

35 FIGHTER CONTROL SQUADRON (SEPERATE)



MISSION

LINEAGE

35 Fighter Control Squadron (Separate) activated, 4 Jun 1942
Inactivated, 23 Jul 1946

STATIONS

Nadzab, New Guinea, Mar 1944
Binmaley, Luzon, Philippines, Jan 1945
Kamiri Airstrip, Noemfoor Island, 2 Jul 1944
Luzon, Philippines, Nov 1944
Sydney, New South Wales, Australia
Fukuoka, Kyushu, Japan.
Japan, 4 Nov 1945

ASSIGNMENTS

MISSION EQUIPMENT

AN/CPS-1, Nov 1945
SCR-584, 1945 (height-finding)
AN/TPS-10, 1945

COMMANDERS

Maj George Smith, 1 Oct 1945
Capt Samuel M. Arthur, 7 Oct 1945

HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

EMBLEM

MOTTO

OPERATIONS

On December 18, 1941, just eleven days after the Pearl Harbor attack, the 35th Interceptor Control Squadron was activated at Hamilton Field, California. This was the organization that later became the 51st Fighter Control Squadron. Capt. Albert B. Willet was the first commanding officer having 41 enlisted men under his command.

After a brief period for organization and training, the 35th Interceptor Control Squadron boarded the transport "Mariposa" at San Francisco and, in January 12, 1942, sailed away from the United States for an unknown destination. The destination was really Karachi, India, which was reached upon March 12, 1942 after short stops at Melbourne and Freemantle, Australia and Colombo, Ceylon. In order to reach Karachi a distance of 14,270 miles (more than half-way around the world) was traveled.

While at Karachi, the Squadron did military police duty for a time. Later the Squadron was relieved from military police duty and trained intensively for its real duty of intercepting hostile aircraft and establishing posts from which ground observers would give warning of hostile aircraft movements. The name of the 35th Interceptor Control Squadron was changed to the 51st Fighter Control Squadron when the Squadron was assigned to duty with the 51st Fighter Group on May 29, 1942.

Having completed the training program, the 51st Fighter Control Squadron left Karachi on September 10, 1942 to proceed to Dinjan, Assam, India. The 2000-mile journey was made as far as Allahabad by rail, then by air for the remaining distance with arrival in Dinjan on September 20th. Groups of men were immediately sent to the Naga Hills which form the boundary between India and Burma to establish visual Air Warning Stations.

The Japanese were desperately trying to smash the Allied forces in Upper Assam at this time to prevent American supplies from reaching China and to prevent Gen. Stilwell from gaining sufficient strength to re-enter North Burma successfully. Jap reconnaissance planes flew over the area daily and air-raids were a common occurrence when the 51st Fighter Group of which the Fighter Control Squadron was a part arrived in Dinjan, Assam. Sabotage of communications and supplies was experienced. Jap patrols were roving in the Naga Hills often

causing serious trouble with the Air Warning system. Squadron men of a Visual Warning Station in the Naga Hills on one occasion, at least, fought a rear-guard action with the Japanese (Medals were later awarded for braver in this encounter). Friendships formed by Squadron personnel manning the Air Warning Stations with native tribesmen helped to keep the hill people loyal at a very critical time. At no time was the Squadron caught un-alert by enemy action.

A fighter control center was established at Kanjikoah, Assam (near Dinjan) soon after the Squadron arrived and made camp there. The Control Center was in the Manager's Bungalow on the Kanjikoah Tea Estate. From this center, interceptions were made on the raids of October 25, 26, and 28, 1942; February 25, 1943; December 13, 1943; and March 27, 1944.

The Visual Air Warning Stations were taken over by Signal Corps personnel on May 30, 1943 allowing Squadron personnel to return to camp at Kanjikoah for a much-needed rest. Squadron duty was now the maintenance and operation of the Fighter Control Center in Upper Assam at Kanjikoah.

The 51st Fighter Group was assigned to the 14th U.S. Army Air Force on September 30, 1943. The 51st Fighter Control Squadron remained at Kanjikoah, India while the rest of the Group went to China. Orders were issued assigning the 51st Fighter Control Squadron to the 10th U.S. Army Air Force on January 31, 1944. No change of duty or station was caused by these orders.

To provide better protection for the growing Allied offensive into North Burma, a forward relay station was established at Ft. Hertz, Burma on October 20, 1943 and a Fighter Control Center was established at Jorhat, India on January 8, 1944. This also helped to give more protection to American transport airplanes flying supplies over the "Hump" to China. Following closely behind the advancing forces of Gen. Stilwell an Area Control Center was established at Shingbwiyang, Burma on March 13, 1944. GCI stations were also established at Titabar and Digboi, India for the purpose of making better interceptions of Japanese aircraft.

