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JUN 1945

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**RESTRICTED**

H I S T O R Y

458TH FIGHTER SQUADRON (SE)

506TH FIGHTER GROUP (SE)

A P O #86

1 JUNE 1945 - 30 JUNE 1945

**P.R.C.**

**RESTRICTED**

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In the first month of combat operations, the 458th Fighter Squadron flew 315 sorties for a total of 1136 flying hours. Of these, 87 sorties totalling 318 hours, was Combat Air Patrol off the island of Iwo Jima. 49 were short range Fighter Strikes against ground installations on Haha and Chichi Jima in the Bonins, totalling 91 hours. The balance of 179 sorties being VLR missions against the Japanese Empire for a total of 907 hours. Only 51 of the VLR sorties were successful in reaching a target while the remaining 128 were turned back in the majority of instances because of weather fronts between this Base and the Japanese home islands.

The month of June brought tragedy to the Group and Squadron in the loss of our Deputy Commander, Lt Col H. J. Scandrett and 2nd Lt R. V. Harvey of the 458th Squadron, who failed to return on what later developed to be a weather mission on 1 June. Returning pilots reported a front starting at approximately 2½ hours of Base in which zero visibility, extreme turbulence, and heavy rain was encountered. The Group, Squadrons, Flights and Elements became separated in most instances, and stragglers returned to Base for the better part of two hours, as singles, in pairs, and in flights, many of the men using dead reckoning, conventional homing and DU's as well as navigational ship assistance to return to Base. As a whole, both the 506th Group, the 21st Group and the 15th Group suffered tragedy from this abortive mission. Many lessons were learned however, but not without the expense of

loss of lives and equipment. One interesting sidelight, an experience which benefited the Squadron and Group as a whole, was the successful bailout of 2nd Lt T. F. "Hap" Harrigan, who was picked up by one of the rescue agencies some fifty hours after bailing out and boarding his one-man raft. "Hap" Harrigan recounted several interesting and a few humorous incidents which accompanied his bailout and rescue. The personnel of the Squadron as a whole were benefited as well as the Personal Equipment Section which handles the distribution and maintenance of Air Sea Rescue facilities and equipment within the Squadron as well as in the Group. His praise is endless with respects to the Navy as regards their cooperation and facilities for bringing about his rescue as well as seeing to his personal welfare after he was aboard ship. "Hap" complimented the Navy on their excellent cuisine and thanks them for their "room service". "They even did my laundry in fresh water and I got to sleep in the Captain's bunk".

Personnel of the Squadron on this month's missions were quite surprised at the reluctance of the Japanese Air Force to come up and engage in aerial combat. On few occasions were successful missions run in which Jap fighter aircraft were encountered. All fighter to fighter encounters throughout the month were as a result of our own initiative and not the enemy's, and it was not until 10 June that a successful mission was completed. On that date a VLR Bomber Escort mission to the Tokyo Area was flown and enemy aircraft were encountered, with claims of five single engined fighters



destroyed by the following Officers:- Lt Vaughn Sowers, 1 Frank; Lt Raymond Feld, 1 Frank; Capt Peter Nowick, 2 unidentified single engined fighters; and 1 unidentified single engined fighter by Lt Henry J. Seegers. Lt Edward H. Mikes also claimed 1 enemy destroyed and this claim was later verified by gunnery films, making a total of six for this mission.

On 23 June the boys had a "heyday" with destruction of fighter aircraft by Capt J. B. Baker, Lts Jack A. Kelsey, Evan S. Stuart, Roy W. Kempert, Harold G. Davidson, Vance A. Middaugh, Frank H. Wheeler, Max E. Ruble and G. B. Lambert, with Lt Stuart getting two victories in the air, ~~and~~ one damaged and one probably destroyed. Lt Davidson, on this mission, added a probable to his one destroyed. An interesting incident resulted from this mission when Lt Ruble's wingman, Lt Wilhelm Peterson, following Lt Ruble through on his "kill", saw the enemy pilot bailout and his chute open directly ahead of his plane. Though an attempt was made to avoid the parachute it blanketed the prop in front of Lt Peterson's aircraft and obviously "Watanabe" had quite a letdown.

