

JOHN H. WHITE

The United States quickly faced two enormous problems in the early days of World War II: the immediate need for materiel in the Pacific following the immense destruction at the hands of the Japanese, and the lack of personnel to fight the air war against the Nazis in Europe. The course taken with the 31st Fighter Group demonstrated this problem. The group's airplanes were sent to the Pacific, while its pilots headed in the opposite direction by ship. One of those on board was a young fighter pilot from Kensett, Arkansas, John H. White.

Once in England, White and the other pilots in the group began training to fly British Spitfires, given to the Americans by the Royal Air Force. Although the 31st became the first group in the 8th Air Force to fly operational missions, their first combat came in the sky over the town of Dieppe on August 19, 1942. Lieutenant White flew several flights that day, protecting the commandos who raided the French port. He said the fighting "was very fierce." On his second sortie of the day a Nazi Focke Wulf-190 "got somehow in the way." White shot at it; he wrote "am sure he 'had it' but was unable to confirm it." The combat was quite an accomplishment since the Spitfire Mark-V White and his squadron mates flew was vastly inferior in performance to the Focke Wulfs. The group lost eight pilots over Dieppe and had only one confirmed kill.

In November, 1942 White and the group moved south to provide experienced fighter cover for the American landings in North Africa. The group landed at the airfield at Oran, Algeria, which was still under fire at the time. On April 21, 1943 White was flying alone on

patrol over the Bay of Tunis. Beneath him he saw ten German airplanes about to attack a formation of Allied planes. Rolling over and diving, White attacked the Germans without hesitation. He shot down one Focke Wulf-190 and dispersed the rest.

A few weeks later "things really broke loose" for White and the 31st Group who "had plenty of fighter opposition." The group got twelve enemy planes; three of which were downed by White. The next day he and five other pilots attacked 40 German fighters. White shot down another FW-190, making himself an ace, one of only five at the time in a fighter group consisting of about fifty pilots.

White's combat tour overseas lasted sixteen months and 135 missions. In September, 1943 he returned to the States, where he spent the rest of the war training fighter pilots. On October 5, 1945 White volunteered to fly four injured soldiers from Ft. Sumner, New Mexico to Amarillo, Texas. Just after he landed his Beech ambulance plane at Amarillo, another pilot accidentally landed his trainer on White's plane. White and his copilot died instantly. The four ill soldiers escaped unhurt.

A week later nine of his former students flew their P-47s in formation over his funeral services.

Major White is survived by his wife, Maude Shaver White, and his daughter, Mrs. Jill Roberts.