

73 AIR DIVISION



MISSION

LINEAGE

5 Heavy Bombardment Processing Headquarters constituted, 9 Feb 1943
Activated, 17 Feb 1943
Redesignated 73 Bombardment Operational Training Wing (Heavy), 12 Aug 1943
Inactivated, 15 Oct 1943
Redesignated 73 Bombardment Wing, Very Heavy, 19 Nov 1943
Activated, 20 Nov 1943
Redesignated 73 Bombardment Wing, Very Heavy, Special, 13 Jan 1944
Redesignated 73 Bombardment Wing, Very Heavy, 24 Jun 1944
Inactivated, 31 May 1946
Activated in the Reserve, 12 Jun 1947
Redesignated 73 Air Division, Bombardment, 16 Apr 1948
Inactivated, 27 Jun 1949
Redesignated 73 Air Division (Weapons), 1 Apr 1957
Activated, 1 Jul 1957
Redesignated 73 Air Division, 1 Mar 1963
Discontinued and inactivated, 1 Apr 1966

STATIONS

Walker AAFld, KS, 12 Aug 1943
Smoky Hill AAFld, KS, 30 Jun-15 Oct 1943
Smoky Hill AAFld, KS, 20 Nov 1943
Colorado Springs, CO, 29 Feb-17 Jul 1944

Isley Field, Saipan, 24 Aug 1944-20 Oct 1945
MacDill Field, FL, 15 Jan-31 May 1946
Orchard Place Airport, IL, 12 Jun 1947-29 Jun 1949
Tyndall AFB, FL, 1 Jul 1957-1 Apr 1966

ASSIGNMENTS

Second Air Force, 12 Aug-15 Oct 1943
XX Bomber Command, 20 Nov 1943
Second Air Force, 2 Jun-30 Jul 1944
Twentieth Air Force, c. 6 Aug 1944
XXI Bomber Command, 9 Nov 1944-16 Jul 1945
Twentieth Air Force, 16 Jul 1945
Fourth Air Force, 7 Dec 1945
Third Air Force, 5 Jan 1946
Strategic Air Command, 21 Mar 1946
Fifteenth Air Force, 31 Mar-31 May 1946
Second Air Force, 12 Jun 1947
Tenth Air Force, 1 Jul 1948-27 Jun 1949
Air Defense Command, 1 Jul 1957-1 Apr 1966

COMMANDERS

Unkn, 17 Feb-11 Aug 1943
Col Thomas H. Chapman, 12 Aug-15 Oct 1943
Unkn, 20 Nov 1943
Col Thomas H. Chapman, 27 Nov 1943
Brig Gen Emmett O'Donnell Jr., 15 Mar 1944
Col Morris J. Lee, 16 Sep 1945
Col Neil B. Harding, 28 Jan-14 May 1946
Unkn, 15-31 May 1946
Brig Gen Milton H. Askins, 1 Jul 1957
Maj Gen Frederick R. Terrell, 1 Jul 1960
Brig Gen Robert W. Burns, 2 Jul 1962
Col Jean H. Daugherty, 8 May 1965
Brig Gen Thomas H. Beeson, 31 Jul 1965-1 Apr 1966

HONORS

Service Streamers

World War II
American Theater

Campaign Streamers

World War II
Western Pacific

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

EMBLEM



Azure, a diminished border argent, issuant from base and sinister two piles throughout bendwise the sinister overlapping the dexter and terminating upon the border of the last, each charged with an arrowhead sable garnished of the second and emitting a flight trail throughout or edged gules. (Approved, 9 Apr 1958)

MOTTO

OPERATIONS

As the 73d wing, it first trained in U. S. and then moved to Saipan in Aug 1944. It flew several bombing missions against Truk to gain combat experience before bombing Iwo Jima. In Nov 1944, the 73d began bombing Japan, with only moderate success. Poor weather, the lack of precision radar bombing equipment, and tremendous winds encountered at high altitudes over Japan made accuracy difficult. Consequently, it turned to devastating low altitude incendiary attacks. In addition to Tokyo, Nagoya, and Osaka, the 73d fire bombed numerous Japanese cities until war's end. As the 73d Air Division, it evaluated, upgraded, and determined the proficiency of the Air Defense Command fighter-interceptor and missile squadrons, 1 Jul 1957-1 Apr 1966. The division developed and tested Air Defense Command tactics, equipment, aircraft, guided missiles, and related equipment and armaments. It also maintained active contact with Army, Navy, and other Air Force commands to assure coordinated military effort in the use of rocket and missile ranges, defense plans, air sea land rescue, and airspace and airways directly concerned with the operations of the Air Defense Command Weapons Center.

