

## 475<sup>th</sup> FIGHTER GROUP, AIR DEFENSE



### MISSION

### LINEAGE

475<sup>th</sup> Fighter Group activated, 14 May 1943 by special authority prior to constitution on 15 May 1943

Inactivated, 1 Apr 1949

Redesignated 475<sup>th</sup> Fighter Group (Air Defense)

Activated, 18 Aug 1955

Inactivated

### STATIONS

Amberley Field, Australia, 14 May 1943

Dobodura, New Guinea, 14 Aug 1943

Nadzab, New Guinea, 24 Mar 1944

Hollandia, New Guinea, 15 May 1944

Biak, 14 Jul 1944

Dulag, Leyte, 28 Oct 1944

San Jose, Mindoro, 5 Feb 1945

Clark Field, Luzon, 28 Feb 1945

Lingayen, Luzon, c. 20 Apr 1945

Ie Shima, 8 Aug 1945

Kimpo, Korea, c. 23 Sep 1945

Itazuke, Japan, 28 Aug 1948

Ashiya, Japan, 25 Mar-1 Apr 1949

Minneapolis-St Paul Intl Apt, MN, 18 Aug 1955

### ASSIGNMENTS

Air Defense Command

## **WEAPON SYSTEMS**

P-38

P-51 1946

F-89

## **COMMANDERS**

LTC George W. Prentice, 21 May 1943

Col Charles H. MacDonald, 26 Nov 1943

LTC Meryl M. Smith, Aug 1944

Col Charles H MacDonald, 13 Oct 1944

LTC John S. Loisel, 15 Jul 1945

Col Henry G. Thorne, Jr., 18 Apr 1946

Col Ashley B. Packard, 20 Jul 1946

Col Leland S. Stranathan, c. 22 Mar 1947

Col Carl W. Pyle, 7 Jun 1947

Col William O. Moore, 19 Sep 1947

LTC Woodrow W. Ramsey, 28 Aug 1948-25 Mar 1949

Col David Gould, Aug 1955

## **HONORS**

### **Service Streamers**

### **Campaign Streamers**

China Defensive

New Guinea

Bismarck Archipelago

Western Pacific

Leyte

Luzon

China Offensive

### **Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers**

### **Decorations**

## **EMBLEM**

Azure, over a crossbow or, string argent, bow striped red and silver; a lightning bolt gules, highlighted of the third, surmounting the stock; a pair of wings argent, issuing from the end of the stock; between four seven-pointed stars and one five-pointed star, spattered over the field; all within a diminutive border per pale argent and gules. (Approved, 26 Nov 1956)

## **MOTTO**

IN PROELIO GAUDETE—Be Joyful in Battle

## **NICKNAME**

## **OPERATIONS**

Equipped with P-38's and trained to provide long-range escort for bombers during daylight raids on Japanese airfields and strongholds in the Netherlands Indies and the Bismarck Archipelago. Moved to New Guinea and began operations in Aug 1943. Received a DUC for missions in Aug 1943 when the group not only protected B-25s that were engaged in strafing attacks on airdromes at Wewak but also destroyed a number of the enemy fighter planes that attacked the formation. Received second DUC for intercepting and destroying many of the planes the Japanese sent against American shipping in Oro Bay on 15 and 17 Oct 1943. Covered landings in New Guinea, New Britain, and the Schouten Islands. After moving to Biak in Jul 1944, flew escort missions and fighter sweeps to the southern Philippines, Celebes, Halmahera, and Borneo. Moved to the Philippines in Oct 1944 and received another DUC for bombing and strafing enemy airfields and installations, escorting bombers, and engaging in aerial combat during the first stages of the Allied campaign to recover the Philippines, Oct-Dec 1944. The group flew many missions to support ground forces on Luzon during the first part of 1945. Also flew escort missions to China and attacked railways on Formosa. Began moving to Ie Shima in Aug but the war ended before the movement was completed. Moved to Korea in Sep 1945 for occupation duty as part of Far East Air Forces.