The surprise advance of Merrill's Marauders behind the Japanese battle lines to capture positions at Myitkyina, Burma in May 1944 caused many changes in Squadron Control Centers. With personnel already scattered as thinly as possible, new Control Centers were established at Tingkaw Sakan, Burma, and Myitkyina, Burma. In order to establish these new stations, it was necessary to close the Control Centers at Jorhat and Titabar, India, and at Ft. Hertz, Burma. The Control Center at Tingkaw Sakan was in the jungle beside a newly built air-strip. The Myitkyina Control Center was in a dugout beside the airstrip which had just been wrested from the Japanese. The Japanese still held one end of the airstrip when the Center was first set-up and for two months subjected the area to shelling and low-level air attacks. Jap snipers were able to infiltrate the Allied lines at night causing hazardous conditions.

As the Allied offensive progressed to Bhamo and farther southward more Control Centers were needed. The number of Fighter Control Centers would thus exceed the capabilities of one Fighter Control Squadron so the Control Centers in India were to be operated by the 51st Fighter

Control Squadron while the Control Centers in Burma were to be operated by the 96th Fighter Control Squadron which had just arrived in the India-Burma Theater from the United States. The transfer of the Burma Control Centers was made during August, 1944. The GCI Station at Titabar, India and the Area Control Center at Jorhat, India were reopened and a new GCI Station at Dinjan was established also during August, 1944.

Other changes were being made during August, 1944. After many tests, radio communication with planes was changed from High Frequency (HF) to Very High Frequency (VHF). This change of communication enabled the Squadron to set up VHF Homing Stations at the various airfields in Assam. These Homing Stations were operated by small detachments of Squadron communication men and frequently commended for work in saving lives and planes.

The "rotation" policy of the I-B Theater began to function in the Squadron during September, 1944 when the men with more than two years of overseas service were sent home. Many of these men had been with the Squadron since it had come overseas 33 months previously.

As the Japanese were driven farther south in Burma, our aircraft were forced to fly farther to accomplish their bombing and strafing missions. This caused Fighter Control activities to expand to include directing outgoing missions to target areas and bringing returning missions to base safely. To aid Control Centers and Homing Stations in this new duty, Direction Finding (DF) Stations were established in India during the month of October, 1944. These DF Stations were able to fix accurately the position of an airplane immediately upon receiving a transmission from it through a system of triangulation.

Enemy menace to Assam, India was virtually removed by December, 1944 so it was decided to move Squadron Headquarters to Myitkyina, Burma and to close all Control installations in India except the Center at Kanjikoah which would be operated by a rear echelon detachment. While the Squadron was all assembled at Kanjikoah before making the move to Myitkyina, the Squadron celebrated its third birthday. The occasion was marked by a banquet in which the officers did duty as table-waiters. Following the banquet were various short plays and a dance. This festive occasion was on December 18, 1944.

Groups of Squadron personnel began to make the trip to Myitkyina, Burma during the latter part of December, 1944. The movements were made by air and by vehicle convoy over the Ledo Road. A campsite was selected near the North Strip in Myitkyina overlooking the Irrawaddy River and work was begun on the new home of the 51st Fighter Control Squadron. Camp construction was complicated by the fact that the site had been the scene of a battle. Many unexploded shells and other grim reminders were found in the area.

Operation of the Control Center in Myitkyina, now located in a building in the town of Myitkyina, was assumed by the 51st Fighter Control Squadron on January 7, 1945. Homing Stations and Direction Finding Stations for the Myitkyina Control Center as well as the GCI Station at Waingmaw were taken over during January, 1945, also.

Cultural achievements marked the month of February, 1945. Classes were started in English and Composition in the Kanjikoah detachment with considerable interest being shown. In Myitkyina, the Day Room, newly-constructed, was christened "Monsoon Mansion" and ushered into use with an appropriate party.

On March 28, 1945 the detachment from Kanjikoah moved to Bhamo, Burma preparatory to assuming the operation of the Control Center there. This movement brought to a close the operations of the 51st Fighter Control Squadron in India. The operation of the Bhamo Control Center with its system of Direction Finding, Homing, and GCI Stations was assumed during April 1945. The Area Control Center and Homing Station at Lashio, Burma were taken over at the same time. The building occupied by the Lashio Control Center had an especially checkered history having been reportedly used by Japanese as a brothel and by the Chinese troops as a stable before the American troops set up the Control Room.

With the focus of American attention shifting from the fighting in Burma to the fighting in China, many units were being transferred to the China Theater. Orders were received in June, 1945 to transfer several officers and men to China. Because of these orders, the Control Centers at Lashio and Bhamo were closed. At the last minute, in typical Hollywood fashion, the orders were cancelled and the Bhamo Control Center reopened.

As soon as word was received that Japan had accepted the American surrender terms, orders were received from Theater Headquarters to cease operations. Thus on August 15, 1945 the 51st Fighter Control Squadron ended a long career of active duty and settled down to await forthcoming orders to return to the United States for deactivation. The movement orders were received on September 13, 1945 and the Bhamo detachment moved to Myitkyina the following day.