Before leaving Saipan a number of men with the 73rd Wing and its units expressed a hope that some sort of a history of our organization would be published and made available to all Wing personnel. The Wing historical officer seemed the logical person to do this since he had handled the official history of the Wing which is now on file in Washington. In response to this demand, as well as to other requests received since returning to the States, this volume is prepared. While material in the book is partly borrowed from the official history, it is mostly written and collected now after a few months in the States have mellowed our memories of the Marianas.

The 73rd Wing, as a whole, was a homogeneous, hard-working organization. Its personnel were cooperative with one another and did a tremendous piece of work on and from Saipan. The Wing was not only the first 20th Air Force organization to hit Tokyo but it also dropped the largest number of bombs on the Japanese Empire and flew the most missions of any of the 20th's five wings.

To the 15,000 men who went through the months on Saipan, those months were long and hard. While these men may not have actually been in the front lines, the Wing's casualty list of both men and airplanes show that we were a fighting organization. Also our living conditions were far from comfortable most of the time. Our food was sometimes inferior and our quarters were not too good. We were subject to Japanese raids during the early part of the period. Nevertheless, our memories of Saipan will always be close to us.

While this volume is written primarily from the point of view of the Wing Headquarters itself it should be of interest to all personnel of the Wing's organizations. After all, the Wing did operate as a single unit from Saipan and the groups never did operate independently. The statistics and figures included have to do with the Wing operation as a whole rather than any particular organization. This history will necessarily lack the personal touch that the story of a smaller unit might have. Personalities are pretty much lost in the over-all picture.

These 73rd Wing organizations included the four tactical groups—the 497th, the 498th, the 499th and the 500th Bombardment Groups. Also there were the four Air Service Groups—the 65th, 91st, 303rd and 330th. Without these maintenance and engineering specialists and the Service Centers they manned, the Wing would surely have failed.

Then there were the 880th and 887th Chemical Companies (Air Operations) that handled our incendiary bombs. Burned Japanese cities attested their efficiency. The 323rd Signal Company Wing made communications easy for us because of its own innate ability.

Two other smaller organizations also made noteworthy contributions. The 435th Aviation Squadron did wonders with jackhammers as well as easier equipment. While the 435th was not actually assigned to the 73rd, it worked so closely with us that it was practically a part of the Wing. The 558th AAF Band kept our morale high with its concerts and parades. Also the Band gave us stature as a military organization.

The contribution of Lieutenant Lane and his 237th Army Postal Unit in getting our mail to us cannot be judged by the small size of the unit. It can only be estimated from the morale improvement experienced after receipt of mail.

It is to all the men of the Wing from General O'Donnell to the most recent replacement private to join us that this volume is addressed. Its author is aware that many pictures that might well be included are left out and that much material of interest to many has been omitted. In extenuation I can only plead that some negatives and records have been lost or are now unavailable. Also the book had to be kept in a comparatively small compass for so ambitious an undertaking as a combat Wing history.

The 499th and 500th Bombardment Groups and the 65th and 91st Air Service Groups were deactivated right after returning. Wing Headquarters, the 497th and 498th Bombardment Groups and the 303rd and 330th Air Service Groups started to reassemble at March Field as ordered. However, on December 22 these units were transferred to MacDill Field in Florida. Since so few had returned from temporary duty there was confusion of orders reminiscent of the early Clovis days. By the middle of January, 1946, Headquarters for these units were operating on a very curtailed scale. In March the 497th and 303rd groups were deactivated so in April the Wing consisted of only the 498th and 330th and the 323rd Signal Company (with personnel of two.) There had been all sorts of rumors about the future of the Wing—it was going to Puerto Rico to patrol the Antilles—it was to stay in the States as a training wing—it was to be elevated to an Air Division.

Finally, on May 14, 1946, the 73rd Bombardment Wing was deactivated and all its remaining personnel transferred to the VIII Bomber Command. The Wing had finished in Florida the road it started in Kansas.

