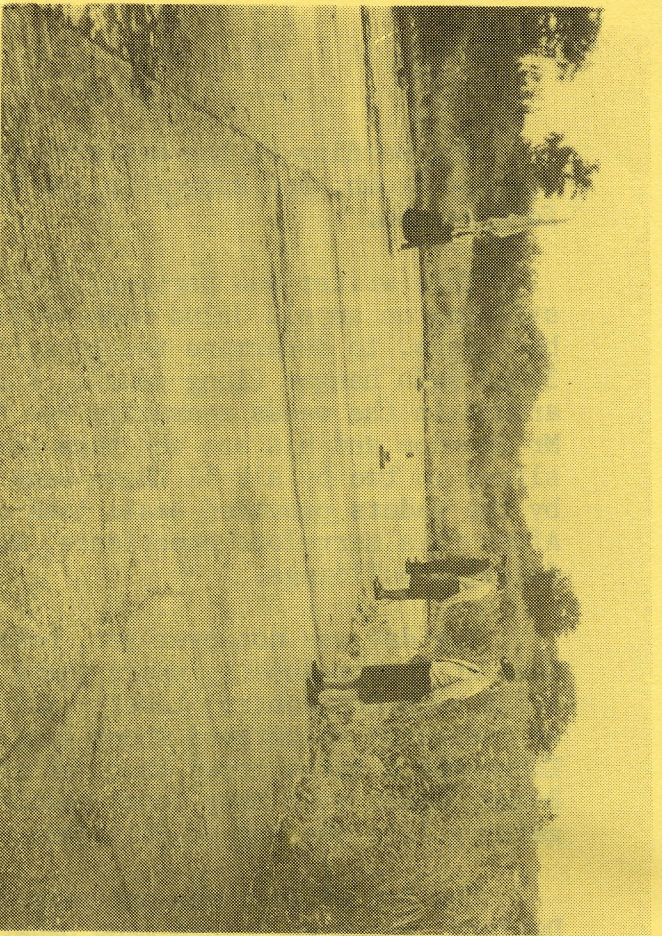
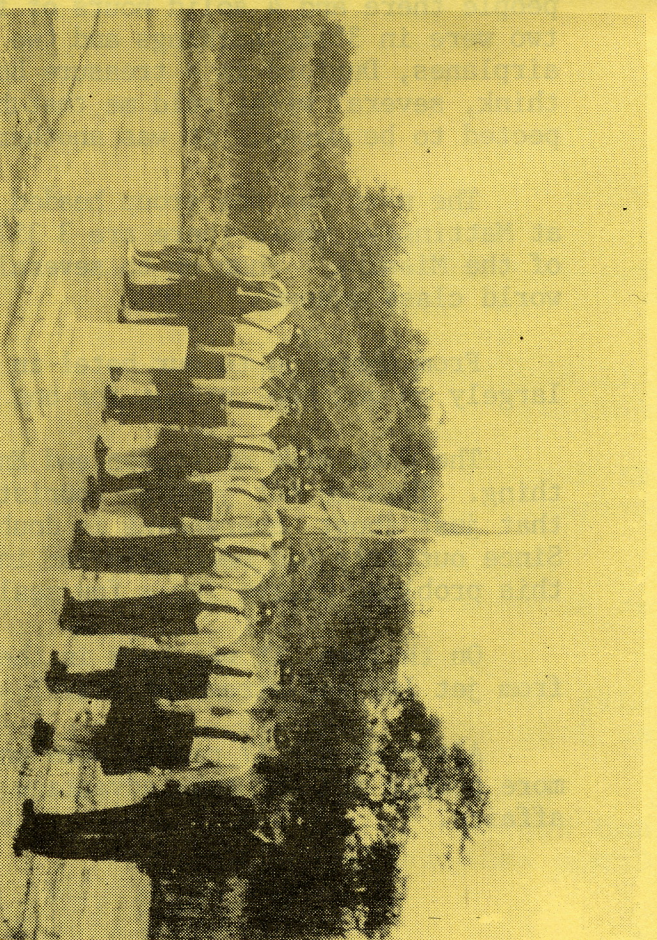




Olmsted unveiling memorial at Leiston hardstand



Laboranti, Olmsted, Peter Rix (Luftwaffe), Skara



Cadet formation at their memorial to the 357th FG



Standing: Stevens, O'Connor, Steffen, Skara, Fry,
Dunn, Laboranti, Hoefner.
Kneeling: Stadler, Vartanian, Olmsted, Keiper

AN UNPLEASANT OCCASION

Back in December of 1942, the 357th Fighter Group was activated at Hamilton Field near San Francisco Bay but it was a few weeks before the men arrived. Most of the enlisted men had finished their basic training several months prior and had continued on to various schools for training in specific fields of Communications, Armament, Ordnance, Aircraft and Engine Maintenance and others.

