

23rd Fighter Group



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Staffed with inexperienced USAAF pilots and led by a handful of seasoned veterans of the American Volunteer Group (AVG), the 23rd FG was formed in the field at Kunming,

in China, on July 4, 1942 and flew combat missions that same day. The group's three squadrons - the 74th, 75th and 76th Fighter Squadrons - were initially equipped with war-weary P-40s handed down from the AVG. These were supplemented by the attached 16th FS, flying new P-40Es, and all squadrons adorned the noses of their airplanes with fearsome and iconic sharksmouth designs.

The 23rd FG fought a guerrilla war against the Japanese, steadily moving pilots and aircraft from one remote air base to another to keep the enemy off balance. Because China could only be supplied by air from India, there were constant shortages of aircraft, fuel and ammunition with which to contend. The 23rd FG met these challenges head-on and by the end of the war its pilots had compiled a score of 594 aerial victories and nearly 400 ground kills. Among the 47 aces who flew in the 23rd were colorful characters such as David L 'Tex' Hill, Robert L 'Bob' Scott and Clinton D 'Casey'. The human cost was high, however - 126 pilots lost their lives in China while serving in the 23rd.

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目录:

[23rd Fighter Group_ 下载链接1](#)

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评论

[23rd Fighter Group_ 下载链接1](#)

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