On other missions to the Bonins; on 28th June mission, a strafing run on Radio Station #6 or Susaki Airfield, Lt F. J. Pilecki successfully ducked Japanese machine gun fire but came away carrying a slight dent in his right wingroot and a broken windshield glass from the encounter.

Other than the tragic loss of pilots H. J. Scandrett, and R. V. Harvey, the accidents for the Squadron consisted of

the following: On 1 June, Lt Ralph E. Bodfish, returning from a mission, on landing downwind found his brakes inoperative and successfully, at the last moment, groundlooped the plane at the southwest end of the runway and succeeded in saving the aircraft from major damage by striking some barrels and crating stacked on the north side of the runway, the only damage to the airplane being the empennage. One pilot, Lt John Schultz, on 4 June while attempting a high cross-wind takeoff, drifted to the north side of the runway before being airborne, and in attempting to avoid grading equipment in that vicinity pulled the plane off the ground, striking one of the trucks, causing one of the external tanks to explode, causing the plane to crash into an embankment. Lt Schultz owes his life to the fast action of the crash and fire crews and to the emergency treatment given by Capt H. J. Wheeling, Squadron Flight Surgeon.

Lt Raymond Feld, returning from mission on 10 June, while making a "hot" wheel landing struck a rough spot in the runway while landing behind another aircraft, nosed up, damaging four blades of the prop.

Lt Jack K. Westbrook successfully walked away from a "flamer" which caught fire when he was forced to make an emergency landing on Field #2 because of engine trouble.

Several lessons have been learned in flying safety from the difficulties experienced during this first full month of tactical operations. From Lt Harrigan's experience of breaking off the selector valve in attempting to change tanks, it has been recommended that the pilots either carry pliers or



a wrench of some type to turn the control rod if this condition is encountered. The accidents have also brought about lectures from Operations on the means and facilities of averting such mishaps in the future.

These accidents also brought about what is possibly a new record for an engine change on the P-51D. Under Lt Francis N. Hines of the Engineering Section, T/Sgt D. S. Horsely, S/Sgts G. H. Amen, J. E. McCoy and Sgr W. A. Aronson made a complete engine change in a P-51D in 42 man hours. The engine was removed and replaced with a new engine and runup check or preflight made 10 hours after work commenced, the plane being "slow-timed" 12 hours after the job was started. Engineering has also contributed to maintenance on the K14-A sight, Lt Hines not only completed a circuit diagram and given classes to all Squadrons of the Group upon maintenance of the sight but has, thru channels, suggested improvements, one of which has been instituted in the Group. All Group aircraft now have the sight wired thru the master switch rather than thru a <sup>gun camera</sup> selector switch. This obviates the possibility of the pilot, who at best is occupied with other thoughts of equal importance, of failing to turn on the gunsight switch. A UR has been submitted on the spring drive and suggestions offered that more oil be used on sights sent to this theater in order to prevent rusting, and further, that a different drive system be devised for the sight to increase it's efficiency.

As this theater and this Group is one of the first to use the K14-A sight it has been suggested by Lt Hines, and has been found to be an aid in maintenance in this Squadron,

*Tech Order*

that a 25 hour check be made on the sight rather than the 100 hour replacement. Many sights, we are advised by Ordnance and Armament, have seen 200 hours of operations with no replacement sights available and maintenance restrictions placed on the sights within the Squadron which prevent proper operation. The Engineering Section also successfully completed a 150 hour inspection, complete, in  $1\frac{1}{2}$  hours, which is fast time on this aircraft.

Ordnance and Armament have encountered some difficulties but not without successfully improvising to offset shortages and unavailability of materials and equipment. Because of the necessity of numerous moves, difficulty has been encountered in obtaining an area suitable for the necessary bomb dump, grading equipment has not been available to construct entrance and exit roadways necessary because of proximity of present bomb dump area to personnel and materiel storage areas.