The presence on the island of four service groups, each set up to operate the base for 5,000 men, presented a problem as to how our personnel could be utilized to their full extent without a duplication of working effort. This was resolved by integration of personnel from the 65th and 91st groups into Service Center A to service the 497th and 498th planes on the northern strip and the personnel of the 303rd and 330th into Service Center B to service the 499th and 500th group

planes on the southern strip. During the period of operations, salvage and reclamation shops, tire build-up and engine build-up were centralized as Wing projects.

The Service Centers began operations at the beginning of November. Shop facilities and most shop equipment were lacking for Service Center A but operations were begun out of squad tents. Service Center B had opportunity to construct some shops prior to beginning operations. Considerable operations during the early months were hampered by lack of shop facilities and equipment and necessary detailing of shop personnel to construct them.

During the period from March 1 to August 22 the Service Centers repaired 564 aircraft for the five months period for which figures are available. Eighty-one per cent of these aircraft were repaired and returned to the organization within three days. Every four weeks the

approximately 600 men actually assigned to duty in the Service Centers supplied some 100,000 man hours of work. A breakdown of the use of this time was that 66% was utilized on work directly pertaining to aircraft, seven per cent for other work such as repairs of small arms, typewriters and the like, 26% for shop overhead and only one per cent for delay representing the time spent waiting for work or transportation.

73rd Bombardment Wing (VH) was activated in Salina, Kansas on November 24, 1943. This activation was necessitated by the growth of the B-29 project to a point where the old 58th Wing was no longer large enough to handle all the B-29 groups. The 20th Bomber Command was activated at the same time and that Command became the higher echelon for both the 58th and the 73rd.

In December of 1943, the 73rd did nothing but accumulate personnel. This personnel was partly overages from the 58th Wing and the 20th Command and most were men who had been overseas in all the various fighting air forces and had returned to a tour in the 2nd Air Force. All were most eager to get into the very heavy program and were pleased with their assignment. As a result of this, there was great enthusiasm in the new Wing.

The number—73rd—came from the old 73rd Bombardment Operational Training Wing which had formerly existed at Salina and had been deactivated. On the first of December the Wing Headquarters was actually set up in a corner of one of the new Bomber Command offices with Technical Sergeant Horace A. Blagg as the entire Wing Headquarters enlisted personnel—and he was only part-time.

On that day the morning report started with the statement, "No personnel yet asgd." One might wonder, looking at such a morning report, who had typed the morning report for the date in question. One might wonder even more, on glancing over the morning reports for the next week, since all read just like the first one. The explanation is that Sergeant Blagg was not really assigned as yet but was only borrowed. The 73rd, then, started with a borrowed part-time clerk at a borrowed desk in someone else's office.

The first Wing Commander, Colonel Thomas H. Chapman, had already been assigned but was actually away from Salina at this time attending to the mysterious business that always arises with the birth of a new army unit.

All four of the Wing's bombardment groups had been activated by the same 2nd Air Force General Order (Number 176) which activated the Wing Headquarters. These groups were the 497th at Biggs Field, El Paso, Texas, the 498th at Clovis Army Air Field in New Mexico, the 499th at Davis-Monthan Field in Tucson, Arizona, and the 500th at Gowan Field, Boise, Idaho. All four of the groups, on activation, had four bombardment squadrons and four bombardment maintenance squadrons. Also each group had a photo lab.

Chapman and Major Love, who was acting adjutant, to move into it. Carpenters were still working in most of the rooms of the building so only these two rooms were actually occupied

before New Year's. Throughout December the organization of the Wing moved forward—at least on paper. A plethora of officers was assigned and they held temporary jobs as acting or assistant section heads for a while and then moved again. Many of these temporary section heads were actually destined for the various groups.

Throughout the period that the Wing Headquarters was in Salina, this organization was maintained. Each of the groups had a group commander who changed frequently—in some cases daily—and almost no other personnel. Only the 499th had its permanent commander—Colonel Wiley D. Ganey—in this early period. He assumed command on the seventh of February.

The bombardment maintenance squadrons of all four groups were assigned directly to the four Kansas bases of Pratt, Great Bend, Victoria and Salina, where the four groups were to train after the departure of the 58th Wing for India. This gave the maintenance personnel of the 73rd an excellent opportunity to secure valuable training by working on the 58th's planes.

The Wing and all its units spent practically full time attempting to reach table of organization strength during the first quarter of 1944. On March fifteenth, Brigadier General Emmett O'Donnell assumed command of the Wing when it was relinquished by Colonel Chapman.

