

WRIGHT STATE UNIVERSITY
ARCHIVES AND SPECIAL COLLECTIONS

NIGHT FIGHTER COLLECTION
MS-120

Processed by:
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October 1981

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INTRODUCTION

The records relating to night fighter squadrons serving in World War II span the period 1942 to 1978. They were acquired mostly from individuals who had served as night fighters in Europe and in the Pacific.

Linear feet of shelf space: 5.0
Approximate number of items: 220

The literary rights to the Night Fighter Collection at Wright State University have been donated to the public.

HISTORICAL SKETCH

As early as 1940, American strategists had an interest in night flying. British fighter pilots were flying aircraft designed for day and night flying. The aircraft they flew were painted black on one side and a pale finish on the other side. These early night fighters relied on moonlight, searchlights, and sometimes ground based radar, since there were no radar-equipped aircraft.

In October 1940, Northrop Aircraft Inc., of Hawthorne, Calif., was asked by the United States Air Corps to develop an aircraft that could be used specifically for night fighting. For the interim period, the Douglas P-70 Havoc bomber was used. It proved to be an ineffective night fighter. Some squadrons in Europe were flying British made Bristol Beaufighters, which also proved to be ineffective. By early 1944, the Northrop P-61 Black Widow was put into service in the Pacific. It was in use in Europe by the summer of 1944. The aircraft received its nickname because of the semi-shiny black color it was painted. This radar-equipped aircraft proved to be an excellent night fighter.

One of the few training schools for night-fighting crews was in Florida at Orlando Air Base. The training center was under the direction of the Fourth Air Force. All night fighter personnel were volunteers, the pilots having had day fighter training. In 1943 the instructors consisted of specialists from the Bell Telephone Laboratories, British night fighter crews, and American crews who had trained in England. The pilots were trained in Douglas P-70 Havocs, and the radar operators were trained in Beech AT-11's.

In 1944, the entire program was moved to Hammer Field in Calif., with the Fourth Air Force still retaining command. At Hammer Field, British instructors were phased out.

The pilots and radar operators were officers, while the gunners and crew chiefs were usually enlisted men. It was necessary for the pilot and radar operator to work like a finely tuned machine, so it was important to avoid a conflict in personalities. Before coming to the school, the pilots were trained in North American B-25 Mitchells, with intensive work on instrument flying. During night fighter training, the pilot learned high and low altitude night fighting, evasive maneuvers, and aerial gunnery. It was necessary to establish close cooperation with Ground Controlled Interception. The GCI was important, since it brought the fighter to within close proximity of the target.

After graduation, the crews were sent overseas where they were attached to larger units. Once the crews left for overseas duty, the Fourth Air Force relinquished command of them. Night fighter squadrons served in the Pacific and in Europe.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The Night Fighter Collection, 1942-1978, is composed of the papers of members of various night fighter squadrons. As a result, the collection has many gaps. The collection includes pilots' tests and certificates, squadron reports, individual flight records, rosters, transfer orders, unpublished chronologies of the 6th and 417th Night Fighter Squadrons, photographs, and some miscellaneous material. The collection also includes cassettes and a reel-to-reel tape of the 1978 Night Fighters Reunion held in Dayton, Ohio, and a taped interview with Gordon T. Timmons, who was at one time, commander of the 415th Night Fighter Squadron.

While this collection will be useful for a history of night fighters, it probably cannot stand as the sole source for such a history. The researcher should consult the United States Air Force Museum in Dayton, Ohio, as well as the United States Air Force Historical Division at Maxwell Air Force Base, Ala., for additional material.

Additions in 2006 include: a CD with images of the Earl Tigner Photographs, Series IX, of Iwo Jima and the 549th N.F.S.; four ink drawings by Gary Olson of aircraft flown by the Night Fighters; and four books on the Northrop P-61, which are being cataloged into the Archives Reading Room collection.

Additions in 2007 include: Papers relating to the Night Fighters Association that was organized in 1984 and was disbanded in February 2001 due to the declining number of members. Included are financial statements, articles about the Night Fighters, rosters of members, history of the organization, Constitution and Articles of Incorporation, correspondence, newsletters, and tax returns.

SERIES DESCRIPTION

I. Kent Blyler Papers, date unknown

A poem which Mr. Blyler found in his old diary. He maintained the diary while stationed on Guadalcanal with the 6th Night Fighter Squadron.

II. Robert W. Boucher Papers, 1943-1946

Pilots' tests and certificates, squadron reports, individual flight records, photographs, and miscellaneous material. Mr. Boucher served with the 421st and the 548th Night Fighter Squadrons.

III. Don Dessert Papers, 1976

An article copied from Air Classics, August 1976, titled, "Night Lightning." Mr. Dessert is mentioned in the article.

IV. Dick Ehlert Papers, 1942-1944

First draft of a chronology taken from Mr. Ehlert's diary. It gives a good account of his experiences as a night fighter in the Pacific. He was a member of the 6th Night Fighter Squadron.

V. Joe Gonzales Papers, 1943

A copy of a chronology of the 417th Night Fighter Squadron. It gives a good account of their training, and experiences while being transported overseas. Many of the men in the squadron are mentioned, as well as their ranks. The chronology ends abruptly, the rest having been lost.

VI. Edward F. Jones Papers, 1944-1945

Rosters, transfer orders, and commendations pertaining to Mr. Jones' participation in the military.

VII. George R. Ludlow Photographs, 1945

Three photographs of German concentration camp victims at Furth, Germany.