The newness to the AAF of both the HVAR and the AR rocket has necessitated improvising on the part of our personnel. T/Sgt E. L. Marks has constructed a chain vise, similar to that used by plumbers, from parts of a Japanese 40 mm dual mount gun. This vise successfully holds the motor of the rocket while the fin and head assemblies are attached. Suggestions, thru Group, have been offered by this Section to higher Headquarters for servicing devices on this relatively new equipment, also requests have been forwarded to speed up the supply of 25D rocket launchers. This Squadron unfortunately lost the only three rocket equipped aircraft by transfer, and from pilot



reports on the use of this weapon it is felt that more efficient destructive results could be obtained over targets if it were possible to equip all ships with the rockets when provisions are made to successfully maintain and mount them. Hold up in the flow of supply of such small items as oil brushes constitute an ever increasing menace to maintenance, though records reveal that this Squadron since being able to obtain a "Marine Type Gauge Kit" has reduced malfunctions in .50 caliber Aircraft Machine Guns to less than one malfunction for every 5000 rounds fired. It is strongly suggested and recommended that this kit be adopted as standard equipment for Fighter Squadrons. With this equipment wear and tear tolerances which can not be checked with the present equipment can be found with the type gauges used in the "Marine Kit".

Metal mounts on gunsights have been found to break and recommendations have been made that a jewel mount be used or some immediate action be taken to make available the replacement of sights within the 100 hour use period specified.

A modification has been made of the bomb dolly by the men of the Armament Section with the use of Jap .50 caliber tripod screw and a "homemade" wooden rack. Bombs as well as wing tanks can be mounted and removed in less time. This section has also constructed from Jap salvage a complete covered working area for gun maintenance and a light trailer for the handling of boresighting equipment. However, due to the low rank of personnel within the Section, shortage of manpower has been experienced by the necessity of these men being removed for other Squadron details.

Communications is contributing to the education of not only the Squadron pilots but to pilots of other organizations thru the manufacture of a DU operational trainer. Under the supervision of Lt R. Grant, M/Sgt C. E. Barr, T/Sgts G. L. Sauck and H. N. Waugaman, and Sgt P. D. Madden are constructing with the use of salvaged material and DU equipment, an operational DU trainer which simulates an aircraft in horizontal flight and can be controlled from within ~~of~~ order that course alterations can be made for familiarization in the use of standard DU equipment. This Section is not, however, without it's difficulties in radio maintenance, although classes are continually being given and communications instructions given at each briefing on DU, IFF, and the SCR 522 Command Set, the aircraft equipment is found to be equipped with an inferior condenser, one on which the voltage rating is too low to carry the surge load. In addition to the fact that a 400-600 volt condenser is needed, the supply problem is bad, in that supply levels cannot be maintained in sufficient quantity. The shop is equipped with excellent repair and testing facilities, all brought about by the ingenuity and resourcefulness of the Section head and the personnel of the Section.

Since the transfer of the Squadron to a new area on the north side of the strip, all Sections have gone about improvising on equipment and quarters until, with the customary objection to dust, the area is pleasantly and well established. Operations and Intelligence, by obtaining dunnage lumber, have been successful in erecting facilities for a complete and



efficient Operations Section and an adequate Intelligence Section. A frame tent with sufficient bulletin boards, and an eight foot briefing board has been erected, tables and chairs have been improvised from scrap lumber and 500 pound bomb tail fin crates. Training classes in recognition, target familiarization, air sea rescue and communications have been instituted and publications of current interest to pilots in this area have been made available for ready reading and reference. A shortage of typewriters as well as transportation handicaps all Sections, though in the main an inspection conducted by Group between the 10th and 20th of the month, came out with excellent ratings, but leaving of course, room for improvement.

In general the operating efficiency of the Squadron has increased immensely. Long hours put in by the personnel of all Sections has made possible a high efficiency record and through constant effort on the part of all personnel, quarters have been improved, areas made more livable, and operating efficiency kept on an upgrade. On two different occasions twenty aircraft of the Squadron were airborne for missions within four and one half minutes. Twenty four aircraft became airborne in five minutes, which indicates better than 100% improvement over the time required on the first few missions.

New quarters are now in the process of erection for enlisted personnel and a new Quonset hut is being erected for mess facilities for the men. In the officers' area, considerable time and labor has been spent in landscaping, providing gravel walkways, and providing with materials available, an Officers' Club of sorts. It is expected that another thirty days

of operations, with the improvement on the same level as the  
thirty days past, the Squadron will be at near top efficiency,  
with suitable quarters and working facilities for all con-  
cerned.