

Wow, what a neat package to receive, with the historical reports and the recognition coin. Thank you for your thoughtfulness; this is the finest gift you could send for my father.

1. I have read in detail the reports of the 556 SAW Bn, from formation to disestablishment, and also scanned through the reports of the 555th (landed in France on 7 Jun 1944) and of the 557th (Solomon Islands). I printed out the pages related to the 556th and am sending them to my father in installments, so he will have a lot of letters to look forward to as he goes through them and relives those days once again. And, in today's mail, I took a break from sending him the history installments to send the recognition coin you included, along with an explanation of what the new units were, and where.

2. I found this excerpt interesting, in a report of the 556th about an event involving their radar sightings of a Focke-Wulf 200:

“7. Battles:

“a. The Battalion participated in action against German aircraft which resulted in the destruction of two Focke-Wulf 200's and one Junkers 88 by fighter aircraft.

“(1) The first aircraft was destroyed on 14 August 1942. It was first detected east of Vik at 0921 hours headed west. It was first identified as F-44 since friendly aircraft were expected in that vicinity. During the latter part of this track, it was suspected of not being friendly since it did not follow the normal route of approach. At 1000 hours the Navy reported that a hostile aircraft was attacking a convoy about 30 miles south of Grindavik. At 1030 hours a track was detected about 30 miles south of Keflavik peninsula headed north. This was identified as X-57. This track then turned east and passed about 10 miles north of Skagi Point. About this time X-57 was intercepted by fighters and identified as an FS-200. Several visual reports were received from radars and ground observers confirming the fighters identification of the FW-200. Radar contact with this hostile was lost at 1100 hours. This aircraft, known as X-57 and F-44, was destroyed by fighters about 5 miles off shore west of Reykjavik. The Radar Officer on duty was Lt W. H. Vogel, Jr.”

3. This report, written in dry military style, turns out to have been important in another way. These were dark days for England, since the U.S. had just entered the war and had not yet engaged in combat in the European theater, and had not even begun Operation Torch landings in North Africa at that time. If you look into the Wikipedia article on the Focke-Wulf 200, at:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Focke-Wulf_Fw_200

you'll find this small entry:

“On 14 August 1942, a Fw 200C-3 was the first German aircraft to be destroyed by US Army Air Forces pilots, after it was attacked by a P-40C and a P-38F over Iceland.[7]”

4. Other info I found:

a. Second Lieutenant Joseph D. Shaffer of the 33rd Fighter Squadron, based at Reykjavík, Iceland, flying a P-40C, shared credit for the first victory over a German aircraft by the United States Army Air Forces in World War II. A Focke-Wulf Fw 200C-3 was tracked on radar and was damaged by Shaffer, before being destroyed by a P-38E flown by Lt. Elza E. Shahan of the 27th Fighter Squadron of the 1st FG.

b. The first German plane shot down by the USAAF in WWII is generally credited to a P-38E on 14 Aug., 1942, an FW-200C downed by Lt. Elza E. Shahan of 342 Composite FG. The incident is mentioned in *An Escort of P-38s*, by John D. Mullins.

c. The first bullet from a Luftwaffe airplane to strike an AAF airplane in World War II was fired from the first Luftwaffe airplane to be shot down by an AAF airplane in WWII. Col. John W. Weltman, USAF (Ret.), Lewiston, Calif., who was the Commanding Officer of the 27th Fighter Squadron, and his wingman attacked an Focke-Wulf FW-200 "Condor" off the coast of Iceland on Aug. 14, 1942. During the [casino pa natet](#) engagement, the donor's P-38 was struck in the nose by a bullet, which broke in two pieces when it hit a .50-cal. bullet in the P-38's ammo compartment, knocking out his guns. Col. Weltman was buried at Arlington on 31 Aug 2007.

d. The History of the 1st FG Volume II, □ from microfilm # B0036 obtained from Maxwell Air Force Base Historical Center includes a report written in 1960 in flashier style and gives the date of the incident as August 15th. It starts out with a phone call to operations announcing that a German Focke-Wulf Kurier was reported over Iceland.

Major Weltman was out of the operations building and into a P-38 before the surprised control officer had set down the receiver. Another Lightning and a Curtiss P-40 were already in the air when the Kurier was spotted. Operations immediately radioed them a vector on which they could intercept the intruder.

Weltman was the first to see the enemy airplane as it suddenly changed course, and taking full advantage of the cloud cover, he thundered over the Airdrome. He poured the coal to both Allison engines and charged his guns. The Nazi gunners aboard the Kurier were also ready. As Weltman closed in and fired, they traded shot for shot. Within a few minutes the Lightning received hits in the Armament assembly putting all four guns out of Commission. Then an engine was shot out

By this time the other P-38, flown by Lt. Elsa E. Shahan, and the P-40, had finally located the German air monster. Weltman turned back to the airdrome in his crippled plane, while Shahan and the other pilot pressed home the attack.

Shahan made one pass. The P-40 (*) bored in, knocking out the Kurier's left inboard engine.

Pilot Shahan executed a chandelle, returned to position, and swept in closer for a deflection shot. There was no gunner on the side of the German aircraft he was approaching and when the P-38 reached a distance of less than 100 yards from the target he pressed the button. Four deadly streams of .50 caliber tracer, incendiary and armor piercing bullets slashed into the hulk of the Luftwaffe behemoth.

Shahan had planned on diving beneath his target, but with the roar of a thunderclap, it blew up practically in his face. It was too late to turn, and he flew on through the bits of flying wreckage. His lightning was well scarred up by the debris, but otherwise it was in shape to continue on to the United Kingdom for many more matches with the German Air Force. Lt. Shahan was awarded the Silver Star. He was the first AAF pilot to receive it.

(*) Two different publications identify the pilot of the P-40 variously as Lt. J.K. Shaffer and as now Brigadier General John J.K. Meyer. It is possible that there were two P-40s in the area and each may have participated in the attack.

5. It is amazing how many war stories are recorded, told from different points of view, and how the pieces come together. It is interesting, and perhaps typical of the time, that the report from the flying unit makes no mention of the radar unit, without which the intercept would not have happened. Maybe even more amazing are the number of stories never told, or lost now in the oral tradition, in various families across the country, but quickly fading. This is just one.

Best regards,

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