The 475th Fighter, "Satan's Angels" came into being at a critical stage in the war in the Southwest Pacific area. In January 1943, four months before the 475th Fighter Group was activated in Australia, the Papuan Campaign in New Guinea ended with the Allied victory at Sanananda Point. A crushing blow was also handed the Japanese early in March 1943, when an entire convoy of transports headed for New Guinea to reinforce Japanese troops was annihilated by the Fifth Air Force. Following those two major victories, the Allies were ready to begin a large-scale offensive against the Japanese in New Guinea. But before that offensive could be undertaken, the Fifth Air Force had to gain and maintain control of the air over New Guinea- a task which would not be accomplished easily.

Japanese air strength in the Southwest Pacific was powerful, and they were capable of launching large scale attacks against our ground forces and installations at any time. One such large-scale attack, involving more than a hundred enemy aircraft, had been carried out against Port Moresby, the Allied stronghold in New Guinea, in April 1943. To the north of Port Moresby, the enemy had many bases from which to launch their air strikes. The Japanese had a string of airbases- the largest being Wewak- stretching up the New Guinea coast. To the east of Rabaul, New Britain, the enemy had massed even greater air and naval strength.

The swiftest and most effective means of gaining control of the air was to bomb both of those Japanese strongholds and destroy as many aircraft on the ground as possible. Such bombing strikes could best be accomplished during daylight hours, when fighter escort was essential. The only fighter aircraft then in the Southwest Pacific with sufficient range to escort bombers to and from Rabaul and Wewak was the P-38. However, the P-38 strength in the Fifth Air Force in April 1943 consisted of only three squadrons. The 80th squadron of the 8th Fighter Group; the 39th squadron

of the 35th Group; and the 9th squadron of the 49th Group. To augment the small force, the 475th Fighter Group was activated as a P-38 outfit on 14 May, 1943.

Originally, the Group and its assigned units, the 431st, 432nd, and 433rd Squadrons were to have been activated at Charters Towers, Queensland, Australia. However, Amberley Field, located close to the supply depots on the outskirts of Brisbane, was substituted as the station of activation. Personnel for the 475th Group and its squadrons were drawn from the 11th Replacement Central Depot and from organizations under the control of the Fifth Fighter Command. The first Commanding Officer of the 475th was Major George W. Prentice, who formerly commanded the 39th Squadron of the 35th Group.

During the first three months after its activation, the Group trained for combat. By August, it was ready to move up to New Guinea aboard a Liberty Ship, and on the following day, the air echelon was transported to Port Moresby in C-47 aircraft. By 11 August, the 431st and 432nd were operating from Port Moresby- the 431st at Twelve Mile Strip and the 432nd at Ward's Drome. The 433rd Squadron moved up to Jackson Drome, Port Moresby on 16 August.

The 475th's first scheduled mission, an escort of transports to Tsili Tsili on 12 August, was canceled because of bad weather. On the following day, however, the weather cleared sufficiently to allow the unit to escort transports to Bena Bene. The mission was without incident. On 15 August, while the unit was flying patrol, its pilots spotted Japanese planes over Lasanga Island but could not make contact. On the following day, the 431st Squadron, while escorting transports to Tsili Tsili, encountered approximately 25 Japanese bombers and fighters. In the ensuing engagement the squadrons pilots accounted for twelve of the enemy aircraft, while only losing two of their own.

During the latter part of August, the 475th was primarily engaged in escorting bombers to the powerful Japanese base at Wewak. During the next few weeks the 475th flew 16 missions, consisting of 257 sorties at Wewak. Despite the groups relative inexperience, the unit shot down a total of 41 enemy aircraft. The Group, on the other hand had lost only three P-38's. After that series of blows against Wewak, the Japanese were forced to shift their strength to bases further up the coast of New Guinea. In addition to its missions to Wewak, the Group also escorted bombers to Hansa Bay, and Saidor, New Guinea, and to Cape Gloucester, New Britain.

