

6160 AIR BASE GROUP

MISSION

LINEAGE

6160 Air Base Group

STATIONS

Itazuke AB, Japan

ASSIGNMENTS

COMMANDERS

HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

EMBLEM

MOTTO

OPERATIONS

On 7 July 1950, the 6160th Air Base Group activated its boat section at Itazuke Air Base (AB), Japan, with one FP-47 (114-foot boat), one lieutenant, and four airmen. Shortly thereafter it became Detachment 1, 6160th ABG. The detachment commander, 1st Lt Phil Dickey, promptly moved out to reassemble all former boat crewmen still in-theater and whatever boats were still seaworthy. Dickey found the effort to acquire seaworthy boats easier than getting the crewmen, but Detachment 1 shortly counted seven 63-foot, eight 85-foot, and one 104-foot

boats in addition to the original FP-47. His efforts to get the crews back together again, brought the lieutenant to the unfavorable attention of several senior officers, themselves frantic to get their own undermanned units ready for war. Phone calls from Fifth Air Force headquarters soon straightened out the senior officers, if not their antipathy toward the young officer. Lieutenant Dickey's word-of-mouth communications among the small crash rescue boat fraternity managed to bring a beginning cadre of 85 airmen back together, and Detachment 1 was soon off to the war.

Detachment 1's small fleet of boats was immediately dispersed by FEAF throughout its entire area of operations. From south to north, the boats were stationed in Guam (Andersen AB), Okinawa (Kadena and Naha ABs), Japan (Haneda, Miho, Ashiya, Itazuke, and Brady ABs), and into the line of fire itself in Korea: Pohang (K-3), Pusan (K-9), Chinhae (K-10), Kunsan (K-8).

A few boats operating in their designated rescue role in Korean waters went further north of the 38th parallel and the main line of resistance separating the massive Communist and US armies on the peninsula itself. These 85-foot boats, operating near Wonsan Harbor on Korea's eastern coast and especially near Cho-do Island off the west coast, found themselves between hundreds of small, seemingly deserted islands and the coastline itself. And in doing so, they found themselves operating in a war that no one had yet briefed them on, the secret spook war between CCRAK and the Communist forces on the peninsula. Inevitably drawn into this war, they went with the full blessings of the Fifth Air Force. By stationing themselves so far north to aid allied combat pilots ditching in the sea or even downed airman attempting to evade to the shoreline from further inland, the boats were seen by many as useful transport for another purpose. As the boat crews soon learned, the seemingly deserted islands were anything but empty.

Like the Navy's famous PT boats of World War II, the crash boats' defense was limited to firepower, speed, and the quick thinking of their commanders. Their wooden-hulled boats offered no hope should a serious mistake be made or simple bad luck catch up with its crews. By the summer of 1952, Detachment 1 had grown significantly from its initial cadre of 85 "sailors." In July of that year, Headquarters USAF reorganized the detachment by activating the 22d Crash Boat Rescue Squadron at Itazuke Air Base.

DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE UNIT HISTORIES

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Sources

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