

73rd EXPEDITIONARY RECONNAISSANCE SQUADRON



MISSION

LINEAGE

73rd Pursuit Squadron (Interceptor) constituted, 4 Oct 1941

Activated, 5 Oct 1941

Redesignated 73rd Fighter Squadron, 15 May 1942

Inactivated, 12 Jan 1946

Activated in the reserve, 1 Aug 1947

Inactivated, 27 Jun 1949

Redesignated 73rd Strategic Reconnaissance Squadron, Heavy, 4 Jun 1952

Activated, 16 Jun 1952

Redesignated 73rd Bombardment Squadron, Heavy, 1 Oct 1955

Inactivated and discontinued, 15 Apr 1963

Redesignated 73 Expeditionary Reconnaissance Squadron, and converted to provisional status, 22 Jul 2010

STATIONS

Wheeler Field, TH, 5 Oct 1941

Bellows Field, TH, 22 May 1942

Midway, 17 Jun 1942

Kaneohe, TH, 26 Jan 1943

Mokuleia Field, TH, 5 May 1943

Bellows Field, TH, 8 Nov 1943

Saipan, c. 23 Jun 1944

Ie Shima, 30 Apr 1945

Okinawa, Nov-Dec 1945

Ft Lewis, WA, 11-12 Jan 1946
Hamilton Field, CA, 1 Aug 1947-27 Jun 1949
Ramey AFB, PR, 16 Jun 1952
Seymour Johnson AFB, NC, 5 Jan 1959

ASSIGNMENTS

18th Pursuit (later Fighter) Group, 5 Oct 1941
318th Fighter Group, 15 Oct 1942-12 Jan 1946
72nd Reconnaissance Group, 1 Aug 1947-27 Jun 1949
72nd Strategic Reconnaissance (later Bombardment) Wing, 16 Jun 1952
4241st Strategic Wing, 5 Jan 1959
Air Combat Command to activate or inactivate at any time on or after 22 Jul 2010

WEAPON SYSTEMS

P-26, 1941
P-40, 1941-1943
P-47 1943-1945
P-47D
P-47N
P-38 1944-1945
RB-36, 1953-1958
B-52, 1959
B-52G

COMMANDERS

Maj John S. Evans, 1941
Maj Charles H. Chapin, 19 Apr 1943
Maj James M. Meng, 1 Nov 1943
Maj John J. Hussey Jr., 14 Apr 1944
Maj Wilbur M. McCown, 22 Jun 1945
Maj Lewis A. Nelson, 12 Aug 1945
Maj Frank A. Cronican, 4 Oct 1945
Cpt Ernest J. Whittle Jr., 22 Oct 1945-unkn
LTC Schmid, unkn-1949
Maj R. O. Breeze, 1952
LTC Frederick D. Barry Jr., 1952
LTC Franklyn W. Haines, 15 Jun 1954
LTC Robert I. Langford, 2 Aug 1955
LTC Robert L. Jones, 16 Aug 1956
LTC George C. Player Jr., 1957
LTC William H. McVey, 26 Jun 1958
Cpt Vernon C. McKenzie, 1 Sep 1958
Cpt Ted C. Frey, Oct 1958
Cpt Lyle B. Bordeaux, 5 Jan 1959

Maj William C. Selsor III, 23 Mar 1959
LTC Clarence J. Deaton, 20 Apr 1959
LTC Colin C. Hamilton, 15 Aug 1960
LTC Edgar S. Harris Jr., 11 Oct 1961-unkn

HONORS

Service Streamers

None

Campaign Streamers

Central Pacific
Air Offensive, Japan
Eastern Mandates
Westem Pacific
Ryukyus
China Offensive
Air Combat, Asiatic-Pacific Theater

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

Air Force Outstanding Unit Award
1 Oct 1957-1 Jun 1958

EMBLEM



73rd Fighter Squadron

73rd Bombardment Squadron, Heavy, emblem: On an Air Force blue disc edged white, a red stylized deltawinged aircraft, chevronwise through-out, edged white, emitting upward two white lightning bolts one to dexter chief, one to sinister chief; all above an atomic symbol of two white orbits encircling a red nucleus; in base four Air Force golden yellow stylized quail in flight up-ward in an

arched formation; in chief a ring of seven white stars encircling three Air Force golden yellow stars, all four pointed. (Approved, 6 Jul 1962)

MOTTO

NICKNAME

OPERATIONS

Patrols over the Pacific, Jan 1942-Apr 1944. Combat in Western Pacific, 24 Jun 1944-14 Aug 1945. Provided radar scope photography, 1952-1955. Converted to bombing mission in 1955. Conducted worldwide strategic bombardment training missions and provided nuclear deterrent, 1959-1963.