Throughout its raids on Wewak, the Fifth Air Force had achieved local control of the air, which paved the way for the Allied Ground offensive. On 4 September, amphibious forces landed east of Lae, New Guinea, under an "umbrella " of fighter aircraft, to which the 475th contributed 68 P-38 sorties. While covering that operation, the groups pilots disposed of five more enemy aircraft.

On 5 September, paratroops were dropped over Nadzab, under the protecting guns of 44 of the groups P-38's and fighter aircraft from other Fifth Air Force units. During the days following the paratroop drop, the 475th patrolled the Nadzab area, supported ground operations in the vicinity of Nadzab and Lae, and made frequent trips to the enemy field at Madang and Wewak in order to keep the Japanese air force out of action.

Our ground forces, aided by the air support of the 475th and other forces from the Fifth Air Force, scored a series of rapid successes over the Japanese. Salamaua was captured on 11 September, Lae on the 16th, and Kaiapit, farther up the Markham Valley, on the 20th. The allies took another step forward on 22 September when they completed a successful landing at Finschafen, New Guinea.

On that day, the 432nd Fighter Squadron scored on of its greatest aerial victories of the war. Twelve planes of the squadrons' 16-plane patrol were covering the landing operations at Finschafen when 10 enemy bombers and 30 fighters came to attack the invasion convoy. The squadrons' pilots, led by Captain Frederick A. Harris, went into action swiftly. Capt. Harris led the first flight of four aircraft in a diving attack on the enemy fighters, hoping to scatter them so that the other two flights could attack the bombers unmolested. The maneuver worked; 7 of the 10 bombers were shot down, and 11 of the 30 fighters were destroyed. Only two P-38's and one pilot, Lieutenant Donald A. Garrison, were lost. For that mission, the 432nd received a commendation from Brigadier General Paul Wurtsmith, Commanding General of Fifth Fighter Command.

As the Month of October passed, our ground forces in New Guinea were slowly pushing the Japanese northward, and at the same time were consolidating the newly-won areas. Meanwhile, in the east, Allied forces were "Leap-Frogging" up the Solomon Islands. The main threat in their path was Rabaul, which would soon feel the weight of the Fifth and Thirteenth Air Force attacks.

Although Allied ground forces were busy throughout the South and Southwest Pacific areas in early October, the first 11 days were comparatively quiet for the 475th. When the weather was suitable for flying, (7 of the 11 Days) the Group accompanied light and medium bombers on barge hunts along the New Guinea coast. On the 11th, operations and intelligence personnel of the 475th were summoned to a briefing at Headquarters, First Air Task Force at Dobodura. The next target was to be Rabaul. On the following morning more than 300 bombers and fighters, the largest force assembled by the Fifth Air Force up until that time, took off from New Guinea airfields toward Rabaul. On that mission, 55 P-38's of the 475th Group, staging through Kiriwina Island, escorted B-25's in their attacks on the Vunakenau and Rapope Airdromes. During the attack, the Groups P-38's covered the medium bombers as they swept an at low level to inflict devastating damage to the airfields and the aircraft on the ground. While the attack was in progress, two enemy planes attempted to intercept, but they were promptly shot down by the 475th. An attempt to repeat that successful mission on the following day was thwarted by the weather, but on the 14th a raid was completed against Cape Gloucester, New Britain. During the remainder of October, up until 7 November, the Fifth Air Force carried out a series of raids against Rabaul. The excellent cover afforded our bombers by the 475th on those strikes help make the missions overwhelming successes.

The Groups outstanding ability to provide effective cover for our bombers is best seen in the mission of 25 October. On that day, extremely bad weather was encountered en route to the target. As a result of this, one of the leading fighter squadrons radioed that it was turning back. Major Charles MacDonald, who later became Commanding Officer of the 475th, continued on course, noting that the bombers apparently had not heard the message. Unwilling to let the bombers face the strong defenses of Rabaul without fighter cover. Major MacDonald led the remaining P-38s through the severe weather. That small force covered the bombers over the target

and turned back the enemy interceptors. Major MacDonald accounted for the only plane shot down in that mission.

