

386th EXPEDITIONARY MAINTENANCE GROUP



MISSION

LINEAGE

386th Service Group constituted, 15 Jul 1944

Activated, 20 Jul 1944

Redesignated 386th Air Service Group, Nov 1944

Inactivated, 25 Nov 1945

Disestablished, 8 Oct 1948

Reestablished, redesignated 386th Expeditionary Logistics Group, and converted to provisional status, 25 Jul 2000

Activated, 12 Aug 2002

Redesignated 386th Expeditionary Maintenance Group, 1 Dec 2002

STATIONS

Kahuka AAB, TH, 20 Jul 1944

Bellows Field, TH, 9 Oct 1944

Iwo Jima, Volcano Islands, 25 Feb-25 Nov 1945

Ali Al Salem, Kuwait, 12 Aug 2002

ASSIGNMENTS

VII Air Force Service Command, 20 Jul 1944

VII Fighter Command, 1 Dec 1944

U. S. Army Strategic Air Forces, 16 Jul 1945

Twentieth Air Force, 5 Aug-25 Nov 1945

386th Air Expeditionary Wing, 12 Aug 2002

COMMANDERS

Maj Richard Feuille

HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

World War II

Air Offensive, Japan, 1942-1945

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

Air Force Outstanding Unit Award with Combat "V" Device

1 Jun 2002-31 May 2003

Army Meritorious Unit Commendation

1 Mar-1 May 1945

EMBLEM

Azure, a fess wavy Or surmounted by two scimitars Sable garnished of the second the dexter point to chief and the sinister point to base, on the fess and between a whippet Brown resting upon five stones Silver Gray fimbriated of the last, all within a diminished bordure Yellow. Attached below the shield, a White scroll edged with a narrow Yellow border and inscribed "386TH EXPEDITIONARY MAINTENANCE GRP" in Blue letters. **SIGNIFICANCE:** Ultramarine blue and Air Force yellow are the Air Force colors. Blue alludes to the sky, the primary theater of Air Force operations. Yellow refers to the sun and the excellence required of Air Force personnel. The black scimitars represent the strength and might of combat air power in Southeast Asia. The brown whippet symbolizes the original group's mascot, Marauder, and by extension the first assigned aircraft, the B-26 Marauder. The flat silver stones, upon which the whippet rests, signify the stepping stones of the original flying squadrons to the present day Wing, and show the untiring devotion to duty, extraordinary skills, courage and commitment. (Approved, 17 Oct 2008)

MOTTO

NICKNAME

OPERATIONS

386th mission: to support the VII Fighter Command, primarily the 15th Fighter Group pilots. The 386th would repair Motoyama Airfield No. 1, located on the southern third of the island, and organize supplies and an overall system to service P-51s, P-61s and other fighter planes.

The 386th Air Service Group arrived at Honolulu Harbor from Seattle, from Ft. Lawton, Wash., aboard the Liberty ship John W. Weeks on June 17, 1944. The group spent a few weeks in

preparation for deployment overseas. Upon debarking, they were transported to Kahuku AAB aboard an OR&L Co. steam locomotive for a six hour journey that was only 40 miles in length. Living quarters at the base consisted of huts, barracks and tents, surrounded with dirt, sand and mud. Within a couple days, the group's members had settled in their new surroundings and shops and sections had been set up. By July 1944, the group had been restructured and consisted of: Headquarters and Base Service Squadron, 490th Air Engineering Squadron and the 611th Air Material Squadrons, which were larger in troop strength than prior to the reconstructing. Colonel Cook was the group CO assisted by Captain Mills, the 490th was under Captain Sperry, and the 611th was commanded by Captain Head. Colonel French came aboard in September 1944, relieving Colonel Cook who assumed the executive officer's position. In the final days of September, the 386th ASG underwent jungle training at the "Unit Jungle Training Center" located at Kahana Bay, down the coast from Kahuku. The group had the distinction of being the first USAAF troops to enroll in the rigid course that included handling a variety of weapons, jungle and swamp survival. While troops of the 386th were in the last phase of jungle training, the unit was assigned a change of station to Bellows AAB located some 28 air miles SSE of Kahuku AAB in October 1944.

