

## 78<sup>th</sup> FIGHTER GROUP, AIR DEFENSE



### MISSION

#### LINEAGE

78<sup>th</sup> Pursuit Group (Interceptor) constituted, 13 Jan 1942

Activated, 9 Feb 1942

Redesignated 78<sup>th</sup> Fighter Group, May 1942

Inactivated, 18 Oct 1945

Activated, 20 Aug 1946

Redesignated 78<sup>th</sup> Fighter Interceptor Group, Jan 1950

Inactivated, 6 Feb 1952

Redesignated 78<sup>th</sup> Fighter Group (Air Defense) and activated, 18 Aug 1955

#### STATIONS

Baer Field, IN, 9 Feb 1942

Muroc, CA, c. 30 Apr 1942

Hamilton Field, CA, May-Nov 1942

Goxhill, England, Dec 1942

Duxford, England, Apr 1943-Oct 1945

Camp Kilmer, NJ, c. 16-18 Oct 1945

Straubing, Germany, 20 Aug 1946-Jun 1947

Mitchel Field, NY, Jun 1947  
Hamilton AFB, CA, Nov 1948-6 Feb 1952  
Hamilton AFB, CA, 18 Aug 1955

### **ASSIGNMENTS**

Eighth AF  
United States Air Forces in Europe  
Air Defense Command

### **WEAPON SYSTEMS**

P-38  
P-47  
P-51  
P-38G  
P-47C  
P-47D  
P-51D  
P-51K  
F-84, 1949

### **COMMANDERS**

Col Arman Peterson, May 1942  
LTC Melvin F. McNickle, Jul 1943  
Col James J. Stone Jr., 31 Jul 1943  
Col Frederic C. Gray Jr., 22 May 1944  
LTC Olin E. Gilbert, 29 Jan 1945  
Col John D. Landers, 22 Feb 1945  
LTC Roy B. Caviness, 1 Jul 1945-unkn  
Col Robert P. Montgomery, 20 Aug 1946-unkn  
Col Earl H. Dunham, 1946-unkn  
Col John B. Patrick, c. 1 Apr 1947  
Col Earl H. Dunham, c. 1 May 1947  
Col Robert W Stephens, 1 Jun 1947-unkn  
Col Barton M. Russell, 8 Dec 1948  
Col Brian O'Neill, Aug 1949-unkn  
Col Jack W. Hayes Jr., 1951-unkn  
Col Wilton H. Earle, 1955

### **HONORS**

#### **Service Streamers**

#### **Campaign Streamers**

Air Offensive, Europe  
Normandy

Northern France  
Rhineland  
Ardennes-Alsace  
Central Europe

### **Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers**

#### **Decorations**

Distinguished Unit Citations  
Holland, 17-23 Sep 1944  
Czechoslovakia, 16 Apr 1945

#### **EMBLEM**

Per pale indented azure and gules, in chief five chain lengths conjoined fesswise or. (Approved, 26 Sep 1942)

#### **MOTTO**

ABOVE THE FOE

#### **NICKNAME**

#### **OPERATIONS**

Trained for combat with P-38s and served as part of the air defense organization. Moved to England, Nov-Dec 1942. Sailed from New York on Queen Elizabeth 24 Nov 1942.

The group lost its P-38's and most of its pilots in February 1943 when they were assigned to 12th AF for service in the North African campaign.

The group was reassigned to Duxford Airfield in April 1943 and reequipped with P-47s. Aircraft of the group were identified by a black/white checkerboard pattern. The group consisted of the following squadrons: 82d Fighter Squadron (MX), 83d Fighter Squadron (HL) and 84 FS (WZ) From Duxford, the 78th flew many missions to escort B-17 and B-24 Bombers that attacked industries, submarine yards and docks, V-weapon sites, and other targets on the Continent. The unit also engaged in counter-air activities and on numerous occasions strafed and dive-bombed airfields, trains, vehicles, barges, tugs, canal locks, barracks, and troops. In addition to other operations, the 78th participated in the intensive campaign against the Luftwaffe and aircraft industry during Big Week and helped to prepare the way for the Normandy invasion. The group supported the landings in France on 6 June 1944 and contributed to the breakthrough at St. Lo in July.

The group converted to P-51Ds in December 1944 and participated in the Battle of the Bulge, December 1944 – January 1945 and supported the airborne assault across the Rhine in March. The 78th Fighter Group received a Distinguished Unit Citation for activities connected with the airborne attack on the Netherlands in September 1944 when the group covered troop carrier and bombardment operations as well as strafing and dive-bombing missions. The group received a

second DUC for destroying numerous aircraft on five airfields near Prague and Pilsen on 16 April 1945. They returned to Camp Kilmer, New Jersey and October 1945 and was inactivated in place on 18 October.