Our next location, prior to assignment to the 357th Fighter Group was at the Fourth Air Force Replacement Depot at Fresno, CA. We were billeted adjacent to Hammer Field Airbase. Our stay there was to be brief. It was there that our military future would be determined for we were to be assigned to a permanent military unit for the duration of WW II. The billeting and the mess hall food was satisfactory but there was nothing to do for days except to await the "calling off" of shipping orders each morning and afternoon. A Hollywood movie actor permanently stationed there, mounted a tall six foot square platform in the middle of the place to read off those orders which in most instances were permanent assignments. This movie actor was of Hispanic origin and it always amazed me how proficient he was in calling off those Mexican names. For years, it has irked me that I can't recall his name. Part of the brief time spent at the replacement pool was to include leaving Hammer Field and go up into the foothills of Kings Canyon National Park for a few days of instruction at a rifle range.

Once you were seated in the back of a covered 6x6 G.I. truck, one had little knowledge as to what direction you were going or what passed by. It was quite a long ride to a barren place called "Squaw Valley". Today as I study a map, I believe the place was directly East of Fresno, CA on route 180 about 35 miles from Fresno.

The weather in the daytime was great when the sun was shining but at night, it became very cold. We were billeted in G.I. tents on wooden platforms and on canvas folding cots. In order to sleep through the cold nights, we slept with all of our clothing on including our leggings and shoes with our blanket under us and covered up with our good old heavy G.I. full length overcoat.

We had our practice and our testing for a scoring with a rifle. As a high school teenager, I worked summers on a dairy farm and at that time, I thought I was a pretty good marksman with the 22 caliber rifle but on the G.I. range, we were given old Enfield Rifles and I scored just fair. I always felt later that it had to be the old rifle that did only fair - NOT ME??

We also had practice firing the Thompson Sub-machine Gun and the 45 cal. pistol but one couldn't hit the broad side of a barn with either weapon.

Once we had finished our weapons training program, there were assigned details of "policing" brass and "pulling targets".

About the time my tour at Squaw Valley was to be finished, the situation turned bad. The food was prepared by means of a portable G.I. kitchen. Any food that had to be prepared was poorly cared for. Anything directly out of a can was a blessing. We ate out of our G.I. mess kits and cup which was no problem.

The eating area was a huge tent with tables the height for standing up to eat. My buddies and I ate just once in the mess tent. The air was very stagnant within and we just couldn't tolerate the flies in the mess tent.

The following photo, I took with the smallest and cheapest camera I

have ever seen but I sent the film home and since my father hobbied at black and white photo processing, he developed it and years later, Merle Olmsted enlarged the print for us.



I do not recall the smaller man on the left as becoming 357th F.G. personnel. The second from the left is Thomas "Chick" Aurio who became a 364th F.S. Crew Chief. The farthest on the right is Henry "Hank" D'Esti who became the Chief Aircraft Inspector of the 364th F.S. "Chick" was referred to often as being one of the young boys of the squadron and "Hank" as the "old man". These two airmen became very close friends which continued for years.

After WW II, "Chick" suffered a heart attack and died at a young age and "Hank" is approaching his 81st birthday.

This photo was taken after we went through the open chow line and took our meal to the pile of logs to be able to eat in the sun and fresh air in comfort.

Bathing facilities were TOP SHELF at the rifle range. There was a large water tower built on high poles. To shower, one could stand under a spicket beneath the water tower with it's ice cold water. Few showers

were taken!!!

Most of the men with me at the time were A & E Mechanics. Dick Eagan (later 364th F.S.) was a tall Irishman with a strong voice and he was designated to be our tent leader. Others that I recall being in our tent were Philip Bruce (362nd), Roger Bender (363rd), Bob Grupposso (364th) as well as Aurio and D'Esti (364th).

Problems came into being soon at the Squaw Valley Rifle Range when the camp was quarantined with a Measle epidemic.

Prior to the Measles, in order to keep the men busy, the duty consisted of digging the trench deeper and longer in front of the targets. When the depth became greater than the men could throw the dirt out of the trench with long handled shovels, a second four foot wide trench was started on the one side of the original trench which was dug four feet deep to serve as a platform for receiving dirt from the deeper trench.

