

344th FIGHTER SQUADRON



MISSION

Defense of Alaska, Oct 1942-Aug 1945

LINEAGE

344th Fighter Squadron constituted, 2 Oct 1942

Activated, 10 Oct 1942

Inactivated, 15 Aug 1946

STATIONS

Elmendorf Field, AK, 10 Oct 1942, (detachment at Ft Randall, AK, 12 Nov 1942)

Ft Randall, AK, 25 Dec 1942

Ft Glenn, AK, 8 Mar-23 May 1943, (detachments at Amchitka, May-Jul 1943, and Attu, 12 Jun-Dec 1943)

Shemya, 25 Jun 1943-15 Aug 1946

ASSIGNMENTS

343rd Fighter Group, 10 Oct 1942-15 Aug 1946

WEAPON SYSTEMS

P-40, 1942-1945

P-40E

P-40K

P-40N

P-38, 1944-1946

P-38J

P-38L

COMMANDERS

HONORS

Service Streamers

None

Campaign Streamers

Aleutian Islands

Air Combat, Asiatic-Pacific Theater

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

None

EMBLEM

Over and through a medium blue disc, wide border orange, piped white, a black aerial machine gun winged white, in flight, firing shells from cartridge belt, with muzzle toward sinister chief; eleven empty yellow cartridge cases, trimmed orange, falling toward base, arranged three, four, and four. (Approved, 13 Jan 1944)

MOTTO

NICKNAME

OPERATIONS

The 10,000-foot Shemya runway, along with two 5,000-foot cross runways supported a variety of aircraft. The 404th Bombardment Squadron flew B-24's along with one Beechcraft AT-7, which was used for navigator training. The 344th Fighter Squadron flew both P-40s and P-38s. In addition, a North American AT-6 was utilized for pilot training. One RB-34, a UC-64A and numerous TB-26s were flown by the 15th Tow Target Squadron that was stationed on Shemya. Many administrative and cargo aircraft, such as the C-47 flew in and out of Shemya during the war.

In March 1944, the pouring of concrete piers for a fighter hangar was also completed. After digging the drainage ditches and laying the drainage pipe, all work had to stop until the required lumber from Attu arrived in the last week of March. By the end of May, this hangar was complete and in operation. In addition to the fighter hangar, Shemya was also authorized one Kodiak "T" hangar and fourteen Birchwood hangars. The first Birchwood Hangar was erected on the north side of the main runway, 2,500 feet from the west end. But only six of the fourteen hangars had been completed by the end of the war. Hangar Number One was for the Navy; Number Two was for the Base Engineer; the 344th Fighter Squadron used Hangar Number Three, while the 11th Fighter Squadron had Number Four. The last two, Numbers Five and Six, were utilized by the two other

combat flying squadrons on Shemya - the 15th Tow Target Squadron and the 404th Bombardment Squadron.

The 372nd Service Squadron, 337th Service Group, arrived on Shemya on June 20, 1943, and consisted of a forward echelon of four officers and forty-seven enlisted men. By the twenty-fifth of June the complete squadron was in place. In addition, detachments from Chemical Warfare Service, Finance, Airway Communications, Ordnance, Quartermaster, Weather, and Signal Corps arrived on June 20, 1943. Three days later, the first contingent of the 344th Fighter Squadron, 343rd Fighter Group arrived from Unmak, (Fort Glenn). Major Robert L. Rocklehurst, Air Corps, Commander, was accompanied by ten enlisted men. The activity on Shemya further grew with the arrival of the 32nd Service Squadron on July 31, 1943 from a tour of duty on Adak.

As late as May 1944, there was a conspicuous absence of running water throughout the base. For example, there were no shower facilities at all in the 344th Fighter Squadron area, while there were only three in the 400th Base Headquarters and Air Base Squadron areas. The personnel housing was extremely over-crowded and uncomfortable. Not until September 1944, did the phrase "slightly overcrowded but adequate" begin to appear. Inconsistencies in the furlough policy were another contributing factor in the lowering morale. The original rotation plan required two years service in the Alaskan Theater before orders for reassignment could be issued. The real problem was that a furlough could be issued in lieu of a reassignment. In May 1944, the Air Base Commander indicated that the personnel would be better oriented if there were a free working furlough and rotation plan. "Eighteen and twenty-four months in the Aleutian area is not particularly conducive to high morale especially when the present rotation plan is so dependent on inadequate transportation." In simpler words of the Daily Diary for Base Operations, May 22, 1944: "Furloughs to states to start as soon as transportation becomes available, very depressing." The adjutant's section outlined the leave procedures at this time which restricted leave to one per cent of the total base population, or approximately eighteen men. It was pointed out that "Our only problem is when will we be able to take advantage of a leave or furlough." The Daily Diary of the Base Quartermaster for May 24, 1944, gives an excellent example of how the enlisted troops felt about the furlough policy. "When T/5 Good was notified of his being the fortunate one to receive a furlough, it was the most difficult condition anyone ever encountered, explain to him that he really did have a furlough, boy these G.I.'s won't believe a thing anymore."

The 344th Fighter Squadron had a small radio station which supplemented the regular one. Individual radios in the personnel living quarters were of prime importance in providing entertainment. In addition to the island's radio station, the proximity to Japan made Tokyo radio a source of amusement to the men. The Daily Diary of Base Personnel of May 26, 1944, recorded that "Tokyo Rose said that if we're not off this place by the 31st, we will be pushed off. Sorry Rosie, only five percent can leave at any one time."

Air Force Order of Battle

Created: 2 Mar 2012

Updated:

Sources

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