

TUMULT OVER TUNISIA

THE FIRST NORTH AFRICAN COMBAT TOUR OF THE
14th FIGHTER GROUP'S LOCKHEED LIGHTNINGS

BY STEVE BLAKE

On 8 November 1942, British and American invasion forces went ashore at Vichy France's colonies of Morocco and Algeria in Northwest Africa, supported by Allied warships and carrier-borne aircraft. The invasion went down in history as Operation *Torch*. The French armed forces there — technically but for the most part unenthusiastically allied with Germany — put up more resistance than had been expected, but they surrendered three days later.

Immediately after the surrender, Allied forces began preparing captured French airfields for the arrival of their land-based aircraft that would be flown in from England. Among the units involved were two USAAF Lockheed P-38 Lightning Fighter Groups — the 1st and 14th. The 14th



Some of the 14th Pursuit Group's leaders at March Field, California, on 18 July 1941 where its Headquarters was based from June of that year to February 1942, when the unit returned to Hamilton Field. Left to right: Troy Kelth, then the 48th PS CO; Ronald F. Fallows; Thayer Olds, the Group CO; and Paul Spivey, Group Operations Officer.

Pursuit Group and its three Fighter Squadrons — the 48th, 49th, and 50th — were activated at Hamilton Field, just north of San Francisco, California, on 15 January 1941. They flew a variety of single-engine fighters including Curtiss P-36s and P-40s,

Republic P-43s, and Vultee P-66s that year and in October began receiving a few early model twin-engine Lightnings. Immediately after the attack on Pearl Harbor on



When formed, the 14th Pursuit Group was assigned an odd mix of obsolete single-engine fighters including the Republic P-43 Lancer.



USAAF
12th Air
Force
shoulder
patch.

This 48th Squadron P-38 was destroyed during the *Luftwaffe* bombing of Maison Blanche on the night of 18/19 November 1942.