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Aces of the Eighth Air Force in World War Two

By [Stephen Sherman](#), June, 1999. Updated April 16, 2012.

In the European Theater, ETO, the U.S. Eighth Air Force started bombing Germany heavily in 1943. In that year, the first American Fighter Groups - the 4th, 56th, and 78th arrived, and their fighter pilots flew P-47 Thunderbolts. They shot down many enemy aircraft, and when properly handled, the "Jugs" more than held their own in aerial combat against the German Fw-190s and Bf-109s. Many 8AF aviators became aces flying P-47's.

But the bombers needed fighter planes to escort them all the way, into the heart of Germany. When the P-51 Mustangs began to fly combat missions in early 1944, they proved that they could do it all: they could fly all the way to Berlin and back, they could fly faster and out-dogfight the German fighters. Thus Herman Goering's famous comment: "When I saw Mustangs over Berlin in March, 1944, I knew the jig was up."

Following are the stories of many of the highest scoring P-47 and P-51 aces of the ETO, including some from the 354th Fighter Group, which, to be precise, was part of the Ninth Air Force.

Also, be sure to take a look at the [Clark Gallery](#), a collection of high quality photographs, donated to this website, by the family of 1st Lt. James Clark, a pilot with the 56th Fighter Group. There are many pictures of Clark, Gabreski, and other pilots, as well as scans of a few contemporary documents. And, for another dose of reality, read below, where a veteran flier comments on the veracity of a piece of newspaper puffery that found its way onto this site.

Summary Table of Top Aces

Name	Kills	Medals	Unit	Plane
Francis "Gabby" Gabreski	28.0	DSC	56FG	P-47
Robert S. Johnson	27.0	DSC	56FG	P-47
George Preddy	26.8	DSC	352FG	P-51
John C. Meyer	24.0	DSC	352FG	P-51
Ray Wetmore	22.6	DSC	359FG	P-51
David C. Schilling	22.5	DSC	56FG	P-47
Dominic Gentile	21.8	DSC	4FG	P-47
Fred J. Christensen	21.5	SS	56FG	P-47
Walker M. 'Bud' Mahurin	20.8	DSC	56FG	P-47

Glenn E. Duncan	19.5	DSC	353FG	P-47
Duane W. Beeson	19.3	DSC	4FG	P-47
Leonard 'Kit' Carson	18.5	SS	357FG	P-51
Glenn T. Eagleston	18.5	DSC	354FG	P-51
Walter C. Beckham	18.0	DSC	353FG	P-47
John Godfrey	18.0	SS	4FG	P-51
Col. Hubert 'Hub' Zemke	17.8	DSC	56FG	P-47
Lt. Col. John B. England	17.5	SS	357FG	P-51
John F. Thornell Jr.	17.2	DSC	352FG	P-51
Henry W. Brown	17.2	DSC	355FG	P-51
Robert W. Foy	17.0	SS	357FG	P-51
Gerald W. Johnson	17.0	DSC	56FG	P-47
Ralph 'Kid' Hofer	16.5	DFC	4FG	P-51
Clarence 'Bud' Anderson	16.3	LM	357FG	P-51
Donald M. Beerbower	15.5	DSC	354FG	-
Don Blakeslee	15.5	DSC	4FG	P-51
Richard A. Peterson	15.5	SS	357FG	P-51
William Whisner	15.5	DSC	352FG	P-51
Jack T. Bradley	15.0	DSC	354FG	-
James A. Goodson	15.0	DSC	4FG	P-47
Donald Bochkay	14.8	DFC	357FG	P-51
Joe H. Powers Jr.	14.5	SS	56FG	P-47
Bruce Carr	14.0	DSC	354FG	-
Kenneth H. Dahlberg	14.0	DSC	354FG	-
Wallace N. Emmer	14.0	DSC	354FG	-
Arthur F. Jeffrey	14.0	SS	479FG	-
Donald Strait	13.5	SS	356FG	P-51

