

108th FIGHTER BOMBER GROUP

MISSION

LINEAGE

348th Fighter Group constituted, 24 Sep 1942

Activated, 30 Sep 1942

Inactivated, 10 May 1946

Redesignated 108th Fighter Group and allotted to ANG (NJ), 24 May 1946

Extended federal recognition, 16 Oct 1946

Redesignated 108th Fighter-Bomber Group,

Redesignated 108th Tactical Fighter Group,

Inactivated 9 Dec 1974

STATIONS

Mitchel Field, NY, 30 Sep 1942

Bradley Field, CT, 4 Oct 1942

Westover Field, MA, 29 Oct 1942

Providence, RI, 3 Jan 1943

Westover Field, MA, 28 Apr-9 May 1943

Port Moresby, New Guinea, 23 Jun 1943

Finschhafen, New Guinea, 16 Dec 1943

Saidor, New Guinea, 29 Mar 1944

Wakde, 22 May 1944

Noemfoor, 26 Aug 1944

Leyte, 16 Nov 1944

San Marcelino, Luzon, 4 Feb 1945

Floridablanca, Luzon, 15 May 1945

Ie Shima, 9 Jul 1945

Itami, Japan, Oct 1945-10 May 1946

Newark Mun Aprt, NJ, 1 Mar 1951

Turner AFB, GA, 14 Mar 1951

Godman AFB, KY, 9 Dec 1951-1 Dec 1952
McGuire AFB, NJ

ASSIGNMENTS

WEAPON SYSTEMS

Mission Aircraft

P-47

F-47

KC-135E

Support Aircraft

COMMANDERS

Col Neel E. Kearby, Oct 1942

Col Robert R. Rowland, 17 Nov 1943

LTC William M. Banks, 8 Jun 1945

Maj Walter G. Benz, 26 Nov 1945-unkn

Maj J. D. Zink, Mar 1951

Col Alvan C. Gillem II, Jun 1951

Col Carl W. Stapleton, Nov 1951

Col Donald J. Strait, 14 Jan 1952

Col George Laven, Jr., 4 Aug-1 Dec 1952

HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

Air Offensive, Japan

China Defensive

New Guinea

Bismarck Archipelago

Western Pacific

Leyte

Luzon

China Offensive

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

Distinguished Unit Citations

New Britain, 16-31 Dec 1943

Philippine Islands, 24 Dec 1944

Philippine Presidential Unit Citation

EMBLEM

Azure, within a bordure dimidiated, gules, hand gauntleted in armour proper, encircled with wreath of laurel, vert, grasping a torch argent, flamant proper. (Approved 15 Aug 1951)

MOTTO

PER CAELUM VICTORIAE—Through the Skies to Victory

NICKNAME

OPERATIONS

Prepared for combat with P-47s. Moved to the Southwest Pacific, May-Jun 1943. Operated from New Guinea and Noemfoor until Nov 1944. Flew patrol and reconnaissance missions and escorted bombers to targets in New Guinea and New Britain. Col Neel E Kearby was awarded the Medal of Honor for action over New Guinea on n Oct 1943: after leading a flight of four fighters to reconnoiter the enemy base at Wewak, Col Kearby sighted a Japanese bomber formation escorted by more than 30 fighters; despite the heavy odds and a low fuel supply, and although his mission had been accomplished, Kearby ordered an attack, personally destroying six of the enemy planes. For covering Allied landings and supporting ground forces on New Britain, 16-31 Dec 1943, the group was awarded a DUG. In 1944 began to attack airfields, installations, and shipping in western New Guinea, Ceram, and Halmahera to aid in neutralizing those areas preparatory to the US invasion of the Philippines. After moving to the Philippines in Nov 1944, provided cover for convoys, flew patrols, escorted bombers, attacked enemy airfields, and supported ground forces. Received a DUG for withstanding assaults by enemy fighters to cover bombers raiding Clark Field on 24 Dec 1944. Also attacked shipping along the China coast and escorted bombers to Formosa and the Asiatic mainland. Moved to the Ryukyus in Jul 1945 and completed some escort and attack missions to Kyushu before the war ended. Moved to Japan in Oct 1945 as part of Far East Air Forces. Called to active duty on 1 Mar 1951. Relieved from active service on 1 Dec 1952 and returned to the control of ANG (NJ)

Personnel of the 348th Fighter Group boarded the Army transport ship Henry Gibbons and left the wharf at Weehawken, New Jersey on 15 May 1943. Amongst them was Otto Carter of the 340th Fighter Squadron. They all thought they were heading for the European theatre of war. They went through the Panama Canal and crossed the Pacific Ocean reaching Brisbane, Australia on 14 June 1943. They moved to Archer Field (Archerfield airfield) and waited for their aircraft to arrive.

Their P-47D-2-RE Thunderbolts began to arrive in Brisbane in the same month, and by the end of July after they had "run in" their engines, the 348th's three squadrons under the command of Lt. Col. Neel Kearby, had made the 1,200-mile flight from Brisbane to Port Moresby. I believe a small number of P-47s had been assembled at Eagle Farm in Brisbane and the majority being assembled in Port Moresby. Can anyone please confirm? Another source indicates that the P-47s were assembled in Townsville. Michael Claringbould's book "The Forgotten Fifth" states

that twenty five P-47D-2-RAs were assembled at Wards Drome in Port Moresby. The Thunderbolt was given the nickname of "Jug".

The 340th Fighter Squadron, 348th Fighter Group, transferred from Port Moresby to Finschhafen, New Guinea on 13 December 1943. Headquarters group of the 348th Fighter Group transferred from Port Moresby to Finschhafen on 16 December 1943. The 341st and 342nd Fighter Squadrons, moved from Port Moresby to Finschhafen on 17 December 1943.

The 460th Fighter Squadron was also later attached to the 348th Fighter Group on 23 September 1944 which was stationed at Noemfoor, New Guinea at that time.

The Thunderbolts assembled in Brisbane used two 165 gallon drop tanks designed for the P-38 Lightning. These tanks were not big enough for General Kenney who ordered his engineering staff to come up with a design for a new external drop tank. Ford Australia were then contracted to make the new tanks. The first of the new tanks arrived by the middle of August 1943. The new tanks were bulky and they held 200 gallons. This almost doubled the P-47's combat range. Michael Claringbould's book "The Forgotten Fifth" states that the P-47s arrived with 200 gallon tanks "caused bad tail buffeting so the 27th Depot Repair Squadron at Port Moresby was ordered to design one more suitable." An new design of 200 gallon tank was built in Brisbane in August 1943 and was fitted with electric booster pumps. The new design proved successful.

Lt. Col. Neel Kearby, the Commanding Officer of the 348th Fighter Group shot down his first Japanese aircraft on 4 September 1943. He shot down a second Jap on the 15 September 1943. He flew a mission on the 11 October 1943 which eventually earned him the Medal of Honor. Kearby went on to score 22 Jap aircraft. Another pilot, LTC William D. Dunham, scored 16 kills.

Air Force Lineage and Honors

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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.