

George Dewey Gingras, Jr.

Fighter Pilot, 325th Fighter Group

George Dewey Gingras, Jr. was born 13 March 1920 in Washington State to George Sr. and Ethel Thema (Peterson) Gingras. Little sister Olivette E. was born in 1924 in Illinois. The 1930 Census showed the family is living at 407 L Street in Bakersfield, California. They own their home, valued at \$2,800 and they have a radio set. George, Sr. is a representative in the office equipment industry and Ethel is a bank clerk. While a student at Bakersfield High School, George, Jr. was a member of The Skyhawks, a model airplane club, and won several awards. He was also the 1938 diving champ. He later attended the University of Redlands.



George joined the Army Air Corp in 1938 at March Field in California. His Army Serial #6-576-234. The 1940 Census showed George as living in Perris, CA and working as a telegraph operator in the Air Corp at March Field. He finished 1 year of college, worked 35 hours the week before the census, and made \$252 in 1939. At this time, it looked like he was in the California National Guard on active duty. He drew his final enlisted pay on 15 October 1940 of \$65.76 when he was promoted to Aviation Cadet. He did his Primary at Glendale, CA, and flew 32:48 hours dual and 24:12 hours solo time, total of 60:00 hours. Basic at Randolph Field, TX with 34:20 hours dual and 37:25 hours solo time, total of 71:45 hours. Advance was at Kelly Field, TX, with a total of 79:20 flight time as a pilot. He was commissioned and awarded his wings on 29 May 1941. He was then given a new Army service number for officers, O-417610. Lt. Gingras first duty station was the 33rd Squadron, 8th Pursuit Group at Mitchell Field, NY. In late June Lt. Gingras qualified in P-40s with 6 flights totaling 9:00 hours. In July he flew 8 flights with 10:05 flight time. Soon the 33rd was loaded aboard the USS Wasp with new P-40 Cs. On 6 August 1941 the 33rd flew off the Wasp to Iceland, to relieve the British garrison. His flight log simply showed 'Wasp-Reykjavik'. Lt. Gingras was one of the pilots who chased a Nazi patrol plane away from Iceland months before the US was officially at war. He was stationed in Iceland until July 1942. During this time, he flew between 6 and 30 flights a month, with 8 to 45 hours of flight time each month. Most flights were in P-40s, but Lt. Gingras also got some

pilot time in PT-17s, P-39s and even 2 flights in a B-18. At this time, he had flown over 500 hours as a pilot. After about a year overseas, he returned to help form the 318th Fighter Squadron, 325th Fighter Group. He took command of the Squadron on 2 August 1942 at Grenier Field, New Hampshire. He was one of the few Lieutenants to command a Fighter Squadron. The chain of command was Boston Air Defense Wing, 1st Fighter Command, 1st Air Force. On 2 September his father, George Sr., was drafted into the US Army at age 44. Looks like he was assigned to Company A, 51st Medical Training Battalion. The 325th spent the next 4 months not only training, but also conducting air patrols over the New England area.



Early January 1943 the pilots of the 325th were ordered to travel by train from Boston to Langley Field, Virginia. They found 72 brand new P-40 Fs, equipped with a Packard built Merlin engine. Over the next few days, the Navy gave these Army pilots some intense training on how to fly an Army plane off an aircraft carrier. After everyone had 2 ‘practice carrier launches’, they flew their planes to the docks at Norfolk Naval base, and they were loaded onto the USS Ranger, CV-4. The Ranger with escorts sailed 8 January for North Africa. While at sea, on 13 January 1943, 1st Lt. Gingras was promoted to Captain. Since this was done on the Ranger, and it went back to the States, looks like the orders were delayed and this created a lot of confusion of rank until it was finally corrected in 1950. On the morning of 19 January, the Ranger was about 90 miles off the coast of Casablanca, French Morocco. The Navy, being good sports, gave the Army pilots about 425 feet of deck to fly off while Navy pilots only got 390 feet. All 72 P-40s made it to Cazes Airdrome near Casablanca. Captain Gingras was one of the few Army pilots to fly an Army plane off a carrier 2 times. A few days later the 325th flew a protective patrol for President Roosevelt when he was at the Casablanca Conference. While waiting for all ground personnel to make the trans-Atlantic, intense training started. Also, almost half of the 325th’s planes were transferred to the 33rd Fighter Group, which was engaged in heavy combat.

Captain George Dewey Gingras was killed on 11 February 1943 in a mid-air collision during a training flight. He and his Operations Officer, Lt. Joe Bloomer were practicing formation flying, and during a formation loop, Gingras’ propeller cut the tail off Bloomer’s plane. Bloomer was able to bail out and landed safely, but Gingras spun in from 6,000 feet and was killed. Captain Gingras was buried at

the European American Cemetery in Casablanca, French Morocco with full military honors and a leaderless formation of 5 P-40s flew over while last rites were given. Capt. Gingras was the first member of the 325th killed overseas. After the war, battlefield cemeteries were being consolidated, and families were given the opportunity to bring loved ones home. In October 1947 Capt. Gingras was moved to the American Graves Registration center at Cazes Air Base Depot in Casablanca to be prepared to be brought home. In April 1948 he and others boarded the Army Transport ship Barney Kirschbaum and arrived in Brooklyn, NY in May. From 20 to 25 May he traveled by train to the Oakland Army Base. From Oakland to Bakersfield, he had an Army escort. He is buried at Greenlawn Cemetery in Bakersfield, CA.