In February, an advance command post of the Wing had been set up in Clovis where personnel of all four groups had been concentrated. Housing conditions were very bad in Clovis and were especially aggravated by the large numbers there. Some training, especially ground school, was begun in Clovis but conditions were not favorable to a real training program. The 58th Wing had virtually left the Kansas bases by the end of March so our groups began moving to them.

Also at the end of March the need for better liaison between the 2nd Air Force and the 73rd Wing Headquarters had become so great that the Wing Headquarters was ordered to move to Colorado Springs where 2nd Air Force Headquarters was located. On March 27, the Wing closed its offices in Salina.

In April the group reorganizations were started and soon Colonel Stuart P. Wright was in command of the 497th, Colonel Samuel R. Harris of the 499th and Colonel Richard T. King, Jr. of the 500th. The fact that colonels were now in command of all of the groups, instead of just the 498th, gave them more authority and greater standing as organizations. The various new commanders immediately went to work on reorganizing their groups.

In addition to the new colonels in command of the groups, Wing Headquarters received Colonel George E. Schaetzel who became A-4 and Colonel Byron E. Brugge as A-3. Later both men were elevated to be Deputy Chiefs of Staff, when that office was introduced in a later new reorganization. These men both reached the Headquarters with considerable experience and they still further increased the prestige of the Wing.

During the Colorado Springs period of the Wing history, reorganization after reorganization based on almost constant changes in the table of organization kept everyone in a turmoil and lowered morale considerably. This led to constant uneasiness. The most important change to the Wing as a whole was the reorganization of groups when they changed over from four bombardment squadrons and four bombardment maintenance squadrons each to just three tactical squadrons each. These squadrons combined the personnel of the maintenance squadrons with that of the bombardment squadrons. The former table of organization had called for seven airplanes per squadron, making a total of 28 to each group while the new number of airplanes was ten per squadron or 30 to a group so actually the size of the groups in both personnel and equipment was about the same or a little larger than before.

Throughout its training period the entire B-29 program had some difficulty with morale since so many of the men in the program had had considerable combat time overseas and they disliked having to go through further training in the States. However, they found the training bearable when they could see progress being made.

During this time the Wing directed that all personnel be given leaves or furloughs as soon as possible so that these leaves or furloughs would be over by the middle of the summer and would not interfere with the latter part of the training program. An opportunity to go home for a short time pleased everyone.

The months of May and June were good months for the 73rd Wing. Training, both aerial and ground, progressed most satisfactorily. The only real difficulty was insufficient radar equipment in the B-29s, which prevented the completion of a lot of training missions, but the flying time was kept at a high level.

Wing headquarters received its first official intimation of its eventual movement overseas on the second of May when warning orders arrived from the 2nd Air Force. This was welcome news to the entire staff as well as to the personnel of all the groups. It resulted not only in improved morale but also in increased interest in both training and overseas processing.

The first Wing conference and Wing Ding took place on June 1 at the Officers' Club of the 2nd Air Force Headquarters in Colorado Springs. This conference, as well as the later ones held at the various Kansas bases, was planned not only as a social get-together of all the groups' staff officers but also for the transaction of some general Wing business and a conference on Wing policies. These functions led to a better acquaintanceship among the officers doing various types of work in the different groups and their opposite numbers in other groups. This gave the organizations in the Wing a feeling of Wing solidarity and esprit de corps.

Just after the first Wing Ding, the announcement of the addition of the air service groups to the Wing was made. All four of them—the 65th, the 91st, the 303rd and the 330th were to remain at Tinker Field in Oklahoma City until they departed for overseas service. The reason for assigning these particular air service groups to the 73rd was to give the Wing the highest possible experience level of maintenance and engineering personnel. There were other less

experienced service groups at the Kansas bases who were actually taking care of our service problems at that time.

A little later in June, the divorce of the 73rd Wing and its units from the 20th Bomber Command became a matter of record when the 2nd Air Force announced it. Next the 21st Bomber Command was activated at Peterson Field and the 73rd became the first wing of that command.

So far as activity in Kansas and Colorado was concerned, July was a month of routine training for the Wing. Much overseas processing was also completed.

The first elements of the Wing's personnel started for Saipan in July. On the eighteenth, the ground echelon of the Wing Headquarters personnel departed from Colorado Springs. Also during July ground echelons of the bombardment-groups left their Kansas bases and the service groups departed from Tinker Field. These ground echelons and the service group personnel, all of which traveled by boat, really had a serious "gripe". The trip was a long and arduous one—in the case of the Headquarters squadron, it took 61 days by ship.

