

**Eighth Air Force Fighter Command**  
**SUMMARY OF COMBAT OPERATIONS, WW II**  
**SEPTEMBER 21, 1942 – APRIL 25, 1945**  
**And,**

**355<sup>th</sup> Fighter Group**  
**SUMMARY OF COMBAT OPERATIONS, WW II**  
**SEPTEMBER 14, 1943 - APRIL 25, 1945**

The 355th Fighter Group ended the war with an interesting and unique record as the third highest scoring group in the Eighth Air Force and the top strafing outfit. While four 8th AF fighter groups finished ahead of the 355th in total air-to-air victories (56th, 357th, 4th and 352nd), none surpassed the 355th in terms of harassment of the German war machine on the ground with awards of 502.5 destroyed and 397 damaged on the ground while losing 89 fighters to flak and strafing.

Only three (4<sup>th</sup> FG, 55<sup>th</sup> FG, and 78<sup>th</sup> FG) had higher operational losses than the 355<sup>th</sup> FG although the 355<sup>th</sup> had the fewest accidents..

The Steeple Morden Strafers finished fifth of fifteen among 8AF Groups in German aircraft destroyed in the air. They scored 341-27-127 for the loss of 44 pilots either shot down by enemy fighters or lost to Unknown cause while enemy fighters were in the area. The Thunderbolts accounted for 38 of the air awards while the Mustang accounted for 303.

The 355<sup>th</sup> and the 339<sup>th</sup> FG finished Combat Operations with the highest average number of German aircraft destroyed with 2.5 per mission. In contrast the 56<sup>th</sup>, 357<sup>th</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 352nd FG's, with more air scores, finished with ratios of 2.1, 2.2, 1.8 and 1.9 German aircraft destroyed per mission, respectively.

The Table A - 8<sup>th</sup> AF Operations Summary, below was developed using raw data from Eighth AF Victory Credits Board, 8<sup>th</sup> AF Operational statistics for each Fighter Group from Maxwell AFB Historical Research Center, from Roger Freeman's "The Mighty Eighth", from "Fighter Units and Pilots of the 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force" by Kent Miller plus my own research combined with Dr. Frank Olynyk's generous assistance.

Several other key Unit histories are well documented by Merle Olmstead for the 357<sup>th</sup> FG, the 352<sup>nd</sup> Fighter Group Association for the 352<sup>nd</sup> FG, Kent Miller for the 356<sup>th</sup> FG, Jeff Ethell and Garry Fry for the 4<sup>th</sup> FG, Garry Fry for the 78<sup>th</sup> FG, Kenn Rust and Bill Hess for the 353<sup>rd</sup> FG to name a few.

There is room for judgment on the statistics for two reasons. First, there is considerable question in the individual Missing Aircrew Reports as to the exact cause of many losses... These are cited as Unknown Cause when the last person to see the missing fighter pilot, and the author of the Witness Statement, simply did not see what finally happened but did note if there were, for example, enemy fighters in the area, or they were strafing and being shot at by flak.

For example, if a pilot was 'last seen' in an area and KIA/MIA in the vicinity of an air battle I put him in column of 'lost in air combat'. If the pilot hit the ground while being chased by an enemy fighter or had a mid air collision when engaged with fighters, those also became air combat losses. I performed the same judgment for all 8<sup>th</sup> FC losses as described in the MACR's. If a pilot was seen crashing into a train I created a category called "Strafing" and separated Flak and Unknown-Strafing from each other. The pilot could have been hit by unseen flak, or could have lost control or simply flown too low and hit the ground – but he was lost while Strafing..

Also, several MACR's were not prepared near the end of the war in ETO and thus one has to extract Cause from individual Squadron or Group histories for mid April, 1945.

Second, the question between Accident and Operations is a fuzzy one because there were situations in which a MACR was not prepared when a pilot was climbing out over the Channel and seen to dive into the Channel as the fate was known – but the witness statement was unclear as to cause (i.e. Pilot Error, Oxygen System failure, Fire, etc).

