

# Seymour Johnson AFB to rename Fort Fisher Air Force Recreation Area

SEYMOUR JOHNSON AIR FORCE BASE, N.C. -- The Fort Fisher Air Force Recreation Area was recommended for a name change by the congressional Naming Commission. The 4th Fighter Wing leadership is pleased to announce that the Fort Fisher Air Force Recreation Area will be renamed the Blakeslee Air Force Recreation Area effective June 30, 2023.

The new name was chosen to honor Col. Donald James Matthew Blakeslee, a flying ace who had more than 15 aerial kills and two ground kills. He flew more than 500 operational sorties and accumulated 1,200 combat hours -- an American record. Blakeslee flew more combat missions against the Luftwaffe than any other American fighter pilot in World War II.

Blakeslee assumed command of both the 335th Fighter Squadron and later in his career, the 4th Fighter Group. Under Blakeslee's leadership, the 4th FG received the P-51 Mustang and destroyed a total of 1,016 German aircraft, a record for any American group or wing in any war.

Although Blakeslee passed away Sept. 3, 2008, he left a legacy that the 4th FW emulates to this day.

"It is not an everyday occurrence to have the opportunity to name an area like this. It is an honor to have the opportunity to recognize and memorialize heroes like Blakeslee," said Lt. Col. Timothy Kirchner, 4th Force Support Squadron commander. "He set the standard that we still follow today."

Visitors to the Blakeslee Air Force Recreation Area can expect the same great service and amenities they've previously enjoyed.

The Naming Commission's mission was to provide removal and renaming recommendations for all Department of Defense items that commemorate the Confederate States of America or any person who served voluntarily with the Confederate States of America.

The name change has been coordinated with the Post Office, Emergency Control Center, online map and navigation sites.

Please contact Seymour Johnson AFB Public Affairs with further questions at 919-722-0027 or 4fw.pa@us.af.mil.



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## Colonel Don Blakeslee

Don Blakeslee was the greatest fighter leader that the war (World War II) produced, stated Major General Chesley Peterson, first American to command an Eagle Squadron. Donald James Matthew Blakeslee was born 11 September 1917 at Fairport Harbor, Ohio. In his haste to get into World War II he crossed into Canada in 1940 to join the Royal Canadian Air Force. In November 1941, as a member of 401 Squadron, he shot down his first German Me-109. In 1942 he transferred to the Royal Air Force and was assigned as commander of 133 RAF Eagle Squadron. He led 133 Squadron in support of the Dieppe Raid, where he flew four missions in a single day.

The Eagle Squadrons joined the United States Army Air Force in September 1942 and he was assigned as the commander of the 335th Fighter Squadron of the 4th Fighter Group. In April 1943, flying the P-47 Thunderbolt, he shot down two German FW-190s, the first pilot to score kills flying the P-47. In December he led the 354th Fighter Group, flying P-51 Mustangs, in their first six combat missions. Blakeslee knew the P-51 was the best American fighter.

In January 1944 Colonel Don Blakeslee earned command of the 4th Fighter Group. Blakeslee went to General Kepner and requested the 4 FG switch to the P-51 Mustang. He promised the Group would fly com-

bat missions only 24 hours after transitioning to the P-51. Blakeslee kept his promise, accomplishing an amazing aviation feat. During his tenure as commander through November 1944, Blakeslee led from the front and molded the unit into the most lethal fighter group in the history of the Air Force. Blakeslee flew over 1200 combat hours, an American record, while demanding his pilots destroy the most powerful air force at that time, the German Luftwaffe. By wars end the 4 FG destroyed 1,016 German planes, a record which will never be broken. Blakeslee was among the Fourth's 38 aces.

Colonel Blakeslee's legacy is not just leading the greatest fighter group of World War II. Decades after the war the veterans of the 4 FG would remember Blakeslee with reverence and awe. His personal courage and inspired leadership set the tone for the entire history of the 4th Fighter Wing. The extraordinary Airmen of today's 4th Fighter Wing at Seymour Johnson Air Force Base in Goldsboro, North Carolina, continue to meet the standards created by Colonel Blakeslee; accomplish the mission and defeat America's enemies. From World War II through today and tomorrow, the "Fourth But First" will always be the Air Force's tip of the spear, that is the true legacy of Colonel Don Blakeslee.