

## 63<sup>rd</sup> BOMBARDMENT SQUADRON, MEDIUM



### MISSION

### LINEAGE

63 Bombardment Squadron (Heavy) constituted 20 Nov 1940

Activated, 15 Jan 1941

Inactivated, 29 Apr 1946

Redesignated 63 Bombardment Squadron, Very Heavy and activated, 1 Oct 1946

Redesignated 63 Bombardment Squadron, Medium, 2 Jul 1948

### STATIONS

Langley Field, VA, 15 Jan 1941

Bangor, ME, 28 Aug 1941-17 Feb 1942

Sydney, Australia, 28 Mar 1942

Charleville, Australia, 15 Jun 1942

Torrens Creek, Australia, 3 Aug 1942

Mareeba, Australia, 20 Aug 1942

Port Moresby, New Guinea, 23 Jan 1943

Dobodura, New Guinea, 29 Oct 1943

Nadzab, New Guinea, Apr 1944

Owi, Schouten Islands, 20 Jul 1944

Tacloban, Leyte, 23 Nov 1944

Clark Field, Luzon, 19 Mar 1945  
Ie Shima, 25 Jul 1945  
Ft William McKinley, Luzon, 10 Dec 1945-29 Apr 1946  
Davis-Monthan Field, AZ, 1 Oct 1946  
Carswell AFB, TX, 15 Mar 1960-1 Sep 1964  
Little Rock AFB, AR, 1 Sep 1964-31 Jan 1970

### **DEPLOYED STATIONS**

Fairford, England, 18 Sep 1954-9 Dec 1954

### **ASSIGNMENTS**

43<sup>rd</sup> Bombardment Group, 15 Jan 1941-29 Apr 1946  
43<sup>rd</sup> Bombardment Group, 1 Oct 1946  
43<sup>rd</sup> Bombardment Wing 16 Jun 1952

### **WEAPON SYSTEMS**

B-18  
B-25  
B-17  
LB-30  
B-17, 1942-1943  
B-24, 1943-1945  
B-29, 1949-1950  
B-50, 1948-1954  
B-47, 1954-1960  
B-58, 1960

### **COMMANDERS**

Maj John G. Fowler, 15 Jan 1941  
Maj Leonard E. Symroski, 10 Jan 1942  
Lt Col James O. Ellis, 16 Aug 1942  
Maj William G. Benn, 6 Sep 1942  
Maj Edward W. Scott, Jr., 14 Nov 1942  
Capt Folmer Sogaard, 24 May 1943  
Capt John Van Trigt, 16 Aug 1943  
Capt Robert L. Coleman, 27 Nov 1943  
Capt Herbert O. Derr, 6 Dec 1943  
Maj Harry G. Park, 30 May 1944  
Maj Merrill F. Sargent, 29 Aug 1944  
Maj Albert W. Brownfield, 15 Jan 1945  
Maj Earl A. Butts, 22 May 1945  
Maj Rowlett, #1948  
Lt Col Harold E. Confer, #1964