Remained in UK until Oct. 45. Many personnel transferred after VE-day. A/c to depots for disposal Sep. 45. Sailed from Southampton on Queen Mary 11 Oct. 45 and arrived New York 16 Nov. 45. Inactivated at Camp Kilmer, NJ, 18 Oct. 45.

First Mission: 13 Apr 1943

Last Mission: 25 Apr 1945

Total Missions: 450

Aircraft missing in action: 167

Enemy aircraft claims: 338.5 air; 358.5 ground.

Activated again 20 Aug. 46 at Straubing, Germany, an occupation force P-47 group . By Jun. 47 Group run down and transferred 'less personnel and equipment to Mitchel Fld, NY. Remained unmanned until Nov. 48 when rebuilt as F-84 unit at Hamilton AFB, Cal.

In February 1949, the 78th Fighter Group received the first of the new production F-84 with these aircraft going to the assigned 82d, 83d and 84th Fighter Squadrons. The F-84s became problematic with cracks appearing in wing spars or skin beginning in September. The group lost four jets in accidents by the end of the year. On 1 July 1949, Air Defense Command was inactivated as a major command, the 78th Fighter Wing being assigned to CONAC. On 1 September 1949 ConAC created the Western Air Defense Force, to which the 78th Fighter Wing was assigned. They were re-designated the 78th Fighter-Interceptor Group in January 1950. With the breakout of the Korean War in June 1950, the 78th Fighter Group was the only remaining ConAC F-84 unit with an air defense commitment, the group lost many personnel which were reassigned to Far East Air Force units engaging in combat with deployed units.

The personnel losses were replaced with less-experienced federalized Air Force Reserve or Air National Guard personnel. At the same time, CONAC placed the 78th Fighter Group on 24/7 air defense alert status, with the three squadrons rotating among themselves for one day on and two days off alert periods. Throughout this period, the F-84s remained problematic with wing integrity, the group having only 50 of its authorized 70 aircraft operational, as a third of its aircraft had been sent to Republic Aircraft or Air Materiel Command depots for repairs. This led to excess hours being put on the remaining aircraft, reducing their designed operational life. By the first quarter of 1951, the number of operational aircraft on station was reduced to 44, with only 34 actually being combat ready. The manpower shortage was worse, with only seven of the forty combat-rated pilots being available, the remainder being assigned Europe or combat duty in Korea.

In June 1951, the 78th Fighter Group received the first four of the F-89B Scorpions, as a replacement for the F-84. The Scorpions were assigned to the 83d and 84th Fighter Squadrons, while the 82d retained the best of the groups remaining F-84s, while the remainder were either shipped as replacement aircraft to South Korea or sent to Republic for refurbishing. By the end of

1951, the 82d Fighter Squadron stood alert during daylight hours while the other two squadrons rotated night and foul weather duties. The F-89s were rushed into service too rapidly. There were not enough trained pilots and radar operators, and there were not enough maintenance personnel who knew the intricacies of the complex and troublesome Hughes E-1 fire control system. The in-service rate of the F-89B was appallingly low, and crashes were all too frequently.

The 78th Fighter Group was inactivated on 6 February 1952 along with its parent wing as part of an ADC reorganization, being replaced by the 4702d Defense Wing when Hamilton was placed under the ADC 28th Air Division. Two of the inactivated 78th's squadrons were transferred. The 82d was transferred to Larson AFB, Washington, and reassigned to the 4703d Defense Wing; the 83d FIS to Paine AFB, Washington and transferred to the 4704th Defense Wing. The 84th remained at Hamilton AFB.

The unit was reactivated in 1955 by replacing the 566th Air Defense Group at Hamilton AFB. The 566th Air Base Group was activated as the host unit at Hamilton AFB in February 1952, when the 78th Fighter-Interceptor Wing was inactivated. On 16 February 1953, the 566th was redesignated as an Air Defense Group and assumed operational control of the 84th FIS, and later the 325 FIS and 496 FIS. The 566th was replaced by the 78th Fighter Group (Air Defense) as result of ADC "Project Arrow" notable unit redesignation program on 18 August 1955 and the 84th FIS was assigned to it.

Its 83d Fighter-Interceptor Squadron returned without personnel or equipment to Hamilton and was reassigned to the group, taking over the personnel and equipment of the 325 FIS, which moved without personnel or equipment to Truax Field, Wisconsin. On 18 October 1956, the 78th Fighter Wing was once again activated and the group transferred its maintenance and support functions to other groups. The group flew numerous interceptors for West Coast air defense until its inactivation on 1 February 1961 when group components were assigned directly to the 78th Fighter Wing as the 78th converted to the tri-deputate system.

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Air Force Order of Battle  
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Sources  
Air Force Historical Research Agency. U.S. Air Force. Maxwell AFB, AL.