

FHC's Fw 190 SHRIKE GETS ITS FEATHERS

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This past October, Westpac Restorations, Colorado Springs, Colorado, had the honor to host a reunion of pilots from the famed 365th Fighter Group — the Hellhawks. “Frank ‘Lucky’ Luckman, one of the group’s P-47 pilots, decided that Colorado Springs would be an excellent location for a reunion. Needless to say, with our commitment to the Thunderbolt we wanted to get involved,” said Westpac’s Bill Klaers.

The Hellhawks came into being when the 365th FG was constituted on 27 April 1943 and activated on 15 May. Trained on Thunderbolts, the unit moved to RAF Gosfield in Britain during December 1943 where they

were assigned to the 9th Air Force. As typical of the time period, it took several weeks before the unit received its full complement of Thunderbolts — a total of 75 of the mighty P-47s.

Because of training and the terrible English weather, the 365th FG did not fly its first combat mission until 22 February 1944. At the time, fighter escorts for the 8th AF’s B-17s and B-24s were desperately needed so the 365th’s early missions were bomber escort. On 2 March, the Thunderbolts ran into the *Luftwaffe* for the first time — losing one of their own while claiming six of the enemy, including 102 victory ace Egon Mayer.

HELLHAWKS

WESTPAC RESTORATIONS HONORS PILOTS OF A
FAMOUS WWII FIGHTER GROUP

BY PHILIP MAKANNA/GHOSTS

Bill Klaers brings the Thunderbolt into formation with Steve Hinkley’s camera plane to start the formation flight.





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KARLES RABBIT

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B-WZ

THE PILOTS

FRANK "LUCK"
LUCKMAN
ORGANIZED THE
HELLHAWKS'
REUNION.



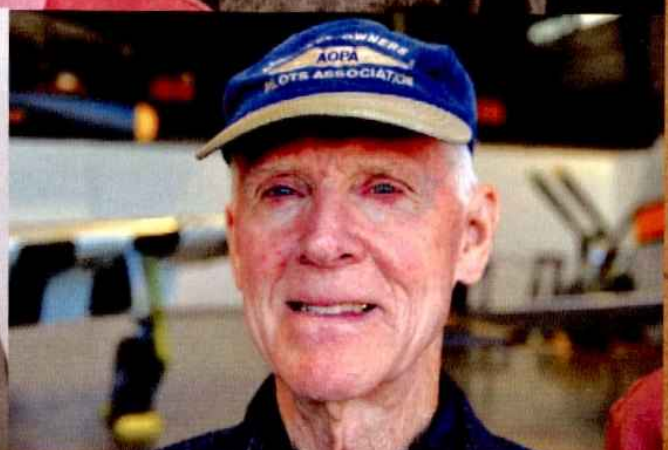
ARCHIE MALTBE
AT THE
REUNION... AND
DURING 1944.



VETERAN T-BOLT
A.J. HARRINGTON
UNDER THE WING
OF WESTPAC'S
P-47D AND
WITH HIS OWN
THUNDERBOLT IN
FRANCE.



AN INFORMAL
PORTRAIT OF
MIKE CANNON
ALONG WITH HIS
OFFICIAL USAAF
PHOTO.





The Thunderbolts were flown by (left to right) Neal Melton, Bill Klaers, and John Shoffner.

On 5 March, the unit moved to RAF Beaulieu for intensive training on attacking ground targets. After two weeks of training, the Thunderbolts headed to Europe to attack V-1 sites, bridges, airfields, and rail facilities — destroying enemy targets prior to D-Day. On 6 June 1944, the group blasted enemy installations behind the bridge-

head. The unit became highly respected for their daring ground attack missions as they supported advancing Allied forces as well as striking hard at the enemy during the Battle of the Bulge.

The 365th moved to France on 21 June and then began moving to advanced airfields in support of the troops. By V-E Day, the 365th was at Fritslar,

Germany. The 365th played a part in the Occupation Forces until the unit was inactivated during September 1945.

During this time, the Hellhawks built up a great combat record. "When I heard about the reunion, I got in touch with Neal Melton," said Bill. "Neal was ready for an engine change in his P-47D so he agreed to come out to participate in the reunion and then have the R-2800 changed. John Shoffner also agreed to bring his Thunderbolt so we were going to have some fun flying."

The Hellhawks participated in a program at the Air Force Academy that was highlighted by the three Thunderbolts roaring overhead. "The next day we got to fly during the halftime in the USAF-Army football team so we got to participate in two important events," said Bill.

The Hellhawks also got to tour the Westpac facility and examine the three P-47Ds up close — the aging veterans recalled many tales of combat over Europe. "We feel it was a real honor to host the Hellhawks," stated Bill. "We hope to do it again." **AC**



Hellhawks gather in the Westpac hangar.