## **HONORS**

### **Service Streamers**

#### **Campaign Streamers**

Antisubmarine, American Theater

Air Offensive, Japan

China Defensive, Papua

Guadalcanal

New Guinea

Northern Solomons

Bismarck Archipelago

Western Pacific

Leyte

Luzon

Ryukyus

China Offensive

#### **Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers**

#### **Decorations**

Distinguished Unit Citations

Papua, [14 Aug] 1942-23 Jan 1943

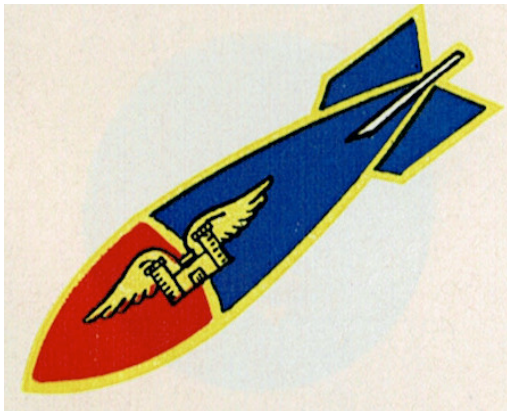
Bismarck Sea, 2-4 Mar 1943

Philippine Presidential Unit Citation

Air Force Outstanding Unit Award

1 Aug 1960-1 Aug 1962

## **EMBLEM**





B17



B24



Creation of the 63rd Seahawk name and logo occurred during the transition from B-17 Flying Fortress to the B-24, which took place with "The Scott Project", a group of low altitude, radar-equipped Liberators dedicated to attacking shipping. Capt. Herbert Derr was the Squadron Commanding Officer who decided that a new identity was required, hence the creation of the "Seahawks" nickname. He and artist Thomas Rote created the design for the new squadron insignia.

63<sup>rd</sup> Bombardment Squadron, Medium emblem: two stylized boomerangs interlaced, yellow and black, the yellow boomerang's point is upward, the black boomerang's point is downward. (Approved, 11 Aug 1954)

#### **MOTTO**

#### **OPERATIONS**

Antisubmarine, Dec 1941-Feb 1942; combat in Southwest and Western Pacific, 14 Aug 1942-14 Aug 1945, using airborne radar after Oct 1943 for many low-level attacks at night, and for pathfinder operations.

In May and June, the unit's squadrons were moved to other bases in Australia for preliminary combat training, but by 1 August the 43rd and its elements were reunited at Torrens Creek. The following day the Group received its first plane, the Chief of Seattle, a gift from the city of Seattle, Washington. On 18 August four more B-17's arrived from the United States and were assigned to the 63rd Squadron; the rest of the Group's aircraft continued to arrive through November. In August, the 63rd Squadron, the only component of the Group equipped with aircraft, moved to Mareeba, Queensland, where its personnel trained with the 19th Bombardment Group. By 20 August that squadron was ready to enter combat.

In 1942 the primary base of operations for the Allies in the Southwest Pacific was Port Moresby, the last stronghold in New Guinea. The Japanese, realizing the importance of that base, made several attempts to capture it. In July 1942, Japanese forces landed at Buna, on the northeast coast of New Guinea, and advanced across the Owen Stanley Mountains to take Port Moresby. The following month a second thrust, aimed at that city through Milne Bay, was thrown back into the sea. Among the Allied forces in that important engagement was the 63rd Squadron, which flew its first combat mission on 21 August. Led by Kenneth McCullar, then a First Lieutenant, the squadron attacked a small enemy convoy off Milne Bay and damaged one destroyer.

On 14 September 1942, B-17F, #41-24931, "Hoomalimali" of 63 Squadron caught fire at Mareeba and crashed.

For the next few months the 63rd --and other squadrons of the Group, when they entered combat--aided Australian ground forces in pushing back the Japanese thrust from Buna, which ended in the fall of that stronghold in November 1942.

In addition to its support of ground forces in New Guinea, the 63rd Bombardment Squadron conducted sea search missions and attacked enemy shipping. On 9 and 10 October, the squadron, in coordination with the 28th and 93rd Squadrons of the 19th Bombardment Group, carried out the largest raids up until that time against the enemy's powerful base of Rabaul, New Britain.

The 63rd Squadron's attacks on enemy shipping during that period were unsuccessful because the bombing was done at night and at high altitudes. To make those strikes more effective, Major William Benn, Commanding Officer of the 63rd Squadron, decided to try skip bombing. The concept of skip bombing had been originated by the RAF, but after experimentation the English had rejected it as being too dangerous and difficult. Nevertheless, Major Benn, aided by Major Edward Scott (later Commanding Officer of the 63rd Squadron), and Captains Kenneth McCullar and Franklin Green, experimented with the techniques of skip bombing on a submerged hulk beyond the harbor at Port Moresby. Trial runs were made after a low-altitude bombsight had been improvised by marking crosses on the bombardiers' windshield. Only partial success resulted until the men improvised delay-action fuses on the bombs. By October they were ready to test their techniques in combat.

