

SOUTH PACIFIC TAC RECON

OVER SOME OF THE MOST HOSTILE TERRITORY OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR, THE PILOTS OF THE 82nd AND 110th TACTICAL RECONNAISSANCE SQUADRONS WENT ALOFT IN THEIR BELL P-39 AIRACOBRAS AND CURTISS P-40 WARHAWKS TO MEET THE ENEMY

BY STEVE BLAKE

to California, where it trained and flew anti-submarine patrols over the Pacific Ocean early in the war. It and its squadrons moved to Esler Field, Louisiana, in January 1943, and then to Laurel Field, Mississippi, two months later. It was redesignated Reconnaissance Group in April. Group Headquarters (HQ) and the 17th and 82nd Squadrons began their move to the Southwest Pacific in late September 1943 and the 25th and 110th a month later.

The 71st and its four squadrons had different initial Southwest Pacific destinations, and they would never again all be based at the same place at the same time. As noted earlier, Group HQ arrived at Port Moresby, while the 25th Squadron's first destinations were Sydney, then Brisbane, Australia, before



The tac recon squadrons fought a rough and dirty war. P-39Q 42-19883 of the 82nd TRS has the very faint name *Julia 2nd* on the nose; it is carrying a 500-lb bomb on the centerline rack while the underwing gun pods have seen plenty of use, indicated by all the burned gunpowder on the white wing leading edge (the white leading edges and tail were identification markings to distinguish the American aircraft from the Japanese).

In early November of 1943, the Headquarters of a new Fifth Air Force (AF) Reconnaissance Group (RG), the 71st, arrived at Port Moresby, a major Allied base on New Guinea's southeastern coast. The Group was comprised of the 82nd and 110th Reconnaissance Squadrons (RS/Fighter), which flew Bell P-39 Airacobras; the 17th Reconnaissance Squadron

(Bombardment), equipped with twin-engined North American B-25 Mitchells; and the 25th Liaison Squadron, which operated a variety of observation, liaison, and light transport aircraft.

The 71st *Observation* Group had been activated at Birmingham, Alabama, in October 1941, but it soon moved



Unofficial A-2 jacket patch for the 71st Tactical Reconnaissance Group "Strafin' Saints."



Fantastic line-up of 82nd Tactical Recon Squadron Airacobras on 28 May 1944 at Saldor, New Guinea. From right to left, we have Shreveport Sack Rat, Elleen, Reba, Julia 2nd, name not completely shown, and Ruth-Less 2nd.



Original art work for the Musketeers' Insignia.