

# 111<sup>th</sup> GROUP

## LINEAGE

391<sup>st</sup> Bombardment Group (Medium) constituted, 15 Jan 1943  
Activated, 21 Jan 1943  
Redesignated 391<sup>st</sup> Bombardment Group (Light) in Jul 1945  
Inactivated, 25 Oct 1945  
Redesignated 111<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Group (Light) and allotted to ANG (Pa), 24 May 1946  
Extended federal recognition, 20 Dec 1948  
Redesignated 111<sup>th</sup> Composite Group, Nov 1950  
Redesignated 111<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Group (Light), Feb 1951  
Ordered to active service, 1 Apr 1951  
Redesignated 111<sup>th</sup> Strategic Reconnaissance Group (Medium), Aug 1951  
Inactivated, 16 Jun 1952  
Returned to ANG (Pa), redesignated 111<sup>th</sup> Fighter Bomber Group and activated, 1 Jan 1953

## STATIONS

MacDill Field, FL, 21 Jan 1943  
Myrtle Beach Bombing Range, SC, 24 May 1943  
Godman Field, KY, 4 Sep-31 Dec 1943  
Matching, England, 25 Jan 1944  
Roye/Amy, France, 19 Sep 1944  
Assche, Belgium, 16 Apr 1945  
Vitry-en-Artois, France, 27 May-27 Jul 1945  
Camp Shanks, NY, Oct-25 Oct 1945  
Philadelphia Intl Aprt, PA, 1 Apr 1951  
Fairchild AFB, WA, 10 Apr 1951-16 Jun 1952  
Willow Grove, PA, 1963

## ASSIGNMENTS

Ninth AF  
Strategic Air Command

## WEAPON SYSTEMS

B-26

B-26

B-29

## **COMMANDERS**

Col Gerald E. Williams, 23 Jan 1943-1945

Col Joseph B. McManus, 1 Apr 1951

Col Edward D. Edwards, 24 Jun 1951

Col S. E. Manzo, 8 Nov 1951-16 Jun 1952

## **HONORS**

### **Service Streamers**

### **Campaign Streamers**

Air Offensive, Europe

Normandy

Northern France

Rhineland

Ardennes-Alsace

Central Europe

### **Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers**

### **Decorations**

Distinguished Unit Citation

Germany, 23-26 Dec 1944

## **EMBLEM**

Per bend or and azure, a bend counter compony sable and argent between in chief a Pegasus of the second and in base a cluster of three feathers of the first surmounted by a mullet of the fourth and third. (Approved, 11 Jan 1954)

## **EMBLEM SIGNIFICANCE**

## **MOTTO**

VIRTUTE ALISQUE—With Wings and Courage

## **NICKNAME**

## **OPERATIONS**

Trained with B-26's for duty in Europe with Ninth AF. Moved to England, Jan-Feb 1944. Entered combat on 15 Feb 1944 and during the ensuing weeks bombed targets such as airfields, marshalling yards, bridges, and V-weapon sites in France and the Low Countries to help prepare for the invasion of Normandy. Attacked enemy defenses along the invasion beaches on 6 and 7 Jun 1944. From Jun to Sep, continued cross-Channel operations, which included attacks on fuel dumps and troop concentrations in support of Allied forces during the breakthrough at St Lo in Jul 1944, and strikes on transportation and communications to block the enemy's retreat to the

east. Began flying missions from bases on the Continent in Sep 1944, extending its area of operations into Germany and continuing its attacks against enemy railroads, highways, troops, bridges, ammunition dumps, and other targets. Contributed vital assistance to ground forces during the Battle of the Bulge by attacking heavily defended positions such as bridges and viaducts, 23-26 Dec 1944; for these missions, performed without fighter escort in the face of intense flak and overwhelming attacks by enemy aircraft, the group was awarded a DUG. From Jan to May 1945, and using A-26's beginning in Apr, the group concentrated its attacks on the German transportation and communications system. Flew its last mission on 3 May.

391st Bomb Group (Medium) which was constituted in 1943, with four flying squadrons. It first trained at MacDill Field, FL, in the Martin B-26. A year later, they were flying ground attack mission all over Western Europe. The wing initially started operations from England, bombing targets such as airfields, marshalling yards, and bridges in France and the Low Countries to help prepare for the invasion of Normandy. It attacked enemy defenses along the beaches before that invasion. The wing moved to France and Belgium in fall of 1944, extending its area of operations into Germany and contributing vital assistance to ground forces during the Battle of the Bulge. Very late in the war the pilots transitioned to the A-26 Invader aircraft, for combat missions against German railroads, highways, bridges and armor vehicles. For its actions in WW II, the wing was decorated with the Distinguished Unit Citation.

