The 81st Fighter Group was activated February 6, 1942, at Dale Mabry Field, Tallahassee, Fla., when a cadre of 72 enlisted men was drawn from the 79th Pursuit group under command of 2nd Lt. Thomas G. Mitchell. Lieutenant Mitchell was relieved, February 19, by Maj. J. Stanley Holtoner. . . Units of the 79th--the 85th, 86th and 87th Squadrons and a Headquarters Squadron, became the 91st, 92nd and 93rd Fighter Squadrons, and Headquarters Detachment of the 81st Fighter Group.

On March 10, 53 S/Sergeant pilots, members of the first graduating class from Kelly Field, reported to the organization for assignment. An additional 39 reported March 14. March 12, six flying officers, West Point graduates, were assigned. Capt. Arthur W. Bledsoe was assigned as group adjutant and 113 enlisted men were added before the end of the month.

Capt. Harry E. Hammond assumed command of the 93rd Squadron on April 29; 1st Lt. Robert H. Grimes became commanding officer of the Headquarters Detachment on May 3; 2nd Lt. Gilbert assumed command of the 91st, and 2nd Lt. Paul B. Barker took command of the 92nd. . . On May 5, Capt. Harry E. Hammond became group C/O, relieving Major Holtoner.

June 21, 1942, the 81st Fighter Group was ordered to March Field, Calif., and thence to the Muroc Bombing and Gunnery Range. The preceding five months covered intensive training periods which included: (1) Basic military training of enlisted personnel, (2) Instruction classes in group and squadron administration, (3) Schooling in chemical warfare, air mechanics, communications, etc. (4) clerical instruction at base schools.

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July 10, Maj. Kenneth S. Wade, 0-20631, assumed command of Group. Months of July and August were devoted to further training of flying personnel on P-39's . . . Air echelon departed Muroc, September 17, 1942, for New Jersey. Embarked for England, September 27, arriving October 4, 1942.

Ground echelon left October 4, for Langley Field, Virginia, embarked October 1922, landing with North African invasion troops on D-Day at Medhia Plage. Echelon on beach under fire for three days. Personnel of 91st honored with Soldiers Medal for bravery after rescue of men from capsized barge. (Award to Sgt. Manger). . . Rear echelon left Muroc, October 13; left Fort Dix, November 2, arrived in Casablanca, November 20.

December 27, planes of 91st and 92nd were flown from England to Africa. February 3, balance of group left England for Africa via air. . . Six ships were forced down in Portugal. Flight is recorded as longest over-water flight by mass military movement of single engine aircraft. . . January 7, balance of air echelon left England in convoy, arriving Oran January 21.

On January 22, 81st engaged in first combat mission, and since, in interval to March 11, has flown 105 missions of combat and reconnaissance. . . . These missions were completed over enemy territory which was particularly active, and the Group takes credit for much air support to retreating troops in Kasserine Pass--strafing Jerry columns and concentrations. Combat losses to this date included: Lts. Wm. T. Kelty, Allan H. Middleton, Clifford R. Arndt, Robert M. Graves, Charles R. Goff, Wesley G. Bedrick, Donald F. Haines, Charles G. Shafar, Russell K. Lyons, and Capt. James R. Hillin.

While in England the Group was assigned to the XII Fighter Command, becoming divorced from it January 22 as it went into combat.