The 386th Air Service Group of the Army Air Force was formed on 22 July 1944 from an existing unit, the 13th ASG. The 386th ASG was to support the 15th Fighter Group and its new fighter planes: P-51 Mustang and P-61 Black Widow nightfighter. This support involved getting to know every facet of these new fighter planes, learning how to repair them and to prepare and maintain airfields for them.

Both the 386th Air Service Group and the 15th Fighter Group were members of the VII Fighter Command. A mutual respect developed between the pilots of the 15th FG and the men of the 386th ASG, on whom the pilots would depend during battle.

The 386th ASG had arrived by ship two days before the battle, and waited impatiently to be called ashore. The first contingent of the 386th set foot on Iwo Island five days after the Marines landed. What had been anticipated as a brief period of hauling supplies, medicine, food and ammunition to support the 5th Marine Division became an extended physical ordeal. Often under fire, the men of the 386th ASG hauled supplies across the steep sandy beaches of Iwo. However, the greater challenge, as told by Major Richard Feuille, was the heartwrenching job of evacuating wounded Marines. Walking among thousands of casualties, the men tirelessly carried the wounded on pallets from the island back to "hospital" ships. The Marines were grateful.

On 5 October, during the last few days of our stretch at jungle training, the 386th moved from Kahuku to Bellows Field. Again we looked forward to living in stateside barracks, but again we were doomed to disappointment. We were encamped at "tent city" on the ocean side of the field. We lived in tents set on sand, but the change wasn't as bad as anticipated. It was here that we met the fighter group we were to service in the forward area. The 15th Fighter Group had a long record of good service on Oahu, and they seemed to be itching to get into combat. They flew P-47's and our boys established good liaison immediately with the ground crews and pilots of the flying squadrons. Bellows was closer to Honolulu than Kahuku, and the base itself offered more in off duty recreation. So our stay there proved to be very pleasant. We established leagues in volleyball,

basketball and softball with the 15th, and after a few weeks, both groups were acting as though they had worked together for years.

In November, the 15th changed over to the newest fighter plane in the Pacific, the P-51, and our boys went to work at once to find out what made the little ship hum. It didn't take long for both the pilots and ground crews to know the insides of the Mustang, and in a few weeks the hot pilots of the 15th were flying as though they were a part of the plane.

It was at this time that the 7th Fighter Command, of which we were a part, brought us up to strength as much as possible. New officers and men joined the group. Henry Mann was assigned as the group's Red Cross Rep., Major Gordon Kelly, a flying officer, took over HQ SQ, and command of the group again reverted to Col. Cook when Col. French took over the newly activated 363rd Air Service Group.

Christmas on Oahu was a lonesome time for most of us, as is any Christmas spent away from home. However with parties and shows in Honolulu and on the field we tried to get some of the stateside Yuletide spirit. We got lectures on censorship and security, and we knew that the "day" was approaching. Our APO was changed to 86, and the mysterious name "urik" began to appear on all the equipment and boxes. Packing and crating went into high gear, and a nervous tension gripped us all. This was it! There was no doubt about it this time.

The only question was "where". There was talk of the Philippines, Truk, Formosa and even Japan itself.....but nobody knew. Restrictions were clamped on. No more trips to Honolulu, no more phone calls to the states, and very strict mail censorship. Our gear was checked and rechecked, boxed and crated, and finally the day came.

From 23 January 1945 to 5 February our group went aboard ships that were part of the largest fleet yet seen in World War II. We went on LST's, AKA's, and APA's, and we were all part of the assault or the sub-assault forces. We headed out to sea, accompanied by destroyers and D-E's. Occasionally we would catch sight of a large battle wagon on the horizon, but she would soon be out of sight. Big carriers of the Pacific fleet would come into view, but they too would pass us as though we were motionless. It was very evident that we were headed for an important engagement, and we soon found out where that would be.

After leaving our last port of call, we were informed that we were to take part in the invasion of Iwo Jima. The name to most of us was merely a headline out of the morning papers, "Iwo Jima Pounded Again by Guns of the Pacific Fleet and Heavy Bombers", but as the briefing continued, we learned more about the place we were soon to call home. We saw maps and charts, photographs and diagrams. We learned that the island had taken a terrific daily pounding in the past three months, but that many of the Japs were holed up underground, so the invasion would be no pushover. The morning of "D" day, the shore installations would be given a final touch by the naval big guns and aircraft, the Marines would pour ashore, and it was anticipated that the battle for this Pacific pin-point would be over in seventy-two hours. A Nip garrison of 20,000 was expected, but we had two Marine Divisions, the 4th and 5th going ashore, and the 3rd held in reserve just

offshore. We didn't sleep well that first night out of our last port, and all the ships were blacked out and on the alert. We zigged and zagged, and a few times had submarine alerts, but nothing came of them.