Intelligence reports of that period showed continually a high concentration of shipping in Rabaul Harbor. An especially heavy concentration, reported on 20 October, invited a test of the recently

developed techniques for low-level attacks. On the night of 22 October three flights of the 63 Squadron's B-27's took off for the strike. While two of the flights bombed according to the standard bombing procedures, picked planes of the squadron, including that of Major Benn, glided down through the "moonlit darkness" and released their bombs from less than 250 feet. "Violent explosions and flying debris were observed, with the result that the experiment was considered a success"; the squadron claimed one cruiser, one destroyer, and two cargo vessels left sinking, and two cargo ships and a transport severely damaged. "A later assessment indicated that no vessels were actually sunk."

On 30 October, the 63rd Bombardment Squadron, accompanied by several planes from the 403rd Squadron, made a second attack on shipping in Rabaul Harbor. Again, several hits were made but no vessels were sunk. Although those first two missions met with little success, Major Benn, who was lost in a mission to Buna on 13 November, had paved the way for future experiments with skip-bombing techniques. Because of Major Benn's efforts, Major Paul Gunn of the 3rd Bombardment Group was able to perfect skip-bombing techniques with modified B-25's. His experiments resulted in complete success in the Battle of the Bismarck Sea and established skip bombing as standard attack procedure in the Fifth Air Force.

By 24 November 1942, when the 65th Squadron knocked out enemy gun positions at Sanananda Point in support of ground forces, the entire 43rd Group had been committed to combat. On that same day, the 63rd Squadron attacked enemy shipping in the Huon Gulf. The dangers involved in those shipping strikes, not to mention the skill and endurance of the aircrews is clearly illustrated in the following account. Just before midnight on 24 November, seven B-17's of the 63rd Squadron -- five of which had participated earlier that day in two missions aimed at supply dumps at Sanananda Point-- took off to attack five enemy destroyers reported in the Huon Gulf. After spotting the ships, the planes climbed to 3,500 feet, then dropped to 200 feet to make their first run. At that point anti-aircraft fire bursting around the planes penetrated the tail gunner's post of the B-17 piloted by Captain "Ken" McCullar, exploding "about 70 shells and starting quite a fire." Sergeant Reser, the tail gunner, succeeded in smothering the flames with winter flying equipment. McCullar made a second run. That time the radio operator and two other members of the crew were scratched by flying shrapnel. On the third run "the number 1 motor was hit and all controls shot away." The fourth run brought only minor damage to the plane, but as the bomber sought out a target for the fifth time, number 3 engine sputtered and finally "cut out." By now, one destroyer was burning fiercely and another was seriously disabled; so, with the bombardier and navigator in the back compartment of the ship "in case the prop flew off or we had to set it down," Captain McCullar fought for sufficient altitude to clear the Owen Stanley Mountains. Fortunately, number 3 engine began to function again, and after two and one half hours, according to the pilot, the crew "found a pass to sneak through, landed o.k. and forgot about it."

Not fully manned or equipped, 23 Nov 1945-29 Apr 1946.

On December 27, 1960, USAF Headquarters advised the AMC that each B-58 wing would have 40, rather than 36 aircraft. Accordingly, each squadron would be assigned 12 B-58's. At that time, and throughout the forthcoming operational years of the B-58 in AF service, the assigned B-58 squadrons

would consist of the 63rd (Medium), 64th (Medium), and the 65th (Medium) for the 43rd BW, and the 364th (Medium), 365th (Medium), and the 366th (Medium) for the 305th BW. Eventually, each wing would have 70 crews certified as combat ready. A normal duty assignment for a crew was between three and five years. Accordingly, the wing training program was designed to add three combat-ready crews to the wing each six-month period.

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USAF UNIT HISTORIES

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Sources

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

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

Air Force News. Air Force Public Affairs Agency.

Unit yearbook. *43<sup>rd</sup> Bombardment Wing, Medium, Carswell AFB, TX, The World's First Supersonic Bomb Wing. 1964*

Unit yearbook. *43<sup>rd</sup> Bombardment Wing, Davis Monthan AFB, Tucson AZ. 1948.*