

58 SERVICE SQUADRON



MISSION

LINEAGE

Materiel Squadron, 44 Air Base Group
Redesignated 58 Materiel Squadron
Redesignated 58 Service Squadron

STATIONS

McChord Field, Washington

ASSIGNMENTS

44 Air Base Group
62 Service Group

COMMANDERS

HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

EMBLEM



MOTTO

OPERATIONS

As the 376th Bombardment Group moved westward from Soluch, to Benghazi, Libya it was accompanied by the 58 Service Squadron, one of four service squadrons of the 62nd Service Group. The squadrons each composed of eight officers and 280 enlisted men, provided major maintenance support for the 376th, 98th and other bomb groups in North Africa. The 58 Service Squadron had an engineering section capable of making repairs on all of the major systems in a B-24. In addition, the unit operated separate facilities for parachutes, sheet metal, fabric and metal machining. When one of the 376th aircraft sustained damage which exceeded the capabilities of the groups ground crews, it was restored in one or more of the 58's tent shops.

58 Service Squadron personnel were all experienced specialists and include individuals such as Warrant Officer Floyd Black, assistant engineering officer, Sam Nero, Earl Jackman from the engineering section, and Les Ritchie who went on to become a very proficient calligrapher after the war. Les Ritchie, who was on the staff of the dope and fabric shop, winds up this part of our story with his recollections about being a member of the crew that painted then Col. Compton's P-40 fighter aircraft.

It seems that a transient ferry pilot brought a P-40 to Benghazi sometime early in 1943. This was a normal procedure, for P-40's regularly came through the field on the way to the 57th Fighter Group. In this instance though, the ferry pilot was convinced somehow to leave the aircraft and go back to Cairo to pick another one for delivery to the 57th.

Early November is when Les recalled that Col. Compton wanted the P-40 that had been left with him by the ferry pilot repainted to remove the camouflage colors. First the paint shop

crew of Chief Sgt. Harry Porter, Dan Ricci, Ed Michalski, and Les had to remove all the old paint from the metal and fabric surfaces, a very tough job. Then at the Colonel's request, they painted the plane silver -- lots of coats of paint and clear lacquer. The Colonel checked on progress every day, so the painting became a very serious business.

Next add the original insignia on the plane including the red and white stripes on the rudder. At the next inspection the Colonel said, "Something is missing -- it isn't moving. What can you do to make it look like it's moving on the ground?" They then enclosed the exhaust area with color and added a red on silver speed stripe to the fuselage. Next they added pin wheels on the landing gear and nose spinner. Finally the initials "K.K.," 20" tall, were added in a script that Les designed on each side of the fuselage. The whole project took about six weeks. When finished, the Colonel flew this plane and Norm Appold flew another P-40, made from the parts of three wrecked planes that the 58 had reassembled into one flyable aircraft, on various training missions for the B-24 crews. The two aircraft were used often and became very useful to the 376th. They made passes at the forming up squadrons, giving the B-24 gunners aiming practice; they observed training formation flying and encouraged tightening up; they followed the formations over the Adriatic and made formation flying corrections on the Group's way to the targets. This went on until Col. Compton and Major Appold went on to other assignments.

Appold's P-40 was pieced together from two aircraft that had locked wings while landing in formation in Soluch, and a third P-40 that landed wheels up in a nearby valley. A service squadron team recovered this aircraft on a flat bed trailer. After the aircraft was pieced together, Les Richie was again summoned to paint "Bon Bon" Appold's choice on the nose of the aircraft.

DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE ORGANIZATIONAL HISTORIES

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Sources

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