Iwo Jima, Volcano Island About 0530 of the morning of the 19th of February 1945, we were awakened in a hurry by the sound of heavy naval fire. Rushing onto the deck we saw a sight that will never be forgotten by any of us. The ocean was dotted with ships of all sizes and description. Some of the fleet's biggest battle wagons and cruisers were throwing all they had into a tiny speck of dirt about twenty miles away. We couldn't see Iwo well because it seemed to be in constant fog and flame, but during the brief lulls in the action we could make out Mt. Suribachi, or "Hot Rocks" as they named it on the battle maps. And hot rocks lived up to her name this morning. She seemed to be afire with all the pounding the big guns and naval aircraft were giving her.

Over 800 ships were part of the invasion flotilla and the picture was staggering. The ships seemed to stretch out as far as the eye could see, and at the far stretches of the horizon we could make out the shapes of the carriers. A few minutes before 0900, the last air element of task force 58 made it's final passes at Mt. Suribachi and the invasion beaches on the south-east coast of the island. The Marines were about to hit.

At 0900 a deathlike silence hung on the air, and we could see the spots of white caused by the landing craft as they headed into the surf. Listening over the ship's radio we could hear the voices of the men as they hit the beach. "Well we're here.....What the hell do we do now?.....This damn beach is too quiet.....it looks too easy.....enemy fire is light, and the boats are unloading easily.....it looks too damned good".....

They went two hundred yards in the first ten minutes, and then all hell broke loose from the well hidden gun emplacement's spotted in strategic positions all over the beach. The fire became intense and the men were pinned down. The battle for Iwo Jima was begun. Later on in the morning the first tanks and alligators went ashore to add their fire power to the Marine ordnance. Time after time we could see them crawl to the top of the first ridge, only to be forced back by a direct hit or withering anti-tank fire. The going was rough, and it was evident that the timetable set for the operation would not be met.

Late in the afternoon the first wounded were sent out to the ships designated as hospital ships. The wounded were brought in litters and immediately examined in the ship's wardrooms. It was the first time many of us had seen the results of enemy action, and we were a bit shaken by it.

As night fell, the troops on the beach dug in, and we began to shuttle between Iwo and Minami Iwo, thirty miles south. It was a night to remember. The air raid siren's wail was heard, and the smoke pots went into action. Soon a thick blanket covered us all, but through it we could still hear the reverberations and booming from the night bombardment of Iwo. A few Jap planes came over, and blindly dropped some 500 pounders in the water. A few of them were near misses, and the ships near them were rocked as though a gigantic hand were pushing them. One of our ships, the LST 809, was attacked by a Jap suicide plane, but fortunately the gunners aboard brought the Jap

down in the water, just off the ship. It was a nerve wracking experience and brought the war right to our laps. However, we did get some sleep and the next morning found us ever closer to Iwo.

We were a few miles off the south-eastern shore and could see much of the action as it progressed. Jap ammo dumps going up, amtracks moving sluggishly over the ridge, and the flashes of fire that seemed to come from every inch of the pork chop shaped island. More wounded were brought aboard, but we were beginning to act like veterans.

The day passed slowly, and the thought that was uppermost in all our minds was, "when are we going ashore?" We didn't want to be part of the inferno that was now Iwo and yet we somehow felt that it would be better than waiting offshore and just being spectators in this modern history in the making. Night fell again, and though we were on the alert, it passed without incident. The big guns boomed all night, but we were partially used to them by now, and most of us slept.

The next day, #8FA0CC an electric current seemed to run through the fleet when over the ship's P.A. system came the announcement, "our troops have raised Old Glory on Mt. Suribachi." We all felt thrilled by the announcement, and this meant to us that the Japs couldn't hold the rock, no matter how long or bitterly they fought for it. Life aboard ship for the next few days was torturous. It was hard to relax, hard to keep from looking at the blazing island, now only a few hundred yards from us. We wanted to go ashore and see for ourselves what the score was. The Marines had already taken Motoyama Airfield number one, and we wanted to go ashore and set up. We were eager and anxious to see our Mustangs taking off from our strip.

