

# **RECORD**

**OF THE**

**THREE TWENTY SEVENTH**

**FIGHTER CONTROL SQUADRON**

IN MEMORIAM

CAPT. JOHN P. FOLTZ  
CPL. WILLIAM M. DUNGAN

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## DEDICATION

This book is by no means a "professional" job. Neither has it been formulated for the purpose of giving undeserved glory to the brutal business of war. Not, again, is it in any sense a "puff-sheet." ● It is not a record of war-like events, even though it was born in combat. Rather it is a page of history—the story of the part which one small organization played in the great drama. ● What cannot be recorded is the mutual understanding and cooperation that permeated all operations. That living, breathing thing which somehow eludes description yet is the heart of any organization. What cannot be told is the chronicle of hardship and heartbreak and grim purpose. Those things, after all, are the heritage of war. ● So this book is dedicated to the oneness of purpose; that purpose that needed no explanation nor pep-talk. This is dedicated to all the little guys who didn't need to be told that men should walk in dignity and in justice and in peace. ● It is dedicated to the smaller things like mail from home, and the larger things like the steadfast faith of the people back home. ● It is dedicated to our Allies, too, because we "were all in this thing together." ● In short, it is dedicated to our brother soldiers, to the Navy for its great job on the Normandy beaches and on the Rhine; to every branch of the service; to the men and women on the production line; to our folks; to our wives; to our sweethearts.

This book is dedicated to "The Team."



## WHAT IS FIGHTER CONTROL?

Many puzzled relatives and friends, writing to members of the 327th Fighter Control Squadron, must have asked that question many times. But the answer was always shrouded in necessary mystery because Fighter Control work was on the highly secret list.

Some curious souls thought perhaps it really meant "fire control," and the family heroes were going around with buckets in their hands waiting to put out any stray blazes. One uninformed home-fronter was sure it had something to do with managing prize-fighters, although the connection was vague.

All American controllers owe a great deal to the Royal Air Force which, in many cases, tutored their Yank Allies. Virtually all the officers and men of the 327th Fighter Control Squadron worked with the RAF in the "air offensive of Europe" at one time or another. The British generally credit fighter control with being the biggest factor in the successful defense of London in the dark days of 1940 when the Luftwaffe was at its peak.

All the officers and men of the 327th are alumni of the school at Orlando, Florida, formerly known as the Army Air Forces School of Applied Tactics. The Controllers were chosen, for the most part, from men who were familiar with aviation—many having been either cadets or pilots.

Now, what is fighter control?

We quote from the October, 1944, issue of AIR FORCE magazine:

"The task of directing the air war, the tactical support of ground troops, is a complicated one. Fighter control . . . constitutes the heart of air support operations. It is the fighter controller's chief job to watch the planes as they fly, put them on target, take them off while they are in flight and send them to a more important mission. Finally, the chief responsibility is to direct our planes against enemy attack and to aid our crippled aircraft in returning home.

"Planes are in the air and their pilots call back by radio to tell what they are doing, what they see and where they are. The pilots call back to fighter control for targets, and if there are none, the planes go out looking for targets on their own.

"Quite often a priority target will dominate a day's proceedings. Orders from the command may say that under no circumstances are planes to be diverted from the job laid out. On that day, a division may be pinned down by enemy guns located in a position that only air power can knock out. The division may call for help and direct the planes to the target or turn the directing over to the fighter control.

"As the system operates, complete with air warning personnel, filterers, tellers and large table-maps on which all planes in the vicinity are 'plotted,' fighter control is a logical offensive development of the air defense network protecting the coasts of the United States when hostile air attacks threatened.

"Controllers must have a profound knowledge of weather, navigation and the performance of the particular aircraft being handled.

"Fighter control is continually moving its units, leapfrogging across France and Belgium towards Germany . . . starting from the spot on the beach-head where the control tent had been set up under fire from German snipers and artillery.

"Our fighter bombers, directed by control, destroyed more than 900 trucks and 775 pieces of horse-drawn equipment on one typical day."