While the Fifth Air Force's missions against Rabaul were being carried out, the Japanese, at times, slipped through and made strikes on our bases in New Guinea. For example, on 15 October, the controller at Oro Bay detected by radar, a large force of enemy planes heading for the base at Dobodura. All fighters of the 475th were ordered to scramble. The P-38's on alert took off immediately. Back at the camp, which was a good distance from the airstrip, the pilots of the group tumbled out of their tents and set out for the strip "in everything that had wheels." Major MacDonald and Captain William N. Ivey "set an unofficial jeep record from a standing start" in their dash to the airstrip. "Stealing" two planes from the 433rd Squadron, they took off and climbed to meet enemy. In all, 51 of the units P-38's were airborne to engage the enemy force of 60 planes. The aerial battle which ensued was viewed with intense pleasure by the Group's ground personnel, for it was the first time they had seen their pilots in action. In that battle, 36 Japanese planes were destroyed. The 475th suffered no losses, and only five planes damaged. Major MacDonald and Captain Ivey were well rewarded for their speedy dash to the flight line; they each destroyed two Japanese aircraft.

The losses on the attack apparently did not discourage the Japanese, for they came back for more on the 17th. Once more the pilots of the 475th were there to meet them, and in the engagement shot down 18 of the enemy attackers. Lt. Thomas B. McGuire of the 431st Squadron, after downing three enemy planes, had his aircraft shot up by friendly anti-aircraft fire, and was forced to bail out over the harbor.

On 27 October, our forces in the Solomon's landed on the Treasury Islands, and five days later, troops poured ashore at Empress Augusta Bay, Bougainville. To provide indirect support to our forces on Bougainville, and to keep Japanese power neutralized in New Britain, the Fifth Air Force continued its strikes against Rabaul. On 2 November, the 475th, while escorting B-26's to that Japanese stronghold, encountered extremely strong enemy air opposition. Although outnumbered, the 475th pilots disposed of 19 enemy aircraft. However, it was a costly engagement, for the 475th lost five P-38's.

During the next few days the 475th Group completed two more escort missions to Rabaul; three others were canceled by bad weather. After 7 November, the Group turned its attention elsewhere until mid-December 1943. During the series of blows against Rabaul, the 475th had compiled a commendable record. In all, it had completed 20 missions (322 Sorties), and had destroyed 62 enemy aircraft. On the other hand, seven of the units planes had failed to come home, and five pilots had been lost. Two Pilots, Lt. Edward J. Czarnecki and Owen Giertsen, after being shot down in enemy territory, managed to make their way back to Australia.

Although the Groups aircraft losses had not been very high, battle damage to most of its P-38s was cause for alarm. A number of planes were grounded for repairs and others which had crash landed were damaged beyond repair. The result was a 30 percent loss in aircraft strength. To bring the

Group's aircraft strength back to normal, the P-38's of the 9th Fighter Squadron of the 49th FG, and the 39th FS of the 35th FG were transferred to the 475th.

During the remainder of November and early December 1943, the 475th escorted bombers to targets in New Guinea- notably Alexishafen, Finschafen, and Wewak. On the first mission to Alexisshafen, conducted on 9 November, the group lost one of its best pilots, Captain Daniel J. Roberts. After taking command of the 433rd Squadron on 3 October, Capt. Roberts had led the unit in destroying 47 enemy planes, of which he personally shot down 8. At the time of his death, Capt. Roberts had 14 aerial victories, which made him the leading Ace in the 475th FG at that time, and one of the leading Aces in the Fifth Fighter Command.