Donald S. Bryan	13.3	DSC	352FG	P-51
George Carpenter	13.3	DFC	4FG	P-47
Willard W. Millikan	13.0	DSC	4FG	P-47
Glennon T. Moran	13.0	SS	352FG	P-51
Robert W. Stephens	13.0	SS	354FG	-
Felix D. Williamson	13.0	DSC	56FG	P-47
Lowell K. Brueland	12.5	DSC	354FG	-
Paul A. Conger	12.5	DSC	56FG	P-47
James C. Stewart	12.5	DSC	56FG	P-47
James Howard	12.3	MOH	354FG	P-51
Quince L. Brown	12.3	-	78FG	-
Clyde B. East	12.0	-	10PRG	P-51
George W. Gleason	12.0	-	479FG	P-51
Howard Hively	12.0	-	4FG	P-51
Pierce W. McKennon	12.0	-	4FG	P-51
Robin Olds	12.0	SS	479FG	P-51
Michael J. Quirk	12.0	-	56FG	P-47
LeRoy A. Schreiber	12.0	-	56FG	P-47
Nick Megura	11.8	-	4FG	P-51
Chuck Yeager	11.5	DSC	357FG	P-51
Louis Norley	11.3	-	4FG	P-51
Other Noted ETO Aces	Kills	Medals	Unit	Plane
Urban Drew	6.0	-	361FG	P-51
Frank Gailer	5.5	-	357FG	P-51
Archie Harrington	7.0	-	RCAF	Mosquito

John C. Meyer - Four-Star Ace

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There's an old saying among fighter pilots, "I'd rather be an ace than a general." John Meyer was both.

Several World War II fighter aces who remained on active duty became general officers, but only a few reached four-star rank. One of them was John C. Meyer, fourth-ranking US ace in Europe, with 24 confirmed air-to-air victories, including one German jet. Of the top 15 Eighth Air Force aces, Meyer also was the leader in aircraft destroyed on the ground, the most hazardous of fighter operations.

During the Korean War, Meyer, then a colonel with the 4th Fighter Wing, added two jet victories to become the seventh-ranked all-time Air Force ace. He was the only Air Force officer to be three times awarded the [Distinguished Service Cross](#), predecessor to the Air Force Cross and second only to the Medal of Honor.

Like all successful fighter pilots, John Meyer was an aggressive hunter with complete confidence in his own ability. He was also a smart pilot and an imaginative combat leader. One of his college professors said Johnny Meyer had the best mind of any student he ever taught at Dartmouth.

Meyer's career as a fighter pilot began in July 1940 when he graduated from flying school. He started by flying Iceland-based P-40s on fruitless convoy patrols. When the 352nd Fighter Group arrived in England during the summer of 1943, Meyer was in command of its 487th Squadron. He had earned a reputation as a no-nonsense commander, but he demanded no more of his men than he did of himself. That approach was to pay off in the highly disciplined arena of air combat. On Nov. 26, 1943, Major Meyer won his first victory, flying a P-47, and would score two more in the Thunderbolt.

For a mission on May 8, 1944, Meyer was awarded the first of his three DSCs. Leading a flight of eight [P-51 Mustangs](#), to which the group had converted the previous month, he attacked a large formation of enemy fighters that was about to intercept a stream of Air Force heavy bombers. During the engagement, which dispersed the enemy fighters, Meyer and his wingman became separated from the rest of the flight. While climbing back to altitude, he sighted 15 enemy fighters closing on the bombers. Meyer attacked immediately, shooting down two Luftwaffe fighters and breaking up their attack. He then destroyed another fighter before heading for Bodney, the group's base in England, low on fuel and ammunition. Meyer, now a lieutenant colonel, was awarded an oak leaf cluster to the Silver Star for downing three Bf-109s and one FW-190 on Nov. 11, 1944. Ten days later, he earned his second DSC for leading 11 P-51s in an air battle east of Leipzig, against more than 40 enemy fighters. Meyer maneuvered his formation into position for a surprise attack, himself shooting down three FW-190s. In one case, he used the contrail of an FW-190 for cover, firing at the unseen enemy until he could see strike flashes through the contrail, then breaking off just before ramming the burning enemy plane.