Moving over the Ledo Road in two convoys, the Squadron arrived in Dinjan, India enroute to Piardoba, India on September 18, 1945. After a stop in the transient Camp at Dinjan for a week, the Squadron entrained for Piardoba, a former B-29 base, where it arrived on September 29, 1945. The transient base at Piardoba was the location of the 51st Fighter Control Squadron until November 29, 1945 when C-54 transport airplanes moved the unit to the port of Karachi, India where further delay in movement to the United States was encountered. At the time of writing this history, the Squadron, one of the last tactical units in India, is still awaiting its turn to board ship and return to the United States.

While much has been said in this history concerning outstanding events in Squadron activity, there have been many other events equally important to efficient operation and performance of duty but less spectacular. Communications men performed minor miracles daily under next to impossible conditions to keep the Control Centers functioning.

The Medical Section was constantly called upon to care for other organizations, ranging in numbers from 1 to 13, including personnel numbering from 300 to 1500 men, with very limited personnel and supplies. Mess personnel consistently operated with inadequate equipment -

upon one occasion, at least, feeding regularly 375 men with kitchen facilities suitable for a maximum of 150 men. Transportation men and supply personnel were continually hampered by the lack of even what are commonly considered to be fundamental items. Squadron history was made by every man who was ever a part of the 51st Fighter Control Squadron and who performed his duties, as exciting or as humdrum as they may have seemed. Brief and incomplete, though it may be, this narrative is an attempt to furnish a bare outline for each man who was ever a part of the Squadron - an outline which will form a complete history for each man when filled in with his personal recollections.

No story, article, or even the mention of the name Assam would not be complete without mentioning the 51st Fighter Control Squadron and its area of operations. So, here goes . . .

In the military campaign leading to the liberation of North and Central Burma from the Japanese, one could hardly find an organization with a history surpassing that of the 51st FCS for action, length of service and successful performance of duty under all conditions.

The 51st FCS was actually made up of two groups. The first group, which came to India in March 1942, and then the second group, that came to the CBI during the spring and summer of 1944 replacing the first group who rotated back to Uncle Sugar in September 1944. Bob Fagelson and I call them the "old guys" and the "new guys."

The "old guys" landed in Karachi in March 1942 as the 35th Interceptor Control Squadron of the 35th Pursuit Group. Since there were no airplanes at that time, the "old guys" did MP duty for a while. Then in May 1942, they became the 51st FCS of the 51st Fighter Group. Immediately they went by train and plane to Kanjikoah, Assam, where on September 20, 1942, a Fighter Control Center was established and teams were sent into the Naga Hills as Visual Air Warning Systems. They remained in these Visual Air Warning Stations from September 1942 to May 1943.

For excellent reading on these VAW Stations, Robert Philips wrote a book on his experiences at one of these stations. The book is entitled "KC-8, Burma." Bob, now deceased, along with James E. Griffin, Donald C. Craig, and Delbert Adams were awarded the Bronze Star for exceptional meritorious conduct during this campaign. Also, the Legion of Merit was awarded to Clinton C.

Breedlove and Peter J. Kunz. For dropping food and ammo under hazardous conditions, Andrew C. Hauge, William E. Russell, and Walter V. Wade were awarded Air Medals.

As the year 1945 approached, Japanese air sorties were almost nil and the 51st FCS assumed the duties at homing and direction finding stations accumulating a fantastic score in the number of planes and lives saved. During March 1945 - 82 aircraft were saved; in April - 157 saved; in May - 203 saved; in June - 68 saved, and in July - 34 saved. These aircraft were chiefly transports. This represented a sum of over 40 million dollars worth of aircraft, exclusive of cargo value. More important, however, is the number of human lives saved. The homing facilities were the greatest assistance to transport aircraft flying from India to China via the "Hump." On September 28, 1944, the Homing Station at Moran was commended by Brig.

General A. H. Gilkeson of the 10th AAAF.

Personnel of the 51st FCS were scattered throughout the area of operations. You did not have a chance to really get acquainted. You were sent out (usually in groups of 6-8) to the hill stations, where all supplies were airdropped, or were on detached service with rations and quarters with some other unit operating AWS, Homing or Direction Finding stations. Only about a fourth of the squadron remained at the control centers (headquarters) for any length of time. After your tour in the hills, or where-ever, you returned to headquarters and in a few days out you would go again to another destination with usually an entirely different crew.

For the first time since September 1942, on September 14, 1945, the Squadron is finally together at Myitkyina preparing to embark for Dinjan on the Ledo Road. From there the squadron went by train to Piardoba, India, (former B-29 base), and after a month; departed by air to Karachi. The squadron departed Karachi aboard the Gen. R. E. Callan on December 31, 1945, and arrived in Seattle with a BANG and a BAND on January 31, 1946.

Mar 1945, Operation of Mobile Fighter Sector at Manila, manned by approximately one third of squadron personnel.

Embarked: 15-18 Oct 1945 from Subic Bay via LSTs. Disembarked: 27-28 Oct, Sasebo Harbor, Japan. Road Convoys departed Sasebo Harbor, Japan on 27-29 Oct 1945 for 80-mile trip to Fukuoka, Kyushu, Japan.

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Sources

Air Force Historical Research Agency, U.S. Air Force, Maxwell AFB, Alabama.