

81st DEPOT REPAIR SQUADRON

MISSION

LINEAGE

81st Depot Repair Squadron

STATIONS

Nichols Field, P. I.

ASSIGNMENTS

81st Air Depot Group

COMMANDERS

Cpt William O. Farrior

HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

EMBLEM

MOTTO

NICKNAME

OPERATIONS

THE 81st Depot Repair Squadron looks upon the Eagle Farm airbase as its own baby, reared to a vigorous manhood by the labor and enthusiasm of the Squadron's enlisted men and officers.

Two months after the Coral Sea battle ended all Jap hopes of an Australian conquest, men forming the nucleus of the 81st were sent from the south to establish a new major base. Awaiting them were two "short airstrips and two small ill-equipped hangars.

In August, 1942, lacking many tools and using power supplied by a few one-cylinder engines. they assembled the first P-38's to arrive in this theatre. They have since had the rare pleasure of seeing their work produce victories. This was particularly true of the modification of armament on the B-25 carried on under the supervision of LTC "Pappy" Gunn. Planes, improved here by the installation of .50 caliber nose guns, played a decisive role in the Bismarck Sea battle and were referred to as follows in LTG Kenney's commendation: "The effectiveness of the forward fire of the airplanes making the low level attacks on the Japanese convoy is ample testimony of the skillful workmanship of the personnel responsible for the design and installation of the forward firing fixed guns in these airplanes." This achievement is doubly impressive when we remember that all work had to be done on a strict schedule, night and day, rain and shine, that men worked ten, twelve, and twenty hour stretches without days off.

As men and equipment were being sent in greater numbers to this theatre, both the Squadron and its field increased in size and importance. From a two-strip, two-hangar base, Eagle Farm came to house the biggest Air Depot Group in Australia, with three strips, nine hangars, and a large machine-shop building. The 81st Repair Squadron grew from 200 to 460 men. each a skilled technician, and still other organizations had to be attached to take care of the tremendous volume of work assigned this depot. This work is the assembly and modification of all types of fighter aircraft for this theatre. While essentially "safe" ground work, it has its dangers and has produced sorrows as well as joys. Deepest of these was the loss on July 17, 1943, of Major Donald Simpson, Squadron Commander, and Capt. Paul May and Lt. James Handley, test pilots. In the course of "routine" work they had flown three P-38's to a nearby field and were returning in an A-20 when the fatal accident occurred. They were given full military honors in the presence of the entire Squadron under a sky in which flew a formation of P-38's with three empty positions. The job of C.O. was taken over by Major Forrest Harsh, and, in October, 1943, by Captain William O. Farrow, who had been with the 81st for over a year as test pilot.

The 81st men are not noted for adherence to Ben Franklin's adage about the healthy, wealthy, and wise. When projects had to be rushed, they worked very hard, went to bed at odd hours, and slept very little. When the pace was eased they made sure to take advantage of all possible recreational facilities. Numerous Squadron parties were held on the base and at the Non-Commissioned Officers' Club in the city, and on special occasions the men were treated by their officers to steak fries and boisterous beer parties. As was to be expected, however, the biggest boost in spirit was when the first four men went to the States on the rotation plan.

The work of the 81st Repair Squadron was no small factor in the Allied advance northwards. As the front line was pushed up. more large bases were required closer to the scene of operations, and the mission of the Squadron in Australia was completed. In April, 1944, the 81st was sent

north to begin again the saga of army pioneering and achievement which will soon eliminate all rotation plans.

Air Force Order of Battle

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Sources

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