Meyer was awarded his third DSC for a mission on Jan. 1, 1945, during the Luftwaffe's desperate mass strike on airfields in Belgium and Northern France. The 352nd Group, of which Meyer was then deputy commander, was operating temporarily from field Y-29, Asche, Belgium under IX Tactical Air Command. A man who had earned a reputation for "thinking like a German", Meyer had a hunch that the Luftwaffe might gamble on New Year's Day as a good day to catch the Allied airfields napping. He felt the enemy would believe a New Year's Eve hangover might have caused the pilots to sleep in that morning.

Meyer postponed the 487th Squadron's party one day, which proved to be a wise decision. As Meyer was about to lead 12 P-51s off the runway, the field was attacked by an estimated 50 enemy fighters. Taking off with full wing tanks, Meyer shot down one FW-190 just after he had raised his landing gear. Then, in a 45-minute running battle, he downed another FW-190. The 352nd was credited with destroying 23 enemy fighters that day. The superb actions of the 487th Squadron that day earned them a Distinguished Unit Citation.

On Jan. 9, 1945, after completing 200 combat missions, Meyer was en route to Paris to make a radio broadcast when he was seriously injured in an automobile accident that ended his World War II career. He would not see combat again until 1951 in Korea.

After Korea, Meyer served in Air Defense Command led SAC divisions, and commanded Twelfth Air Force. Later he was appointed director of operations on the Joint Staff, then was vice chief of staff of the Air Force before his final assignment as commander in chief, Strategic Air Command. He was the second fighter ace to command SAC, following Gen. Bruce Holloway who had been the leading ace in China during the early days of World War II. General Meyer retired in July 1974 and in December of the following year suffered a fatal heart attack.

Sources:

- Air Force Magazine, *Valor*, May 1989, Vol. 72, No. 5, by John L. Frisbee, Contributing Editor
- Jerry Scutts, ["decorated with "Hairless Joe," a Dogpatch cartoon character.](#)

Born December 15, 1919, Leavenworth, Kansas. Attended Dartmouth College, New Hampshire. Enlisted USAAC and accepted for pilot training, 1939. Commissioned 2nd Lt. in Air Reserves, May 1940. 8th Pursuit Group at Langley, Virginia and later Mitchel Field, New York. 56th FG at Charlotte AB, North Carolina, June 1941.

To Europe with 62nd FS/56th FG, Jan. 1943. Promoted to Major, C.O. 62nd FS. He participated in the first pre-operational 'circus' over Pas-de-Calais in April 8, 1943. On a late April mission, his plane was hit, knocking out his radio, but he returned without difficulty. He led many missions during this period, such as a fighter sweep over Ypres May 25 and a 'rodeo' of 4 fighter groups on August 23. He was made Group Executive Officer in August 1943.

He opened his scoring on October 2, 1943, downing a Bf-109 and an FW-190. Two days later, on a very big day for the 56th, he led a counter-attack on some Bf-110s as they tried to attack the B-17s, knocking down one himself. November 26 was another very successful day, the Group claiming 23 on a withdrawal support mission from Bremen; Schilling getting two 190s. Promoted to Lt. Colonel. Acting C.O. 56th FG, Jan. 11-19, 1944 (during Hub Zemke's absence). He continued his scoring throughout 1944, getting 3 FW-190s on September 21. After Zemke's capture, Schilling served as Group C.O. from Aug. 12, 1944 through Jan. 27, 1945.

His highest scoring day was December 23, 1944, during the Battle of the Bulge, when he downed 3 Bf-109s and 2 FW-190s in a huge dogfight with over 100 German fighters.

Decorations: Distinguished Service Cross with OLC, Silver Star with 2 OLC, Distinguished Flying Cross with 8 OLC, Air Medal with (?) OLC, British DFC, Croix de Guerre

Returned to USA and later C.O. of post-war 56th FG. Brought the 56th FG's P-80 jet fighters to the UK on the first USAF Trans-Atlantic Jet Flight, July 1948. Staff Officer HQ VIII AF, 1956. Killed in auto accident at Eriswell, Suffolk, England on Aug. 14, 1956.

Sources:

- o [United States Army Air Force Legends website](#)

Jerry Scutts,



Colonel Donald Blakeslee receives the Distinguished Service Cross from Gen. Dwight Eisenhower April 11, 1944. Colonel Blakeslee was commander of the first fighter squadrons to reach Berlin during World War II.