

History of the 353rd Tactical Fighter Squadron

Air Force Fact Sheet



The 353d Tactical Fighter Squadron has a long and distinguished history that encompasses several units. Originally organized on 12 Nov 1942 at Hamilton Field, CA and trained in aerial combat at Tonopah AAF, NV. The unit saw service with the 9th AF in Europe during W.W.II. After the War the unit remained in Germany as part of the occupational forces until the unit was disbanded on 31 Mar 1946 and the designation was retired.

In 1956 the unit was reactivated as the 353d Fighter Day Squadron, flying North American F-100 Super Sabres out of Myrtle Beach AFB, SC. where it operated until being reassigned to the 401st Fighter Wing in Torrejon, Spain. The unit converted to the LTV A-7D Corsair, when the 511th Tactical Fighter Squadron was reassigned to the 354th Fighter Wing, and later re-designated as the 353d Tactical Fighter Squadron, at Myrtle Beach AFB, on 15 Jul 71 becoming the wings first A-7 unit.

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On 12 Oct 1972 the unit deployed to Korat RTAFB, Thailand, participating in combat operations in the Vietnam War. The unit returned stateside in Jan 1973 and then two months later they redeployed to Korat RTAFB and participated in operations until the bombing halt on 15 Aug 1973. The 353rd dropped the last bomb of the war on 15 Aug 1973. Returning to Myrtle Beach the unit continued operating the A-7 until 1978, when it was reequipped with A-10's.

In 1991 the unit participated in Operation Desert Shield/Storm, where it supported ground forces with attacks on enemy armor and motorized gun divisions. The unit remained at 'the Beach' until the base was closed during the restructuring of the Air Force in 1992. On 20 Aug 1993 the unit once again was reconstituted along with the wing at Eielson AFB in Alaska.

Undoubtedly, the 353d Fighter Squadron's actions in W.W.II rank high in the list of the unit's achievements. Known as the 'Pioneer' Mustang Group, the 354th Fighter Group was the first American unit to operate the North American P-51 Mustang as a frontline combat aircraft in the European Theater of Operations (ETO). Additionally, the group 'Pioneered' the art of strafing ground targets when they were selected to develop strafing tactics. This led to a claim of 256 aircraft destroyed, 53 probably destroyed and 428 damaged in strafing attacks on enemy airfields. This does not include the destruction of numerous gun emplacements and a staggering 532 locomotives destroyed while refining their strafing techniques.

While assigned to the 9th AF for the entire war, the 354th was operationally 'loaned' out to the 8th Air Force for the eight months leading up to D-Day. While flying for the 'mighty' eighth, the 353d flew numerous escort and patrol missions. Consequently the 354th saw considerably more action than most 9th AF units and was the highest scoring of all 9th AF fighter groups. Mission records indicate that the 353d was the only squadron from the 354th to fly in the D-Day invasion on 6 June 1944 when the unit was ordered on mission 93, Escort C-47 Troop Carriers to Normandy, in support of Operation Overlord. From the beginning the 353rd FS led the way with 84 pilots eventually sharing 295 of the group's total of 701 aerial victories. This impressive tally made the 353d FS the highest scoring fighter squadron in the ETO, and in United States military aviation history.

The 353d received a Distinguished Unit Citation for activities up to May 1944 where the squadron was instrumental in the development and execution of long range heavy bomber escort. The unit received a second Distinguished Unit Citation for actions supporting Operation Market Garden in The Netherlands in September 1944 and the Battle of the Bulge in December 1944.

The 9th AF was unique in recording individual claims for aerial victories as 'unconfirmed destroyed, damaged, and probable', the 9th was reluctant to allow victories. It was not uncommon for pilots to be awarded credit for only a portion of their actual victories. Were it not for the fact that four XIX TAC Victory Credit Board Reports are missing, the total confirmed score for the 353d would be over 300. There are 37 un-referred claims on these reports and all of them belong to the 354th, with little doubt but what at least five or more belong to the Fighting Cobra's of the 353d.

The 353d's last operational mission of the war was flown on 7 May 1945; after which the unit remained in Germany as part of the occupational forces until February 1946, when the unit was repatriated to Bolling Field in Washington, D.C. The 353d Fighter Squadron deactivated on 31 March 1946.

On 19 November 1956, the 353d reactivated at Myrtle Beach AFB, again as part of the 354th Fighter Wing. This time, the unit flew the North American F-100 Super Sabre. In 1966, the 353d moved to Torrejon AB, Spain, becoming part of the 401st Fighter Wing. It returned to Myrtle Beach in July 1971.

Later in 1971, the unit converted to the A-7 Corsair and deployed to KORAT RTAFB, Thailand, participating in the Vietnam War. The 353D participated in combat operations until it dropped its last bomb of the war on 15 Aug 1973. In October, 1973, the 353D once again called Myrtle Beach its home.

In 1978, the squadron converted to the Fairchild A-10 Thunderbolt II and deployed to Saudi Arabia in support of Operation Desert Shield/Desert Storm. Returning to Myrtle Beach after combat operations, the unit deactivated when Myrtle Beach AFB closed in December 1992.