That, then, should clear up some of the confusion in the minds of the uninformed. The 327th operated 24 hours a day—every day. Because of the desire to give as much aid as possible to the infantry, the 327th was never more than a few miles behind the front and often, as happened in the famous Battle of the Bulge, far ahead of it.

It has now been revealed by Lt. General Courtney Hodges, commanding the First Army, that his headquarters at Spa, Belgium, were almost captured during the breakthrough. The 327th was only 5½ miles from Spa and its position juttied out farther east. Several of the squadron sites were overrun. In one case, the Germans captured two men, Pvt. Dexter H. Harris and Pvt. Roscoe Wingate. The two soldiers, taken on 17 December, were in a PW camp until the Americans liberated them late in April.

During the breakthrough, the 327th "retired" to Liege, Belgium, which later turned out to be the big German objective. For one week, the dying remnants of the Luftwaffe threw everything it had at the beautiful, industrial city on the banks of the Meuse River. Night and day German planes bombed and strafed, and "dogfights" were so common that one could step out almost any time of the day and see American and German planes in combat.

Aided to this, the Germans launched their largest quota of buzz-bombs on Liege, with the possible exceptions of London and Antwerp. The deadly V-1's increased daily until they were coming over at the rate of more than 100 a day. The air raid siren wailed unceasingly.

Despite these hazards, there was no decrease in operations, and our efficiency is attested to by the unprecedented number of enemy vehicles destroyed by fighter control directed aircraft during the "Battle of the Bulge." Four enlisted men of the 327th were wounded when a buzz-bomb telescoped their communications van during this period. Despite many casualties to Americans and civilians, the 327th emerged from the ordeal virtually unscathed.

Fighter control was fairly safe, but it had its moments.



## SQUADRON HISTORY

The 327th Fighter Control Squadron, later to gain fame as the first All-American organization of its type to "hit the beach" in the invasion of Normandy, was officially activated on 20 March, 1943.

Between that time and V-E Day, during 26 drama-packed months, there was an ever-shifting tide of personnel and an itinerary which equalled any Cook's tour. There were 19 different changes of station in the 26 months, and so often the squadron resembled a band of gypsies. The race across France and later across Germany was nerve-wracking because of the constant movement, but comfort was sacrificed for necessity due to the realization that every step nearer Berlin was a step nearer peace.

The first Commanding Officer of the squadron was 2d Lt. Edward J. Dennis who gave way to 1st Lt. Jack L. Powell. Then came Major John P. G. McPhee and Major Henry L. Fetherston. To Major Fetherston must go the major credit for the 327th's success. He took over when the squadron crossed to France, and upon him was thrust the major burden of coordinating activities during the hard days of St. Lo and the Battle of the Bulge.

Major Fetherston was succeeded by Lt. Col. C. B. Crockett, whose genius in controlling was an American legend. Col. Crockett had been among the first American controllers during the African campaign, and he put his experience to good use in the days when the First Army, which the 327th supported, was hammering steadily at the foe.

Lt. Col. Crockett returned to the United States in May, 1945, and was succeeded by Major Michael J. Brady. When Major Brady transferred to 9th Air Force headquarters, his place was taken by Capt. Robert I. Jones, senior communications officer and winner of the Legion of Merit for his outstanding work during the spring and summer of 1944.

In the 26 months, the officers and men of the 327th were to know every type of living conditions. There were pup tents in Normandy, swank hotels and chateaux in Belgium, abandoned school houses with shattered windows which were no defense against the whistling winter winds; German barracks and apartments—in short, the best and the worst.

There were highlights, too. There was London and Paris and Brussels. Then, after the weary, work-filled months, there was V-E Day.

At last, the day of peace in Europe had come. To the grim, serious men who fled from the belly of an LST on that June day in 1944, it was the answer to their hopes and prayers. They remembered the invasion, when for two days the squadron had watched the mounting battle off the French coast. Arriving on 7 June 1944, the 327th men had been unable to land because of severe enemy action. As the LST's approached the French beach near Grandcamp, a troop transport was sunk a half-mile aft of starboard. The transport had struck a mine. Less than three minutes later, a Liberty ship struck another enemy mine—this time only 100 yards away from the anxious soldiers of the 327th Fighter Control Squadron. That ship looked near enough to touch. The evening sky was ablaze with fingers of lights and gunfire—viciously beautiful in the darkness.