A few days later, a case of Spinal Meningitis became known and continued our quarantine with all personnel restricted from doing any strenuous work. To make matters worse, the Medical Officer was a drunk!! The men became very jittery. One night, one fellow tried to go A.W.O.L. and as he climbed the barbed wire fence around the camp, the G.I. on Guard duty shot him in the leg.

One day our tent leader Eagan was told his tent men could either go on K.P. or continue to dig at the target trench or go on wood cutting detail up in the mountains. Wood was cut with cross-cut saws and split with axes for firewood in the wood burning stoves at the mess hall.

Eagan did a bit of investigating and we took the wood cutting detail for a few days because there were a few benefits. We could take a towel and soap and at lunch break, take a sponge bath in the small mountain stream.

Our lunch chow consisted of cases of cartons of milk to be cooled in the stream with cases of nice California oranges to round out the meal. Better than the food back at camp. No cooks got their hands into that food.

Days passed and with a 45 minute notice we were rushed off to return to the replacement pool area at Fresno. After the over extended tour at the rifle range, we did not stay many more days at Fresno.

One memorable incident that occurred as we sweat out the reading of shipping orders each day, was when one young G.I. ran past us shouting with joy, "I'm going to ship out to school, I'm going to school"! When he came down out of the clouds, we learned that he was to go to a Reading and Writing School. This incident awoke us to the fact that our lot wasn't so bad after all.

In a few more days, we were assigned to the 357th Fighter Group.

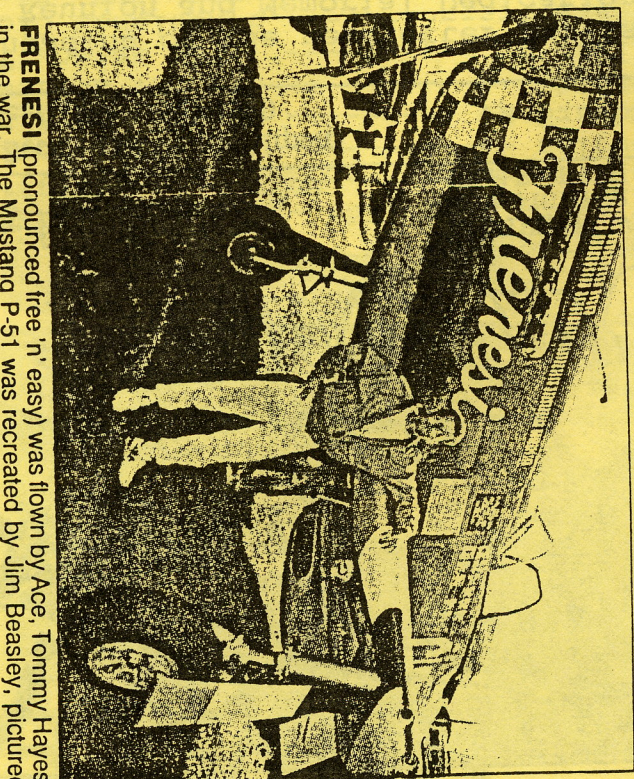
The above occasion was an unpleasant occasion for some of the 357th F.G. enlisted men but by no means did it compare to the far greater hardships that some of our pilots encountered as they were taken prisoners by our enemy, often severely injured in the E.T.O.

Our pilots who were able to escape and not be imprisoned by the enemy also endured some very difficult times.