From first to last, the history of the Seventh was the story of travelling from "one damned island" to another. On 23 January 1943, 24 P40Ks of the 78th Fighter Squadron made the longest mass flight over water by single engine aircraft in history, flying 1,300 miles from Kauai to Midway. They were escorted all the way by three Southern Cross Airways' LB-30s, "Old Faithful", "Fast Freight" and "Trader Horn". At Midway they replaced the P-40E's of the 73rd Fighter Squadron on patrol duty over the island.

The 73rd Squadron had come out to the island right after the Battle of Midway aboard the aircraft carrier Saratoga. Near its destination on 10 June 1942, its pilots flew their P-40s off the deck of the carrier to complete the trip under their own power — the first land based fighters to take off from the deck of an aircraft carrier. When replaced the Squadron determined to fly its P-40s home from Midway to Oahu and show that more than one squadron could set records. And this they did on 26 January escorted by the same three LB-30s. All planes completed the over 1,300 mile flight to set their own non-stop, over water flight record.

The fleet which made possible the Saipan invasion numbered 551 ships, from battleships to landing craft. Among the ships were 14 escort carriers, and on two of those, the Manila Bay and the Natoma Bay, were 73 P-47D Thunderbolts of the 19th and 73rd Fighter Squadrons of the 318th Group. They were scheduled for earliest deployment to Aslito Airfield on Saipan to give air cover and support to the assault troops.

On D+5, 20 June, the assault echelon of the Group went ashore, and two days later the planes began coming in, the first P-47s to be catapulted from the decks of carriers at sea.

That first day, 24 planes of the 19th FS were successfully launched and flew in to Aslito. Next day 12 P-47s of the 19th and 4 of the 73rd FS came ashore, and on 24 June the remaining 33 planes of the 73rd came in. As soon as the P-47s arrived at Aslito they began flying missions, initially to support troops trying to take Mt Tapotchau. From then on bombing, strafing and rocket firing support missions were endless, with each plane having to run a gauntlet of sniper fire from Japanese troops in jungles southeast of the field on every takeoff.

Beside constant work putting up missions in those early days, the ground crews and pilots lived through long nights of rifle fire and shell bursts. The worst of their nights came in the early hours of 26 June. In the darkness a Japanese sabotage party sneaked onto the airfield to destroy the P-47s where they were parked, and three hundred Japanese troops broke through the infantry lines and also reached the field. Men of the 318th became infantry soldiers and held their own. By dawn the enemy was gone. Behind them was the Inirncd out remains of the sole P-47 the sabotage party was able to set afire with their Molotov Cocktails — "Hed Up 'N Locked" of the 73rd Squadron.

As Army troops strove to clear the south coast of Saipan, tenacious Japanese forces there were supported by artillery batteries hidden in caves and pillboxes on Tinian, only three miles across the channel from Saipan. The P-47s devoted countless efforts to attacking these positions which were as hard to hit as they were hard to spot. Missions against these targets were often completed in just eighteen minutes from takeoff to landing, with the result that the pilots were given credit for only half a mission each time although the missions were seldom easy ones.

On 27 June, seven P-47s of the 19th FS took off from Saipan on such a mission to strike at an artillery position on Gurguan Point, Tinian with rockets. One of the P-47s was flown by Lt. Wayne F. Kobler. As he came in low over his target the enemy set off a land mine almost directly under him. The blast caught Kobler's plane square and it went straight in. Later, when the number two strip at Aslito was completed it was named Kobler Field in his honor.

Air Force Order of Battle
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Updated:

Sources

Air Force Historical Research Agency. U.S. Air Force. Maxwell AFB, AL.
The Institute of Heraldry. U.S. Army. Fort Belvoir, VA.
Air Force News. Air Force Public Affairs Agency.