Finally, in the afternoon of 23 February, the first shore party from the 386th went ashore under the group's beachmaster, Capt. Decker. That night the LST 809 prepared to disembark our troops under command of Major Head, and the following day the rest of the troops aboard the Carteret come ashore under Col. Cook. Our beach landing was not at all as we had anticipated, and there wasn't even a wet shoe in the entire group. We got together on the beach, near a wrecked Sherman tank, and then followed a Marine guide over the ridge of the beach to the airfield. The volcanic sand and ash was soft and deep and walking on it with a full pack was a rough job. The beach itself was steep, and those first few hundred yards were the toughest any of us had ever climbed.

All this time, the Marine 155's were singing out over our heads, and we kept flinching involuntarily. However, after a few minutes of the steady bombardment we got used to the sound and took it in stride. The beach was a beehive of frenzied activity. Ammo was being unloaded all the time, the wounded were being brought back to the beach in endless streams, and the litter of wrecked Jap and American equipment spread out as far as the eye could see. Loud speaker horns were barking out the beachmaster's orders for unloading, and at the same time the ships at sea were still throwing their heaviest shells into the central part of the island.

We finally reach our area, in the ridge of the south part of the airfield, and set to work with our entrenching tools to build our foxholes. We dug them deep, and lined them with empty ammo crates or sand bags. This was to be home to us for the next few rugged weeks. After the digging we felt surprisingly hungry and for the first time we made the acquaintance of the army "K" ration. We

were too damn hungry to think about it much, but as hungry as we were, we felt that these cardboard meals were a Jap trick. When dusk fell, we were told to hole in, and stay in. There was no moving around at night, because anything that moved was taken to be a Jap, and there were no questions asked. With our blankets and field jackets acting as both mattress and cover we hit the sack with all our clothes on, and our carbine very close at hand.

Tracers and flares lit up the sky, and overhead a curtain of 90 and 105 mm shells did their best to let us know that we were no longer in the security of our homes, or even in the air bases on Oahu. We did not sleep much that night, and most of us were awake to see the sun rise.

After a "K" ration breakfast of delicious cheese, we set about getting the area in order, and getting the airfield ready. A detail of 175 men went out on the strip to pick up all the shrapnel and loose metal so that the dozers and other heavy equipment could lay the dirt flat for the evacuation planes and fighters.

Our lectures and training in Jap booby traps made us plenty wary, and as we fanned out and moved forward from the south end of the field we made close inspections of anything on the ground. The sun was very strong, and in addition the dust was heavy so that made the work uncomfortable as well as difficult. However, we gained courage after the first half hour, and the cleaning of the field went forward at good speed.

We got our baptism of Jap fire just before noon, when a mortar shell screeched its way from the nip positions North of the field. Everybody hit the dirt and lay flat, and fortunately no one in the group was hit.. We were all plenty scared though and kept our eyes and ears open at all times.

L-5's were already using the strip to act as the eyes of the big guns, and they looked as though they could take off and land on the back of a truck. They flew above the Jap lines with no arms at all, to report the Jap positions to our guns. A carbine bullet could have brought them down, but they acted as though there were no danger of any kind. The kids who flew those ships had a lot of guts, and more than once we wanted to tell them what we thought of them.

The next week and a half made us veterans of forward operations, and the men were beginning to function as a group again. We started an equipment search party, and many of the men were occupied with tracking down the group's boxes as it came off the ships, and grabbing it before the Marines or Sea Bees got to it.

Other men were working on the field and getting it in condition, and still others were building up the living area and the command posts. We got used to the "K" ration, but never got to like it, and the highlight of many a day would be a can of peaches or pineapples hi-jacked from a navy ration dump.

We got used to our canteen of water a day, and made it stretch for drinking and washing both. We got used to the foxholes, and at night it would take more than the booming of the big guns to keep us awake. One night however, only the most sleepy of us stayed asleep. That was the night a Jap

mortar shell landed smack in the middle of the 5th Marine Division ammo dump, a few hundred feet from our foxholes. For close to six hours Iwo Jima had the most impressive Fourth of July celebration that it will ever have.