Then there had been the days in Normandy—days of indecision and doubt; days of sickening impatience. There were days in the field when the comforts of a "lost" civilization wistfully recalled themselves to memory. There were endless days of K-rations, cold, rain, discomfort. There was the rough edge of operations—demanding more and more each passing day. There were days of hard, bitter work, and nights of restless wonder as the German planes strafed and the shells came whistling overhead. There was the ironic comfort of the whump of our ack-ack; there were muddy foxholes, and work, work, work!





There was the thrill of the breakthrough at St. Lo, and the satisfaction of a job well-done as the Commanding General, in proud and glowing terms, congratulated the squadron.

There was the relentless chase through France—the liberation of Paris, and the hysterical, ecstatic welcome that made every man feel a hero. There was the sober "sit-down" in Belgium; the night-marish withdrawal during the Battle of the Bulge; the blows of our Air Force that helped break the back of the once vaunted Luftwaffe for all time. There was Germany itself; the demands of the Ruhr pocket, and the ever moving front which tried the talents and adaptability of the squadron.

And then, high on a hill overlooking a quiet valley—a scene that belied the festering sore of nearby Buchenwald, the men of the 327th Fighter Control Squadron gathered to hear the dramatic V-E Day announcement of England's Prime Minister, Winston Churchill.

The speech ended. The BBC announcer told of the celebrations touched off "in all the old familiar places"—Paris (remember the liberation); London (wonder what Piccadilly is like tonight); New York (Broadway, Times Square . . . home!).

But there was hardly celebration in the squadron. Only a deep weariness and thankfulness. Only a reminder of those men who could never celebrate—who had seen the promised land, but did not live to enter it.

The 26 months had been long and hard. But none could say they weren't worth the effort. They had been thrill packed months. The men of the 327th had participated in the making of history.

For that, they could be forever proud.

## MAP INSERT

TRAVELS OF THE 327th FIGHTER CONTROL SQUADRON

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# TRAVELS

## U. S. A.

ORLANDO, FLORIDA.  
CAMP MYLES STANDISH, MASS.  
PORT OF EMBARKATION, NEW YORK.

## UNITED KINGDOM

GURROCK, SCOTLAND.  
ALDERMASTON, ENGLAND.  
COLCHESTER, ESSEX, ENGLAND.  
IBSLEY, HANTS, ENGLAND.

## FRANCE

CHICQDEVILLE.  
VILLEPIEU.  
LE TEILLEUL.  
MAMERS.  
AULIERES.  
VERSAILLES.  
PARIS.  
LAON.

## BELGIUM

JAMOULX.  
VERVIERS.  
LIEGE.