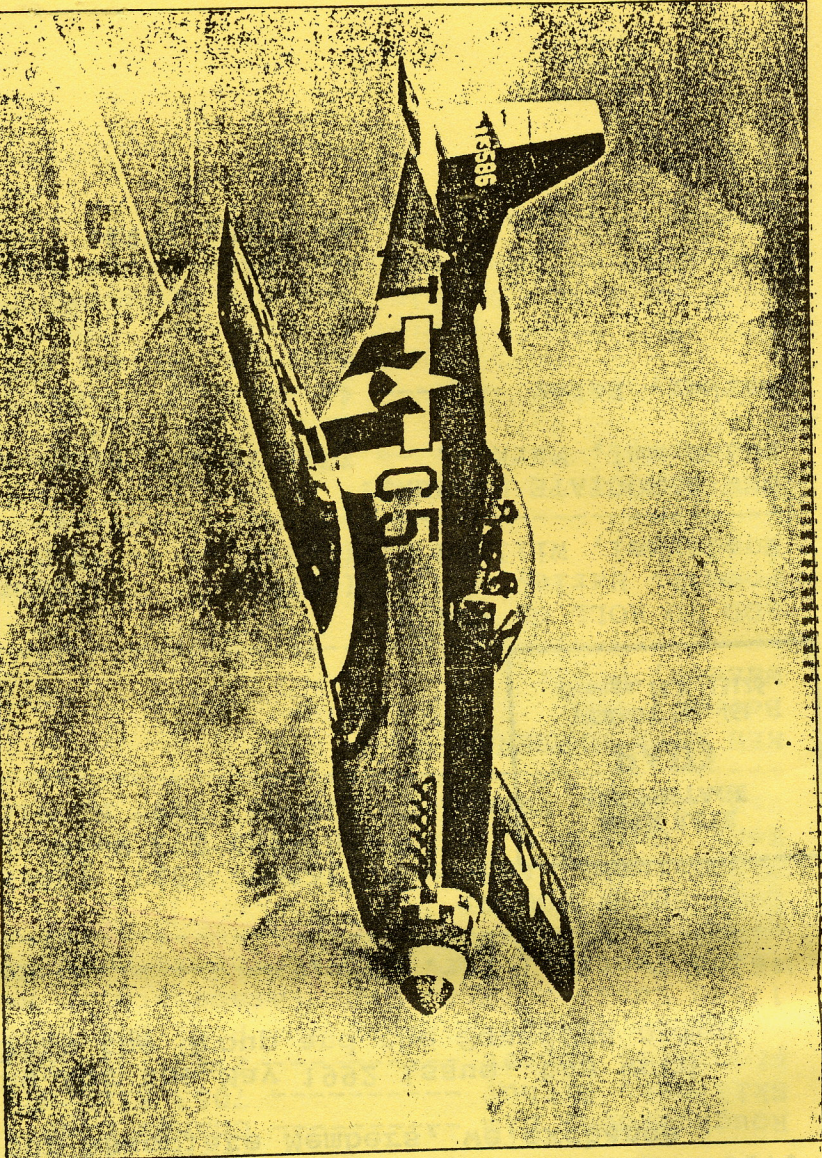
The Squaw Valley Rifle Range story took place early in 1943, slightly over fifty years prior to the time of this writing. An occasion one could never forget!

Joe De Shay

WWII Aces



FRENESI (pronounced free n' easy) was flown by Ace, Tommy Hayes, in the war. The Mustang P-51 was recreated by Jim Beasley, pictured here with Jim Beasley, Jr.



Photos courtesy EAA

'HURRY HOME HONEY' was flown in World War II by flying Ace, Richard Peterson. The Mustang's paint job was recreated by Charles Osborn.

Air combat pilots to be 'reunited' with their Mustangs

One of the most decorated and successful fighter groups of World War II — the 357th Fighter Group — will be honored on the 50th anniversary of its activation as part of the EAA Fly-In Convention.

The 357th was the first fighter group to use P-51 "Mustangs" in the Eighth Air Force and had a faster rate of air victories than any other unit within the "Mighty Eighth" during the final year of the war in Europe. The 357th also featured many top pilots, including Chuck Yeager, who became the first person to break the sound barrier. Also on hand will be Clarence "Bud" Anderson, Leonard "Kit" Carson, Richard Peterson and Tommy Hayes. The five aces totaled 70 air victories among them.

Those five will be "reunited" with their Mustangs, as five P-51s painted to match those flown by the Aces will also be on display.

the airplanes of their era will be one of this year's Fly-In Convention highlights," said EAA Convention Chairman Tom Poberezny. "We welcome the aces of the 357th to Oshkosh and invite visitors to enjoy their participation on Opening Day — Friday, July 31st."

The 357th Fighter Group was activated on Dec. 1, 1942. It eventually became part of the Eighth Air Force and was stationed at Leiston, England. The group had the highest number of enemy aircraft kills for one mission — 56, on Jan. 14, 1945 over Durben, Germany — for any fighter group in the European Theater.

The three fighter squadrons within the 357th (the 362nd, 363rd and 364th) each finished as one of the top 12 fighter squadrons in the European Theater with at least 155 kills apiece. The group had a total of 44 aces.

Yeager is the best-known of the aces, as he later became the first person to break the sound barrier in the Bell X-1 aircraft. He is also credited with much of the early flight work leading to the start of America's space program.

Carson finished with 18½ victories with the 357th, ranking him 11th on the final list of European Theater aces. Anderson finished with 17, Peterson 15½ and Hayes 8½.

The P-51s will be displayed on the Convention Taxiway on Friday, July 31.

The airplanes will open the air show that same day and appear at a special evening program Friday night at Theater in the Woods. Included are Gary Honbarrier, whose "Glamorous Glen III" matches Yeager's wartime fighter; Mickey Rupp's "Old Crow" (Anderson); Paul Romaine's "Nooky Booky IV"