The invasion of New Britain got under way on 15 December 1943, with the landings at Arawe. In support of the landing operations, the 475th flew 83 sorties. During the days following the invasion, the Japanese attempted several small-scale attacks against our ground forces, and the 475th added 19 more planes to its growing list of aerial victories.

Early in January 1944 the 475th flew nine missions in support of the landings at Saidor, New Guinea. At the same time, attacks were continued on Japanese air bases within fighter range. The Group did not engage the enemy in the air until 10 January, when Col. MacDonald led a 6 plane sweep to Wewak. When 40 enemy planes rose to intercept, the 6 P-38s were forced to make a hasty retreat, but not before Col. MacDonald had accounted for the destruction of 1 "Tony", his 10th confirmed aerial victory. The reception of 10 January called for a return visit by the 475th, and on 18 January the Groups' three squadrons and the 80th Squadron of the 8th FG made a fighter sweep to Wewak and Boram. Again, approximately 40 enemy planes rose to intercept; 4 were shot down.

At the end of January, the skies over New Guinea and New Britain were comparatively quiet. The Japanese Air Force in that area had been beaten. Combat was hard to find. The Fifth Air Force had gained control of the air. Personnel of the 475th Fighter Group could look back with satisfaction on their contribution to the Fifth Air Forces' achievement. Since the beginning operations in August 1943, the group had flown 557 combat missions, consisting of 6069 sorties, and had shot down 285 enemy aircraft.

During February, the 475th was engaged for the most part in conducting routine patrols over New Guinea. Enemy air opposition was encountered only once, on 3 February, when pilots of the 431st shot down six Japanese aircraft. On 11 February, when it escorted B-24's to Kavieng, New Ireland, the Group completed the longest over water flight (816 Miles) by fighter aircraft in that theater up until that time. Eleven more missions were conducted to the same target during the month.

The lack of enemy air activity within P-38 range of Dobodura called for the group to move elsewhere. On 20 February an advance echelon was sent to Cape Gloucester, New Britain, where it was to establish camp for the group. However, on 25 February the unit's new station was changed to Finschafen, New Guinea. On 26 February the 431st and 433rd Squadrons moved up to Finschafen, and on the following day they were joined by the Groups advance echelon which had

been recalled from Cape Gloucester. Group Headquarters and the 432nd remained at Dobodura until 24 March 1944, when it moved to Nadzab, farther north than Finschafen. A few days later the 431st and 433rd broke camp and joined the Group at Nadzab.

March 1944, although a quiet month, was highlighted by the Group's escort mission to Hollandia on the 30th. Hollandia, where the Japanese had placed most of their aircraft strength after the raids on Wewak, had previously been immune to daylight bombing attacks because it was far out of range of fighter-escort aircraft. However, early in March, the 475th received new P-38s which were capable of making the long flight because they had a much greater fuel capacity. On 30 March, the 431st and 432nd squadrons, along with the 80th Squadron, escorted three B-24 Groups to Hollandia. The 433rd Squadron, not yet equipped with the long range P-38s, went as far as Tadj, from where it helped cover the bombers on the return flight. The mission went well; the bombers inflicted considerable damage to Hollandia airdromes. However, the fighter pilots of the 475th Group, expecting enemy fighter opposition, were disappointed when only a few enemy fighters rose to intercept, and these were driven off by the pilots of the 80th Squadron, which was leading the formation.

Two more strikes were made against Hollandia on 1 and 3 April. On the mission of 3 April, the Group destroyed 15 enemy planes in aerial combat. Lt. Joseph W. Forster of the 432nd shot down 3, his first aerial victories. During the remainder of April 1944 the 475th flew 9 more escort missions to Hollandia, and flew 5 strikes against Wadke Island, off the New Guinea coast. On 16 April, the Group suffered its greatest disaster of the war. On that day, commonly called "Black Sunday", the groups aircraft, returning from a mission to Hollandia, ran into extremely severe weather. As a result of the weather, 8 of the unit's aircraft, and 6 of it's pilots were lost- more than in any single combat with Japanese aircraft.