We got used to the outdoor four holers, the stubble of beard on our faces, the lack of military titles and salutes, and the continual pounding of the guns. The only experience we never got hardened to was the sight of the never ending line of Marine casualties being brought back from the front lines on jeeps, amtracks, duck and weasels. Down the middle of the line the wounded would come, and on both sides of the road replacements would be marching up to the front. We hated to look, yet we couldn't look away.

The lack of mail began to worry us also, but one happy day, about ten days after coming ashore, the first mail to reach us on Iwo came in through the Fifth Amphib Corps post office. It was the happiest day we had spent on Iwo, and for a few minutes we could almost forget the blood and battle all around us as we were home again with Mom, or the wife and kids, or the girl friend.

On 5 March, the men of the sub-assault arrived, and we who were there "so much" longer than the greenhorns could act like the veterans we were. We told a lot of tall stories, and did a lot of truth stretching, but it didn't take the new men long to catch on. The first few weeks assumed some semblance of normalcy because a few of the things we had been used to were begun again. A field exchange was set up in a tent, and Cpl. Bob Yaeger operated it as though it were the biggest exchange in the Pacific. Chaplain Elder Newton started services for men of all faiths, and many of these were held in shell holes and dug-outs while the roaring still continued all around us. Those services meant a lot to us, and helped us maintain our faith.

After the Sherman tanks had cleared out of the area to the west of the field, our group moved into what was to be our permanent area. The squadron and GP command posts were set up and operating, and a public address system was rigged up to play music and news as often as possible during the day. The progress of the battle on Iwo was followed by us all on the two war maps of the island which were kept up daily in front of the group CP and the group PX. This information was gotten from G-2 of the 5th Corps every morning.

One of the most exciting events to us all was the visit of the first Superfort to Iwo on 4 March. The field was far from ready, and theoretically a few hundred feet short for a B-29, but this afternoon we saw the big ship dip low over the field, and we knew she was going to attempt a landing. He made three passes over the field, and then came in for his landing from the South end. We all stood there with open mouths and watched the big baby come in. She came in low, dipped a wing, twisted right and rolled on the dirt runway. We all cheered as loud as we could, slapped each other on the back, and then ran as close to the ship as we could get. The pilot got out, a 20 year old, 2nd Lt. and told us that he was low on gas, but hated like hell to ditch the ship. "The field looked pretty good, and I knew she was in our hands, so I thought I'd try it."

We gassed him up, and a few hours later he backed up as far as possible, revved his motors and lifted the ship from the last few feet on the South end of the runway. The big ship dipped her wings

in a giant "Thank You" gesture, straightened out, and headed home for the Marianas. The first installment was paid for the terrific cost of Iwo Jima.

Within the group conditions were improving. A movie circuit was started, first films every other night, and later on every night. USO shows started to come in and the "stink holler radio city music hall" was built especially for the Dick Jurgin's show and his troupe. Other shows to play the "stink holler", were Charley Ruggles, Gene Autry, "winged pigeons", Al Pierce, "Duck Cutters Revue", "Grounded Gadgets", all stars navy show, "Foxhole Medly" and the USO sports show.

"Group Snoop" re-appeared, in addition to the "Island Inquirer" and the 7th Fighter Command's "Fighter Post". The first enlisted men's club on the island was started in the group, and the post exchange moved into a well finished Quonset hut. In addition to this, the group started the first off duty school in the Western Pacific Base Command, when "Iwo Jima University" was set up. A faculty of fourteen 386th officers and men taught over twenty courses for a period of thirteen weeks to well over 300 men. The university got publicity in the New York Times, "Brief", and even got a bid from a stateside fraternity to start a chapter here. Our work in the operation was highly commended by General Moore in a letter of citation to every man in the group. At the same time, we were the only unit in Fighter Command to be awarded the "meritorious service unit citation" which authorizes every man in the group to wear the award wreath on the right sleeve.

It looks as though our next beachhead will be San Francisco, and our next uniform will be the pin-striped suit we have been dreaming about. Our next orders will come from that Oh so lovely gal we have been waiting for, and our next sack will have an innerspring mattress. It may be a matter of weeks, or perhaps a matter of months before we all get home, but don't lose hope; this will be the longest and toughest sweat we will ever have to face, but it can't be too far away now. See you in Frisco, or St. Louis, or Dallas, or Portland, or Reno, or Orange, or New York.

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.