If you have not read one or both of the 391st BG histories, you should do so. They should be available in the B-26 Archives at the University of Akron and Pima Museum in Tucson. These volumes present the formation and combat experiences of the group in excellent detail. (See the abbreviated treatment below of the formation and original deployment of the Group). Here I will go into some detail about replacements, crews and individuals to replace combat losses and rotations when crews completed 65 missions. By the time of World War II, the Army Air Corps had become the Army Air Forces. It was a part of the Army, and many of the terms that we know now from the postwar, independent Air Force did not apply. The proper term was "Commanding Officer", not Commander. There were no Air Force Bases; there were Army Air Fields (AAF), or just Fields. One usually said Barksdale Field in everyday talk, not Barksdale Army Air Field. B-26 first pilots were trained at one of two "transition schools." These schools were Laughlin AAF, Del Rio, Texas, and Dodge City AAF, Dodge City, Kansas. Here the young aviator, usually fresh from advanced flying school, where he had flown some twin-engine trainer, such as the AT-9, AT-10, or UC-78 (Bamboo Bomber), learned to fly the B-26. When he had completed the course of some two months' duration, he reported to a Replacement Training Unit (RTU), unless he was slated for instructor's school, flying tow targets, or some such non-combat duty.

The 391st was created by letter dated 15 Jan 43. The headquarters was activated on 21 Jan 43 at McDill Field, Tampa, Florida, and was assigned to III Bomber Command. The squadron composition was 572, 573, 574, and 575. The aircraft type was the Martin B-26 Marauder as of 13 Feb 43. The Group stayed at McDill through 23 May 43. It was next assigned to the Myrtle Beach Bombing Range, Myrtle Beach, South Carolina from 24 May 43 to 4 Sep 43. The last stateside assignment was Godman Field, Fort Knox, Kentucky, 4 Sep 43 to 31 Dec 43. The Ground Echelon departed this date and arrived the next day at Camp Shanks, New York, then sailing on 16 Jan 44, and docking in Scotland nine days later. They arrived at Matching in Essex County, England, on 26 and 27 Jan 44. The Flight Echelon flew from Godman Field on 30 Dec

44 to Hunter Field, Savannah, Georgia. After a final check of all aircraft, the unit departed on 3 Jan 44 for Morrison Field, West Palm Beach, Florida, where it remained for three days. The Flight contingent flew by way of the South Atlantic route. Overnight stops were made at Borinquen Field, Puerto Rico, Atkinson Field, British Guiana, and Belem, Brazil. Two nights were spent at Natal, Brazil, before undertaking the leg to Ascension Island, which the Echelon left on 12 Jan 44, for Roberts Field, Liberia. Weather conditions delayed their departure until 21 Jan 44. The next day the unit flew from Dakar, Senegal, to Marrakech, French Morocco, where it was weathered in for a week. On 30 Jan 44 it flew to St. Mawgan, England and on to Matching. The Flight Echelon did not consist of complete crews. The crews were made up of pilot, co-pilot, flight engineer, and radioman, with some navigators, either 391st ones or navigators belonging to southern route ferry organizations. The bombardiers and armorer gunners went with the Ground Echelon. This fact has made it very difficult to complete the crew listings for these crews, as there were no orders or other paper trail to place these individuals in crews.

The RTUs were in business to train replacement crews for combat. Again, there were two of these for the B-26. One was at Barksdale AAF, Shreveport, Louisiana, and the other at Lake Charles AAF, Lake Charles, Louisiana. Here crews were assembled and crew training began. Co-pilots came directly from advanced flying school. Bombardiers came from their training bases, as did the flight engineers, radiomen, and armorer gunners. What did they do and learn in RTU? Except for the first pilots, they had to learn the airplane systems and their duties in routine flying. All had to learn their duties in combat flying. They had to learn to talk to each other on the intercom, observing the niceties of brevity, clarity, and crew position. Co-pilots got to make a few landings and takeoffs. Gunners got to do some firing. By the way, the flight engineer manned the top turret, the radioman the waist guns, and the armorer gunner the tail guns (at least, that was what the school taught). Practice bombing was an important part of the program; the bombardier used his Norden bombsight, and the pilot attempted to obey the visual commands of the PDI (Pilot's Directional Indicator). Many of these bombing runs were scored. There was some night flying and some round robin cross countries. Emergency procedures received attention, but everyone thought or hoped that they were for somebody else. There was quite a bit of formation flying, because it was the backbone of our kind of combat operations, and practice was essential. I have already mentioned that the B-26 was a good formation airplane, but the pilots had to gain proficiency. After about two months of this regimen, the crew was ready to move on. Before continuing, let me share some memories of Barksdale: living in a tarpaper barracks with the outside temperature 113°; sleeping on a folding cot; the tower's call sign, "Carfare"; our training squadron's call sign, "Hobo"; some showoff at the Officers' Club pool actually knowing how to dive; being taught a single-engine landing procedure that was okay for a 10,000 foot runway but not too great for one of 4500 feet; a B-29 stopping by (none of us could imagine how anything that big could fly); and the Ink Spots singing in a hangar.