All of the other ground echelons took practically the same time since there were long delays either at Oahu or at Eniwetok or both. Some of the ships carrying our personnel and equipment spent as much as three weeks "stewing" in Eniwetok lagoon in the Marshalls. During these long pauses the personnel were allowed on shore only a short time at most and the steel plates of the decks of the ships just became hotter and hotter.

The Headquarters squadron ground echelon finally arrived in Saipan on the sixteenth of September and found considerable personnel from both the tactical and service groups already there. During September, other elements of the various ground echelons continued to arrive until by the end of the month most of them were working on construction of their own areas with the service groups aiding the tactical groups and Headquarters with their construction.

On the fourth of October the first enemy to be captured by the 73rd Wing was turned in by Sergeant Frank Veselovsky of the 870th Squadron in the 497th Group. The Sergeant and two other men from that squadron were out on a "scavenger" hunt for some machine parts that were much needed. They were, perhaps, a bit too eager in their scavenging.

He was much taken aback when he saw a Japanese standing there. The prisoner stood with his hands folded on top of his head and seemed a little surprised at the hubbub he caused. The interpreter later found that he was Yaskaski Oiomo and that he was a member of a conscript labor battalion that had come to Saipan about 2,000 strong. All but four of his organization had been either killed or wounded and he had lost track of the other three. Some time earlier he had noticed that the Americans were digging ditches and building roads and since that was what he had been brought to Saipan to do, he thought that maybe he could labor for the Americans as well as for his own countrymen. All he wanted was a little food in return.

The reaction of our soldiers toward these prisoners was interesting. Both men were weak and sickly looking when captured and both were the recipients of many gifts of food and other little things. All these things were most courteously accepted. For many, pity seemed to overcome incipient hate when the Americans saw these two puny, beaten Sons of Heaven.

The second prisoner of war mission was a maximum effort with 159 airplanes airborne. This mission carried three days supplies for 31,800 men and flew to camps all over the Empire. Following it the Wing flew two small and one large mission before the end of August. Then on the second of September there was a 31-plane mission carrying supplies to Honshu.

September 2 was an important date for the Wing since it marked the actual official termination of hostilities with the signing of the peace on the USS Missouri moored in Tokyo Bay. While combat credit had been given to crew members for the supply missions up to that date, afterward: that was no longer true.

There were sixteen more prisoner of war supply missions. These carried supplies to camps throughout the main Japanese islands as well as Korea and several points in China. The last mercy mission was on September 15 and it was also the very last mission of any type flown by the 73rd Wing except for some weather missions.

The minor missions of the 73rd have not been discussed in this history. It may be worthwhile to remember that the Wing did fly weather strike missions and weather reconnaissance missions frequently throughout its term of service on Saipan. These were missions of one or two planes designed to study weather and drop a few bombs in the case of weather strike missions.

Also the Wing flew a number of leaflet missions when small formations of planes dropped leaflets on different parts of Japan. Frequently these leaflets contained information, in Japanese, telling the inhabitants of various cities that they were about to be bombed by the 73rd Wing's incendiaries and warning the inhabitants to depart. A mission of this type was, of course, a mercy mission and it is presumed that some Japanese did heed the warnings.

To get back to the prisoner of war missions— the Wing had a total of 580 aircraft airborne on all missions and 472 of them were effective. The noneffective planes suffered mostly from bad weather but mechanical failures and impossibility of locating some camps contributed. The Wing released 2,470 tons of supplies on prisoner of war installations. All of these prisoner of war missions cost the Wing four aircraft. One of these crashed into a mountain on Honshu. One was forced down by the Russians over Korea and two were missing.

Our Service Centers also did a tremendous job in loading the supplies for B29s of the other wings. All the planes from Guam and Tinian came to Isley for their prisoner of war supplies. So many came that they were packed in nose to tail on one runway after filling all possible parking places. Isley was quite a sight with all those hundreds of planes being loaded by the 73rd's service personnel.

DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE ORGANIZATIONAL HISTORIES

Created: 10 May 2025

Updated:

Sources

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

The Institute of Heraldry. U.S. Army. Fort Belvoir, Virginia.

Unit History. *The Story of the 73rd The Unofficial History of the 73rd Bomb Wing*. Nd.