot up an armed merchant ship off the European coast.



Capt. Glen D. Schulz Jr.

Strictly a triple-threat, Capt. Glen D. Schulz Jr. accounted for nine German fighters, six of them on two triplevictory days. The 25-year-old Thunderbolt pilot, from North Canton, Ohio, scored his first victories August 17, in shooting down three FW190s. On Jan. 11 he hit another triple, three Me109s, and between times shot down another Me109, an Me210 and an Me110, all singly. The captain was a machinist as a civilian.



Maj. Gerald Johnson

When Maj. Gerald Johnson went hunting for something to shoot at while escorting American heavy bombers to Brunswick recently, nothing else turned up, so he headed his Thunderbolt for a passing three-engined Ju52, a German transport, and brought his total of enemy aircraft destroyed to 14. The Owenton, Ky., pilot was one of the first AAF fighter men in the ETO to shoot down two Germans in one day. He followed that up last July by scoring a triple.



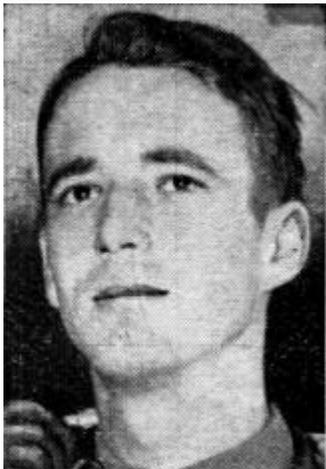
Capt. Charles P. London

First fighter pilot in the ETO to become an ace. Capt. Charlie London, of Long Beach, Cal., has returned to the States to teach some of the tricks he learned in more than 100 missions, sweeps, and sorties in the ETO. One of the first A4F fighters to score a double victory's over here last June, he started flying P36s in 1941, then P40s, next the obsolete P66s and finally P38s before he took over a Thunderbolt. He has destroyed five enemy aircraft.



Capt. Thomas Ace White

Friends figure the White's looked pretty far into the future when they named their son: Thomas ACE White. The Kelso, Wash., Lightning pilot began combat in Africa where he destroyed six Germans. He was returned to the States after being injured in combat, and now he is back in action with a P38 group in the ETO. A flight leader, Ace White says he'll take his Lightning anywhere.



Maj. Walter Beckham

The AAF's leading fighter ace in the ETO, Maj. Walter Beckham, of DeFuniack Springs, Fla., was the first high scoring pilot in this theater reported missing in action. He was lost on an escort mission into Germany a couple of weeks ago after he had destroyed 18 German aircraft.



1 /Lt. James M. Morris

A 23-year-old Detroit Lightning pilot, 1/Lt. James M. Morris was the first AAF fighter pilot in the ETO to destroy four German aircraft in one day. A couple of days before he had gotten his initial enemy kill, and a couple of days afterwards he shot down another, making six enemy aircraft destroyed in one week. Since then Morris has scored a seventh victory.



Capt. Duane W. Beeson

An Oakland, Cal., hotel clerk as a civilian. Capt. Duane W. Beeson has accounted for 14 enemy aircraft to date. Sticking strictly to the Luftwaffe's single-engined ships for his combat, all of the captain's kills except one have been Me109s and FW190s. The exception was a Ju88, which he shot down Feb. 28. The 22-year-old pilot, a transferee from the RCAF, has flown Spitfires, Thunderbolts and Mustangs in combat



Lt. Col. David G. Schilling

A Flying Group executive from Detroit, Col. Schilling is called "Lucky" and "One-a-Day" by Thunderbolt mates. He brought down four Germans in as many days. On his first flight over enemy territory his plane was badly shot up and he went scoreless for the next 43 missions, The Colonel chalked up his initial victory on a Emden raid in October. Since then he has become a "double ace" with ten enemy planes to his credit.



Col. James H. Howard

Commander of the ETO's first Mustang group, Col. Howard has destroyed five Germans since December. Previously he accounted for 6-plus Jap aircraft while flying with the AVG in China. The 30-year-old St. Louis pilot, a tall, rangy individual, waded into about 30 German fighters attacking a bomber formation over Germany Jan. 11. He shot down several and chased off the others.



Col. Donald J. M. Blakeslee

One of time first AAF fighter pilots to lead a Mustang group over the Berlin area. Lt. Col. Donald J. M. Blakeslee, of Fairport Harbor, Ohio, has shot down eight enemy aircraft. One of the top American fighter leaders in the ETO, Col. Blakeslee began operations here with an RCAF Spitfire squadron, then joined an American unit when it became active in the ETO. He has shot down Germans with Spitfires, Thunderbolts and Mustangs.