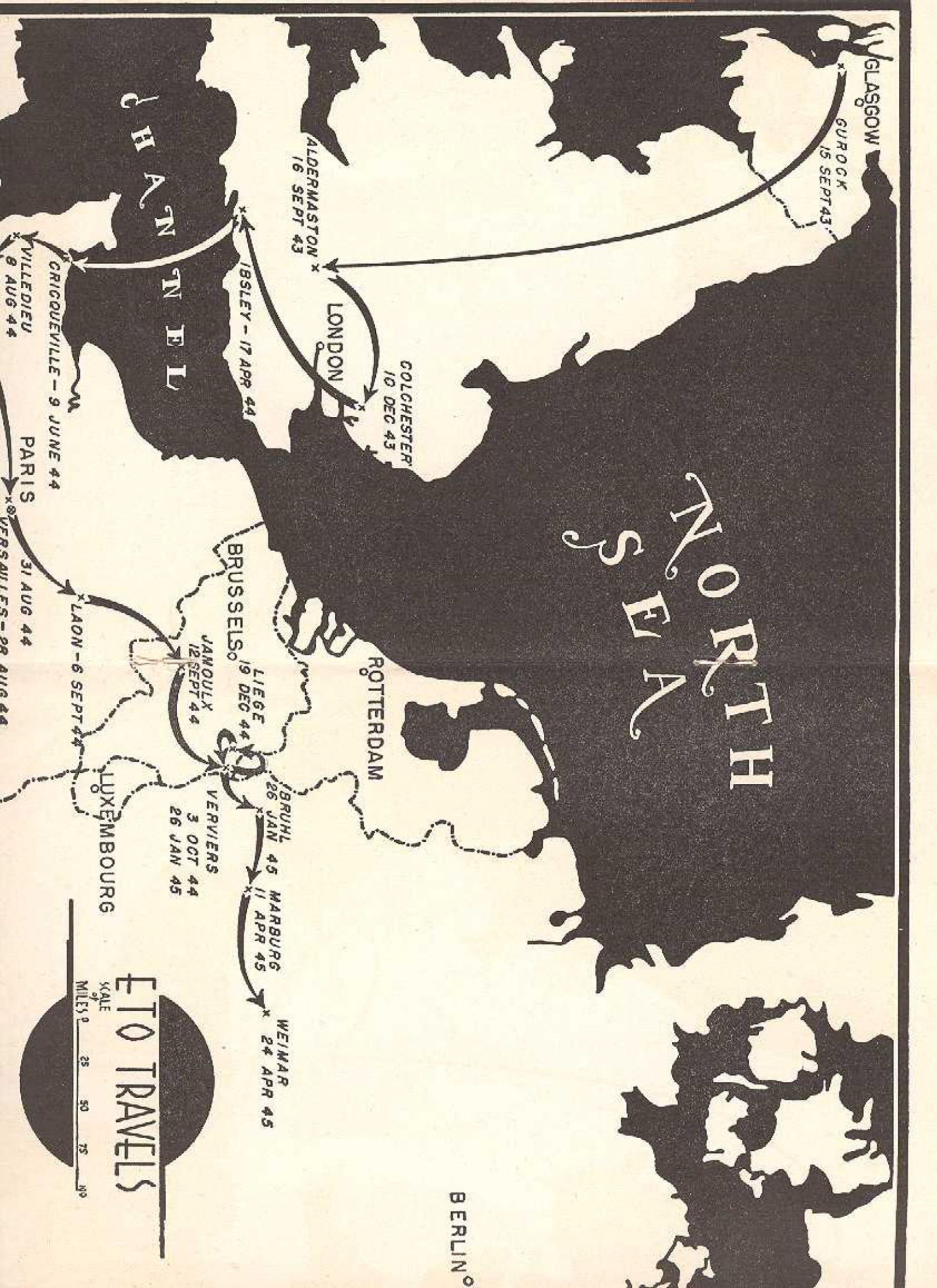
## GERMANY

BRUHL.  
MARBURG.  
WEIMAR.

## MAP INSERT

TRAVELS OF THE 327th FIGHTER CONTROL SQUADRON





GLASGOW

GURROCK  
15 SEPT 43

ALDERMASTON  
16 SEPT 43

LONDON

COLCHESTER  
10 DEC 43

IBSLEY - 17 APR 44

CHANN TEL

CRICQUEVILLE - 9 JUNE 44

VILLEDIEU  
8 AUG 44

PARIS

31 AUG 44

LAON - 6 SEPT 44

VERSAILLES - 28 AUG 44

ROTTERDAM

BRUSSELS

LIEGE  
19 DEC 44

JANOUX  
12 SEPT 44

VERVIERS  
3 OCT 44  
26 JAN 45

BRUHL  
26 JAN 45

MARBURG  
11 APR 45

WEIMAR  
24 APR 45

LUXEMBOURG

BERLIN

ETO TRAVELS

SCALE  
MILES 0 25 50 75 100



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT TO:  
CPL. PAT BARTON  
DRAFTSMAN

NOTE

THE ORIGINAL PRINTING of this history still lies in a print shop at Weimar, Germany. Those copies were more elaborate, complete with photographs and heavy binding. The Americans withdrew from the Weimar zone of occupation before the printing was complete. All efforts to retrieve the histories and the photographic plates have failed.

Thus, it has been necessary to reprint the history in the United States. This accounts for the printing in a more modest form.



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ROGER . . . . AND OUT !



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