

THE 380TH BOMB GROUP ASSOCIATION 5th AF - RAAF

AFFECTIONATELY KNOWN AS

The Flying Circus



The 380th Bombardment Group (H), insignia above, flew B-24 Liberator bombers in the South West and Western Pacific areas in WWII. We were part of the 5th Air Force. We were known as the FLYING CIRCUS and as the KING OF THE HEAVIES (note the lion in the insignia).

The 380th went overseas in April 1943 to become the second B-24 unit in the Fifth Air Force at that time. The other Heavy Bomber unit (the 43rd) flew B-17s.

The 380th was placed under the control of the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) and assigned to the Australian NorthWest Area Command operating out of Darwin, Northern Territory, Australia. We were thus the only heavy bomber unit available to cover the whole of the Dutch East Indies (1,000,000 square miles) until late in 1944. At that time the successes in the New Guinea campaign had brought the other Fifth Air Force units close enough to the East Indies to join us in that task.

The 380th made the longest bombing missions of WWII, to the oil refineries at Balikpapan, Borneo (200 miles further than the Ploesti mission in Europe) and to those at Surabaya, Java (as long as Ploesti). We did both of these missions several times during our stay in Australia.

In addition to our attacks on the Japanese oil supply, we were heavily engaged in crippling their shipping fleet to reduce the Japanese capability of supplying their far-flung forces. We also heavily bombed the numerous Japanese airfields in the East Indies to reduce the Japanese threat to Australia and our New Guinea forces.

In its service with the Australians, the 380th served longer under the operational control of an Allied country than any other Air Force unit (from June 1943 until February 1945).

As part of its duties in Australia, the 380th carried out the operational training of 52 Australian crews and their associated ground staffs so that the Australians could take over the East Indian campaign activities of the 380th when they were assigned to The Philippines in February 1945. Many of the Australians so trained have become part of the 380th Bomb Group Association, our veterans group here today, strong evidence of the strong ties of friendship, which developed between us in our long service together.

The 380th was composed of four Squadrons: the 528th, 529th, 530, and 531st.



The mascot of the 528th Squadron was HERKY, the clown, as shown on the insignia to the left.



The mascot of the 529th Squadron was LITTLE BEAVER, the Indian boy sidekick of RED RYDER in the cowboy movies of the 1930s (our era).



The mascot of the 530th Squadron was BUGS BUNNY and he appears on their insignia as well.



The mascot of the 531st Squadron was a fierce DONALD DUCK as shown by the insignia presented here.

The insignia were sewn on our leather flying jackets as in all Air Force units in WWII.

As noted above, the 380th was based in Northern Territory, Australia, from May 1943 through February 1945. At that time, the Group moved to Murtha Strip, San Jose, Mindoro Island, The Philippines. There they joined the rest of the 5th Air Force in attacks on Formosa, Indo China, Japanese areas of The Philippines, and on China itself.

As the war progressed, the 380th moved with the rest of the 5th Air Force to Yonton Strip, Okinawa, to begin the attack on Japan proper. As the world knows, the atom bomb negated this need and the war ended.

The 380th served throughout the Cold War flying B-52, B-47, and FB-111 aircraft. It was disbanded in the draw-down since the collapse of the Soviet Union.