VIII. William C. Odell Papers, 1942

One copy of an Individual Flight Record and one copy of a page from a diary. The two pages seem to indicate that there was a night fighter squadron in existence as early as April, 1942.

IX. Earl Tigner Photographs, 1945

Photographs of Iwo Jima and the 549th Night Fighter Squadron which was stationed there. A CD containing digital copies of these images was added to the series in 2006.

X. Thomas C. Tillman Papers, 1970-71

Several papers pertaining to the retirement and death of Thomas Tillman, an award that he received in 1970, and a pamphlet containing his biography.

XI. Gordon T. Timmons Interview, 1978

An interview with Gordon Timmons, who was at one time, commander of the 415th Night Fighter Squadron. He also served with the 421st Night Fighter Squadron. The interview was conducted by Susan Smith sometime between June 30, and July 2, 1978.

XII. Night Fighters' Reunion, June 30, - July 2, 1978

Two cassette tapes and one reel-to-reel tape of the speeches made at the reunion. The reel-to-reel tape is a duplicate of the cassette tapes. The speakers include Jimmy Doolittle, Colonel Richard Upstromm, who is the director of the Air Force Museum in Dayton, Ohio (as of October 1981), and individuals who served as night fighters.

XIII. Gary Olson Drawings, 1988

Donated in 2006 by Earl Tigner, this series contains four black ink drawings of aircraft flown by Night Fighter programs. The drawings are #74 of a limited production series. The four aircraft include the Northrop P-61B, the Douglas P-70, the deHavilland Mosquito, and the Bristol Beaufighter.

XIV. Earl Tigner Books on P-61

Donated in 2006 by Earl Tigner, this series contains four books about the Northrop P-61. These books are being cataloged into the Archive's Reading Room collection.

XV. World War II Night Fighters

Donated in March 2005, this series consists mainly of financial records of the organization. Also included are correspondence.

XVI. Frank Bosch Papers, 2005.

These papers were donated by his wife in 2005. They consist of material relating to the Night Fighters Association. This

series contains some issues of the Night Fighters Newsletter, correspondence, articles pertaining to the Night Fighters, and rosters of the men who served in the various Night Fighter Squadrons.

Container Listing

<u>Box</u>	<u>File</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Date</u>
1	1	A Night Fighter Poem	Undated
	2	Pilots' Tests and Certificates	Sept. 1943-Dec. 1946
	3	Squadron Reports of the 421st N.F.S.	Sept. 1944
	4	Squadron Reports of the 548th N.F.S.	June-Aug. 1945
	5	Individual Flight Records	March 1943-Dec. 1946
	6	Photographs of P-61 and crews	Undated
	7	Miscellaneous papers	Oct. 1943-Feb. 1945
	8	"Night Lightning," Air Classics	Aug. 1976
	9	Chronology of the 6th N.F.S.	July 1942-Feb. 1944
	10	Chronology of the 417th N.F.S.	Feb-Oct 1943
	11	Rosters, Transfer Orders, and Commendations	Mar. 1944-Oct. 1945
	12	Photographs of World War II Holocaust	May 1945
	13	Photographs, Individual Flight Record, and one page from diary	1942
	14	Photographs of Iwo Jima and the 549th N.F.S. CD of images (added 2006)	1945
	15	Papers of Lt. Col. Thomas Tillman	Dec. 1970-Feb. 1971
	16	Interview with Gordon Timmons; one cassette tape	1978
	17	Night Fighters Reunion; two cassette tapes	1978
	18	Night Fighters Reunion; one reel-to-reel tape	1978
2	1	Numbered Certificate for Gary Olson Drawings	1988
	2	Northrop P-61B by Gary Olson	1988
	3	Douglas P-70 by Gary Olson	1988
	4	deHavilland Mosquito	1988
	5	Bristol Beaufighter	1988
	6	List of 4 Northrop P-61 books cataloged into collection	
3	1	Articles of Incorporation and Tax Status	1984
	2	Organization Dissolution	2000-2000
	3	Roster of Squadron Representatives	1996
	4	State of California Tax Exemption	1988-2000
	5	Financial Statements	1994-2000
	6	Check Registers	1988-1998
	7	Tax Return	1997
	8	Tax Return	1998
	9	Tax Return	1999
	10	Tax Return	2000
	11	Memorabilia Price Guide	1998
	12	Correspondence: Donations	1998-2001
	13	Correspondence: Organization Tax Exemption	1991-1994

<u>Box</u>	<u>File</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Date</u>
3	14	Correspondence: Assumption of Office	1997
4	1	Historical Material	1942-1945
	2	Constitution and Organizational Chart	Undated
	3	History of Organization	1959
	4	Minutes	1958-1959
	5	Minutes	1986, 1990-1998
	6	Financial Material	1986-2000
	7	Convention Material	1968, 1988-2000
	8	Convention 2000: Registration Roster	2000
	9	History of Night Fighters	1943, 1994, 2003
	10	Newsletter	1970-2000
	11	"The Dim View"	1943
	12	"The Rendezvous"	1955, 1966, 1968
	13	Correspondence	1955
5	1	Correspondence	1957-1958
	2	Correspondence: Night Fighter Convention	1958
	3	Correspondence	1959
	4	Correspondence	1959
	5	Correspondence	1960, 1994-2003
	6	Correspondence: Frank L. Bosch	1968-2003
	7	Speeches	1957, Undated
	8	Memorial Programs	1989-1996
	9	Death Notices	Undated
	10	Photographs	Undated
	11	Articles about Night Fighters	Undated
	12	Unknown Articles	1943-1945, 1983-1992