The move began with a train ride from Barksdale or Lake Charles to Hunter Field, Savannah, Georgia. Here the crews were assigned airplanes, which they proceeded to check out, calibrating the compass, the airspeed indicator, etc. There also were new pieces of equipment to be studied and used. There were briefings about the overseas flight, ditching, water survival, and all those good things. There were training films, some about things other than flying! The crews then began their deployment. In the summertime, they flew over the northern route. As I went by this

route, I will describe it in some detail. There were 16 airplanes in our contingent, which took off on 6 Aug 1944. We departed on the same day, flying individually at intervals of some minutes. Our first stop was Dow Field, Bangor, Maine, for one night. The next day we took off for Goose Bay, Labrador, where weather in Greenland forced us to stay for several days and caused us to be called back on our first departure. The destination in Greenland was Bluie West One at Narsarsuak. If you haven't landed at BW1, you have missed one of life's biggest thrills. We were briefed for hours with talks, movies taken from the nose of an airplane, and a topographical model. The reason for what might seem like overkill is that BW1 is 52 miles up a fjord with walls several thousand feet high, numerous dead-end offshoots, no room to turn around, and usually an overcast below the tops of the walls. You had to get it right the first time. When you got within a few miles of the airport, signified by some geographical feature that I do not remember, but not seeing the field, you began a turn to the right, slowing. When you passed a grounded ship, you put the gear down and half flaps and kept turning. When you passed three small islands (I may have the ship and islands reversed), you put down full flaps and kept turning. Pretty soon you saw the runway, which runs slightly uphill. There is a glacier dead ahead; you could not out climb it. If you had to go around, you had to turn hard left before the first hill, or you had bought it. We remained at BW1 for two or three nights, not because of weather over Iceland, our next destination, but because of weather over the Greenland icecap. Upon leaving, taking off downhill, we had to climb, going back down the fjord until we reached some specified altitude which I do not remember, after which we turned right and continued climbing back toward the field, which I believe we had to cross at no less than 7000 feet, continuing to climb to the east to 12,000 feet to cross the icecap, after which we could let down over the water on our way to Meeks Field, Reykjavik, Iceland. We stayed one night here--my turn in the barrel--I had to sleep in the airplane.

We took off the next morning for Prestwick, Scotland. Approaching Stornoway, in the Outer Hebrides Islands, we descended through broken clouds only to find ourselves directly over a British battleship; we thought we were goners. Prestwick was zero-zero (not forecast), so we were diverted to Northern Ireland, landing at Toome. More about Toome later. The next day we delivered our airplane to Stansted, England, where the B-26 repair depot was located. Then we were off by truck to Stone, a well-known and much disliked replacement depot, where we killed time until arrangements were made to send us (in the back end of a B-17) to what might be called the "Combat Finishing School" at Toome. Here we had several weeks learning to do it "their way." Finally, we were assigned to Groups to which we were sent, in my case, by ship across the Irish Sea, train to Bishop's Stortford, and bus to Matching Green. Group orders assigned us to squadrons. Crew integrity was maintained through all of this. In the winter, crews flew over the southern route, and I refer you to the Group histories for a description of this route. I am sure the hop to Ascension Island provided a thrill to match that of BW1. I have described the "normal" crew resupply system, but it was not the only way crews ended up flying the B-26. For example, SO-266, dated Sep 22, 1944, from the 70th Replacement Depot, the famous Stone, shows "crews" assigned to the various groups. The people went where assigned, but they were not crews. The so-called crews were pure fiction, manufactured by personnel at the "Repple Depple." Both P. K. Bonde and Dana Wetherbee assured me that they hardly knew their so-called crews before or after reporting to the 391st. The Group, apparently knowing what was going on, proceeded to assign the people to squadrons on an individual basis, as shown in Hqs 391st BG SO-126, dated Sep 24, 1944. I am confident the squadrons then assigned the

individuals to crews based upon their qualifications and "exigencies of the service." Where did these people come from? That would take another book, but many of the pilots were longtime instructors; many of the individuals had previous tours. Wetherbee, for example, had flown 50 missions in B-25's in the Mediterranean; the powers that be were smart enough not to send him through the whole training pipeline again.

In 1946, the 391st was redesignated the 111th Bombardment Group (Light) and returned back to the Pennsylvania National Guard. That same year, the 103rd Bomb Squadron (Light) was absorbed into its current parent unit. For the rest of the decade the unit flew the B-26 in its' new mission of Air Defense and Tactical Ground Support.

In 1955, the unit was redesignated the 111th Fighter Interceptor Group; which meant a change in mission from tactical fighter operations to that of air defense. In that era, many of the aircraft of the U.S. Air Force and Air National Guard were then engaged in the 'Cold War' with the Soviet Union. Air defense aircraft were used to protect the U.S. against Soviet bombers who could have attacked American cities with nuclear weapons.

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Air Force Order of Battle

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Sources