

CHAPTER 4

8th Fighter Squadron “The Blacksheep”

The 8th PS was one of the three squadrons which comprised the 49th FG formed in the US in late 1941. It later took the name *The Blacksheep*. The unit docked in Melbourne on 1 February, led by Lieutenant Robert Van Auken. When all three of the 49th PG's squadrons received several experienced pilots who had survived the Philippines and Java campaigns, the 8th PS was allocated flight leaders Captain Allison Strauss and First Lieutenant George Kiser, along with Lieutenants RC Docksteder and Jim Morehead as element leaders. Strauss soon replaced Van Auken as squadron commander but was killed during combat over Darwin on 27 April 1942. His replacement was Captain “Eck” Mitchell Sims. Following months of combat defending Darwin, the 8th FS left the theatre and moved to Townsville. It later ferried its Warhawks to Port Moresby, New Guinea, on 25 September 1942 from where it flew its first combat mission on 1 November 1942.

It moved to Dobodura on 15 April 1943, then to Tsili Tsili on 30 August 1943 in preparation for the invasion of Lae. It relocated to Gusap on 29 October 1943 and left the main New Guinea theatre when it moved Hollandia on 3 May 1944. In late August that same year the squadron commenced conversion to the P-38 Lightning. The 8th FS lost 31 Warhawks to non-combat causes in the Australian and New Guinea theatres, including to take-off and landing accidents, one mid-air collision, engine failures and several losses to bad weather. It lost 18 Warhawks directly to combat.

Squadron Markings

Squadron numbers 40-69 were allocated to the 8th FS Warhawks. Similar to the 49th FG's other two squadrons, “box numbers” remained extant on many early P-40E airframes throughout their service, confusing markings interpretations. The spinners on the P-40Ns appeared in different designs of yellow, the squadron colour.



P-40E serial 41-5543 Smiley, as shown in Profile 29, under a camouflage net at Darwin in May 1942.