On 15 May 1944, the 475th Moved from Nadzab, up to Hollandia, which was still in the process of being cleared of Japanese snipers. Operations from the new base were begun on the following day, when the 432nd escorted B-25's in a strike against Bosnek Airdrome on Biak Island, and the 433rd escorted B-24's to Camera Drome, Noemfoor Island. Later in the month the Group patrolled the skies above Biak, where our ground forces had landed on the 27th. In June, the unit centered its attacks on enemy airfields on the Vogelkep Peninsula of New Guinea. The month was highlighted by the units first dive-bombing mission, which was conducted against Kamiri Airdrome, Noemfoor, on the 30th. When our forces landed on Noemfoor on 2 July, the Group covered the landing operations. Later in the month, it covered the landings made at Cape Sansaport on the Vogelkop Peninsula. By that time, the enemy resistance in New Guinea was feeble. The Japanese Air Force was reduced to making infrequent "nuisance" raids at night.

On 10 July, the 475th moved to Berekoe strip on the island of Biak, where it joined the 49th Fighter Group. After beginning operations from its new field on 14 July, the group escorted bombers and completed fighter sweeps to Japanese airfields on the Vogelkop Peninsula and in the Halamahara Islands.



Missions of that type continued throughout August, September, and October 1944, during which period the Group also flew missions to Mindanao in the Philippine Islands, Celebes, and Balikpapan, Borneo. On its Missions to Mindanao, which was 925 miles from Biak, the group staged through Middleburg Island off Sansapor, New Guinea.

On 15 September the Allies landed at Morotai, just 30 miles from the Philippines. On the same day, Central Pacific Forces fought their way ashore at Peleliu, and later troops landed at Angaur in the Palau Group, 620 miles southeast of the Philippines. Then on 20 October the long awaited day arrived- our ground forces stormed ashore at Leyte.

Four days after the landings the group's ground echelon, which had left earlier in the month, arrived at Leyte. Meanwhile, the air echelon, virtually out of the war back at Biak, was anxiously awaiting orders to move up to Leyte. However, the 8th and the 49th Fighter groups were the first to be ordered north, and the 475th transferred some of its aircraft to these organizations in order to bring them up to full strength. On 1 November, pilots of the 431st ferried P-38's to the 39th Group at Tacloban, Leyte. When they approached the field, the controller ordered them to stay up and patrol the area. While on patrol, Major Thomas McGuire shot down his 25th enemy aircraft. On 2 November, the Group's air echelon moved to Leyte, and before long it was conducting missions from the strip at Dulag.

During the Next two months the 475th, while flying escort and intercept missions, encountered heavy enemy opposition. Consequently, the units' pilots added victory after victory to the Groups' score. On Christmas Day, the 475th joined a select circle of fighter groups which had destroyed 500 or more enemy planes in aerial combat in World War II. Only one group in the Pacific, the 49th, led the 475th in that department. By the end of December the Group had destroyed 169 enemy planes (99 in December) in the Philippines.

In February 1945, the 475th moved to Mindoro, and from there began to support ground operations on Luzon. In March, the Group moved to Clark Field, Luzon, and in April to Linguyen, Luzon. During the remaining months of the war the Group supported the ground operations on Luzon, and on several occasions flew escort missions to China, French-Indo China, and Formosa. The unit ceased operations on 21 July and prepared for movement to Ie Shima, in the Ryukyu Islands. The ground echelon arrived on Ie Shima on 13 August, but before the movement of the air echelon could get under way, the war came to an end.

During World War II, the 475th Fighter Group, in combat for approximately two years, completed 3042 missions, (21,701 Sorties) and shot down 551 Japanese aircraft. On the other hand, the Group lost only 56 Planes to the Japanese.

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Air Force Order of Battle  
Created: 13 Oct 2011  
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Sources  
Air Force Historical Research Agency. U.S. Air Force. Maxwell AFB, AL.