So, for the purposes of the tables below I evaluated the circumstances of say, a crash on final approach at a base in England, or a crash while climbing through overcast and separated the crashes into two categories, Namely a category of Operations where the crash occurred after safely leaving England, and those that crashed on English soil. For the ones that crashed on English soil I assigned those that had known battle damage to the Operations cause of damage – namely “Air” if returning with battle damage from German aircraft, ” Strafing” if hit by flak. For those that did not have Battle Damage but crashed on final approach for no known reason I assigned that to “Accident” whether there was an Accident Report generated or not,

The purpose of the explanation is not to re-create categories but to explain the categories in the tables below so that you may have insight regarding why my presentation may be different from another published source.

This is NOT a complete and exact accounting as research by historians and researchers such as Olynyk, Miller, Jan Hey, Ray Shewfelt, and me, is an on-going activity. Having said that, I believe the research on the 355<sup>th</sup> is as complete and accurate as any in existence today.

Given all the caveats, here ‘tis.

**Table A: Eighth AF Fighter Command – Operations Statistics September `1942 through May 8, 1945**

<u>Groups</u>	Luftwaffe		8th AF Fighter Command					Awards to Losses	
	A/C Destroyed		Pilot and A/C Losses (3) and (6)					Air	Air+Grnd
	Air (1)	Grnd (2)	Air	Stafe	Oth	Acc(4)	Total(5)	To Air	To Total
<b><u>4</u></b>	<b>550.0</b>	<b>461.3</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>255</b>	<b><u>6.4</u></b>	<b><u>4.0</u></b>
<i>Spit</i>	13.0	0.0	3	11	5	2	21		
<i>P-47</i>	127.0	1.0	21	1	4	4	30		
<i>P-51</i>	410.0	460.3	62	91	38	13	204		
<b><u>20</u></b>	<b>211.5</b>	<b>226.5</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>153</b>	<b><u>5.0</u></b>	<b><u>2.9</u></b>
<i>P-38</i>	87.5	28.5	33	35	17	9	94		
<i>P-51</i>	124.0	198.0	9	25	15	10	59		
<b><u>55</u></b>	<b>303.5</b>	<b>266.0</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>196</b>	<b><u>5.6</u></b>	<b><u>2.9</u></b>
<i>P-38</i>	102.0	7.0	44	25	13	10	92		
<i>P-51</i>	201.5	259.0	10	59	28	7	104		
<b><u>56</u></b>	<b>664.0</b>	<b>320.5</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>164</b>	<b><u>11.1</u></b>	<b><u>6.0</u></b>
<i>P-47</i>	664.0	320.5	60	50	28	26	164		
<b><u>78</u></b>	<b>326.0</b>	<b>342.5</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>205</b>	<b><u>6.8</u></b>	<b><u>3.3</u></b>
<i>P-38</i>	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	3	3		
<i>P-47</i>	252.0	152.0	42	51	28	19	140		
<i>P-51</i>	74.0	190.5	6	32	19	5	62		
<b><u>339</u></b>	<b>235.0</b>	<b>431.0</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>111</b>	<b><u>9.0</u></b>	<b><u>6.0</u></b>
<i>P-51</i>	235.0	431.0	26	41	33	11	111		
<b><u>352</u></b>	<b>504.5</b>	<b>275.0</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>125</b>	<b><u>12.3</u></b>	<b><u>6.2</u></b>

P-47	72.5	14.0	9	5	7	3	24		
P-51	432.0	261.0	32	36	21	12	101		
<b>353</b>	<b>328.0</b>	<b>404.5</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>154</b>	<u>7.8</u>	<u>4.8</u>
P-47	206.0	138.5	31	50	14	7	102		
P-51	122.0	266.0	11	16	19	6	52		
<b>355</b>	<b>341.0</b>	<b>502.0</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>180</b>	<u>7.8</u>	<u>4.7</u>
P-47	38.0	7.0	11	4	12	2	29		
P-51	303.0	495.0	33	86	27	5	151		
<b>356</b>	<b>200.0</b>	<b>77.0</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>122</b>	<u>5.7</u>	<u>2.3</u>
P-47	118.0	55.0	27	30	23	9	89		
P-51	82.0	22.0	8	9	9	7	33		
<b>357</b>	<b>595.5</b>	<b>107.0</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>148</b>	<u>10.8</u>	<u>4.7</u>
P-51	595.5	107.0	55	36	45	12	148		
<b>358</b>	<b>1.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>4</b>	<u>0.3</u>	<u>0.3</u>
P-47	1.0	0.0	3	0	1	0	4		
<b>359</b>	<b>255.5</b>	<b>117.0</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>135</b>	<u>7.3</u>	<u>2.8</u>
P-47	40.0	27.0	5	2	6	2	15		
P-51	215.5	90.0	30	49	31	10	120		
<b>361</b>	<b>222.0</b>	<b>111.0</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>98</b>	<u>11.7</u>	<u>3.4</u>
P-47	32.0	25.0	5	7	2	1	15		
P-51	190.0	86.0	14	36	20	13	83		
<b>364</b>	<b>262.5</b>	<b>191.0</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>146</b>	<u>6.9</u>	<u>3.1</u>
P-38	37.0	24.0	20	21	14	6	61		
P-51	225.5	167.0	18	35	26	6	85		
<b>479</b>	<b>155.0</b>	<b>268.0</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>92</b>	<u>14.1</u>	<u>4.6</u>
P-38	52.0	102.0	4	28	8	4	44		
P-51	103.0	166.0	7	16	14	11	48		
<b>Scouts</b>	<b>15.0</b>	<b>7.0</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>20</b>	<u>3.0</u>	<u>1.1</u>
<b>Exp</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>5</b>		
<b>1st</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>5</b>		
<b>2nd</b>	<b>12.0</b>	<b>7.0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>5</b>		
<b>3SF</b>	<b>3.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>5</b>		
<b>8th AF</b>	<b>5170.0</b>	<b>4113.3</b>	<b>644.0</b>	<b>890.0</b>	<b>534.0</b>	<b>240.0</b>	<b>2308.0</b>	<b>8.0</b>	<b>4.0</b>

#### Summary of Operations Statistics by Eighth Air Force Fighter Type

Fighter Type	Awards		Losses		Ratio - Award/Loss	
	Air	Grnd	Air [2]	Strafe [1]	A/air	G/strafe
<b>Spitfire</b>	13.0	0.0	3.0	11.0	4.3	0.0
<b>P-47</b>	1550.5	739.0	214.0	200.0	7.2	3.7
<b>P-38</b>	278.5	161.5	101.0	109.0	2.8	1.5
<b>P-51</b>	3328.0	3212.8	326.0	570.0	10.2	5.6
All types	5170.0	4113.3	644.0	889.0	8.0	4.6

1. "Strafe" includes losses due to flak, crashes and 'Unknown' casue while strafing but no German fighters present

2. "Air" includes losses to German aircraft or gunners, collisons with an American fighter while engaging, collisions with a German a/c shot down by the shooter, "Unknown" causes while German fighters are seen in the area.

**TABLE B**  
**355<sup>th</sup> Fighter Group/Scout Force Operations Summary**

Notes:

1. The awards for air victories are based on USAF 85 and Dr. Frank Olynyk extensive research – same as above.

2. The awards for ground scores are based primarily on the final USAAF 8<sup>th</sup> AF Victory Credits Board published after World War II. I have found exceptions between official VCB awards made during the war and the final accounting and I have gone with the VCB posting during WWII. Same as above

3. The number of pilots/aircraft MIA plus pilots lost in air and ground accidents are in these tables, but not aircraft salvaged after a safe return. I would estimate that the 355<sup>th</sup> lost an additional 5% of its fighter Operational losses to Category 5 accidents and salvage due to Battle Damage, but the pilot bailed out or crash landed safely and returned to base. These Tables include combined initial Pilot and Fighter Lost at same time, even if pilot later returned safely.

In many cases the pilots evaded and in a few cases were rescued behind enemy lines – and thus the pilot returned to duty but counted here as one form of loss or another as the a/c was lost.

A prime example is the rescue of Bert Marshall, Jr by Royce Priest. Officially he was MIA, then ‘Evaded’ as a result of being shot down behind enemy lines and returned for duty. I created a separate category of “Rescued” to account for this, as well as Air Sea Rescue for a pilot down in the Channel but picked up. I also have a Loss category in Operations to account for aircraft lost while attempting rescue even if pilot evaded or was captured...

In the case of Killed in Accidents (KIAC), my totals include only those lost prior to VE Day and used the same judgment criteria as for Table A above.

4. The sources for Missions Flown are from various 8<sup>th</sup> AF publications, “The Mighty Eighth” by Roger Freeman, and my own research into several official unit histories available from Maxwell AFB-HRC. Kent Miller also produced a volume of data in his very fine two volume set “Fighter Units & Pilots of the 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force” – Schiffer Military History, published 2001.

Even in this area I tend to have my own definitions as I base ‘Mission’ on a distinct Field Order. If one FO has three parts to assign one squadron each to three separate tasks, I count that as ‘One Mission’. The primary reason is to attempt to match up Group level efforts particularly in post D-Day timeframe when so many squadrons were tasked separately and counted as a separate Mission. At the end of the day the only meaningful set of data would be total sorties flown and these are not complete.

The totals for the 355<sup>th</sup> FG, Scout Force (Experimental) and 2<sup>nd</sup> Scout Force as presented above are derived from the individual day by day accounting for each award for each pilot for each day an award was validated by either USAF 85 for air victories and the 8<sup>th</sup> AF Victory Credits Board for ground score credits.

The loss data for 355<sup>th</sup> and Scout Force Experimental and 2<sup>nd</sup> Scout Force is rolled up from the Appendix F – Honor Roll in “Our Might Always”, which details each loss as recorded in the individual Missing Aircrew Report (MACR), the Accident Reports (ARs) for non-combat losses plus the official losses when the MACR was not performed. Additional information for many losses have surfaced post war from various sources as town records and Luftwaffe records for crash and burial sites,

clearing up mysteries (and errors) contained in my first history of the 355<sup>th</sup>, “Angels, Bulldogs and Dragons – History of the 355<sup>th</sup> Fighter Group in World War II”, published by Champlin Fighter Museum.

All the Awards and Losses are documented in the various Tables presented in the Appendices of “Our Might Always” to be published in 2008.

Awards			
355 Unit	Air	Ground	Total
354	133.0	208.5	341.5
355HQ	16.0	19.0	35.0
357	111.5	172.0	283.5
358	80.5	102.5	183.5
	<b>341.0</b>	<b>502.5</b>	<b>843.5</b>
Exp SF	0.0	0.0	0.0
2SF	12.0	7.0	19.0
	<b>12.0</b>	<b>7.0</b>	<b>19.0</b>

Type of Loss and fate of pilot						
355 Unit	KIA	POW	KIAc	Evde	Resc	Total
354	25	19	3	4	2	53
355HQ	1	1	0	1	0	3
357	29	22	2	9	2	64
358	28	18	2	11	1	60
355FG	83	60	7	25	5	180
Exp SF	1	0	2	2	0	5
2nd SF	3	0	2	0	0	5
SF	4	0	4	2	0	10

Cause of Loss										
355 Unit	Air [1]		Strafing [2]		Other Operations [3]				Acc	Total
	GF	Unk	Flak	Oth	S/M/F	C/FF	W/U	AR	All[4]	
354	11	4	21	4	6	3	0	1	3	53
355HQ	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	3
357	10	6	30	3	8	5	0	0	2	64
358	10	2	26	5	8	3	3	1	2	60
355FG	31	13	78	12	22	11	4	2	7	180
	44		90		39				7	180
Exp SF	1	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	2	5
2nd SF	0	0	2	0	1	0	0	0	2	5
SF	1	0	2	0	3	0	0	0	4	10
	1		2		3				4	