

# **343<sup>rd</sup> AIRDROME SQUADRON**

## **MISSION**

## **LINEAGE**

343<sup>rd</sup> Airdrome Squadron

## **STATIONS**

Iliocos, Philippines

## **ASSIGNMENTS**

## **COMMANDERS**

## **HONORS**

**Service Streamers**

**Campaign Streamers**

**Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers**

**Decorations**

## **EMBLEM**

## **MOTTO**

## **NICKNAME**

## **OPERATIONS**

The 343rd Airdrome Squadron was activated at Pope Field, Fort Bragg, NC, on May 1, 1944. It was deactivated October 29, 1945 at Chitose Air Base on the island of Hokkaido, Japan. In its 18 months of service it exemplified the ground support mission in the Air Force. Its personnel constantly worked with skill and dedication, honor and courage, and generally high humor, to maintain and protect the planes, pilots and flight crews whose combat duties in the air defined and gave purpose to the men on the ground.

On 1 May 1944 the 343rd ADS became a part of the 3rd Air Commando Group with Major Charles Foster as Commanding Officer. On 10 May 44, 6 Officers, 1 Warrant Officer and 197 Enlisted Men were assigned to the Unit. Most of the personnel came from the 310th Troop Carrier Squadron. The 31 Oth Troop Carrier Squadron was redesignated the 318th Troop Carrier Squadron and assigned for duty at Camp Macall, NC.

Intensive training was conducted during the months of June, July and August for eventual combat assignment. The first field march and bivouac was held at Robins Neck, SC on July 17. On Aug. 15 maneuvers with the 3rd Air Commando Group began at Dunnellon, Florida with only 24 hours notice. This necessitated a speedy decampment and move from Camp Mackall.

Returning from Dunnellon, FL to Camp Mackall, NC 15 Sept 44 the Unit participated in widespread maneuvers in North Carolina using ground units at Mackall and Lumberton, NC. The Unit moved to Baer Field, Fort Wayne, Indiana, 30 Sept 44 for overseas staging. First letters were censored, put on alert and restricted to base. The 343rd boarded a train 27 Oct 44 for movement to the West Coast and arrived at Camp Stoneman 30 Oct 44. On 6 Nov the 343rd boarded the USS General Hersey in San Francisco and passed through the Golden Gate early in the morning of 7 Nov. 44. After many days at sea first landfall was made at Hollandia, New Guinea. Forming in a convoy the General Hersey proceeded to the island of Leyte, in the Philippines arriving 30 Nov 44.

Personnel debarked in the early morning 1 Dec 44 on Red Beach near Tacloban. Two days later all equipment and personnel were reloaded on a landing craft and moved a few miles to the South to San Roque. This move was made between midnight and dawn and unloaded in a deluge of rain. This became the first home of the first home of the 343rd as pup tents were set up and the first Unit mess served 5 Dec. Three man wall tents and cots were issued and living conditions improved somewhat, although dysentery became commonplace. A spectacular fire broke out in the gasoline dump, on the fringe of the 343rd area, but no one was injured. On Christmas day the officers pulled KP and served turkey and fixings, to the delight of the men. The following day the 343rd moved to a larger bivouac area, adjoining the 318th Troop Carrier and the rest of the 3rd Air Commando Group.

On New Year Day the planes of the 318th were still in New Guinea and most activity involved setting up showers, latrines, day rooms and other facilities. About 10 Jan 45 the C-47s of the 318th Troop Carrier Squadron arrived and started operational flights from Tanuan strip. Squadron engineers set up a working line at Tanuan. 35 enlisted armorers went on detached service on 15 Jan, to the 335th ADS, servicing P-51s of the 4th Fighter Squadron. On 21 Jan a group of 55 enlisted men and one officer moved with the 318th TCS to Hill Strip on the island of Mindoro. In the move a C-47 carrying a crew of four and 15 men of the 343rd crashed on take-off. Two men of an anti-aircraft unit on the ground were killed, six enlisted men were temporarily hospitalized and one was seriously injured and was evacuated; all of the 343rd ADS.

The Mindoro operation during February involved biscuit bombing, evacuations, resupply and delivery of paratroopers for the retaking of Corregidor. A total of 2,124 hours in the air logged by

18 C-47s indicated lots of flying and lots of maintenance. On 15 February the rear echelon of 55 Men and 5 Officers, still at Leyte, moved to the air strip at Mangaldan on Luzon, near Lingayen Gulf. On 16 Feb. a member of the 343rd Guard Section was killed by an accidental explosion of a phosphorous grenade during a transfer of paratroop equipment. On 18 Feb the rest of the squadron moved by air from Mindoro to Mangal-dan. During the same week a plane of the 318th crashed on a drop mission to Filipino Guerrillas. Seven aboard were killed totaling 8 men of the 318th-343rd within four days. The war was taking its toll. Late in February the 343rd and the 318th were merged operationally into a Troop Carrier unit of the 3rd Air Commando Group. Major Charles Carter the Commanding Officer; Major Charles Foster the Executive Officer and Captain Samuel Sartor replaced Maj. Foster.

In early March an advance party went from Mangaldan to Laoag in Northern Luzon to explore a landing strip located over 150 miles behind enemy lines. A perimeter was formed around the strip by a Filipino Guerrilla Unit, making the strip available for a Commando type operation. A C-47 cracked up on the unfinished strip and six men from the engineering section were sent to strip all usable parts from the wreck. On 12 April an advance echelon moved from Mangaldan to Gabu Strip at Laoag to prepare the strip and layout the housing area and areas for other necessary facilities. A second echelon moved by air on 13 April and on 17 April the 318th-343rd Troop Carrier Unit moved all personnel and equipment from Mangaldan to Gabu, the Northernmost Air Strip in the Philippines. The Units transport vehicles formed a part of a 30-truck convoy which moved by road with a large Guerrilla escort through several engagements enroute to Laoag.

The new installation at Gabu Strip eventually became first class, relatively speaking, with two man bamboo framed tents with bamboo floors, a deluxe mess hall, good showers and day rooms. Local Filipino labor was used and they proved to be excellent craftsmen.

May became a record flying month with 2,238 flying hours and with a 91.4 percent rate for planes in commission. In mid-May two men of the 318th were hospitalized with poliomyelitis and within days, three men of the 343rd were also stricken. On 25 May Cpl Robert Davis died while the others recovered. Shortly thereafter a corporal of the 343rd was accidentally shot when a Guerrilla, riding with him in a jeep dropped his unsafetied weapon which discharged. During the months of June and July records were set by the 318th, hauling nearly 7,000,000 pounds of freight, personnel and medical evacuees each month. All of this was possible through the splendid maintenance and support of the 343rd Air Drome Squadron. In one week alone seven stabilizers were replaced after a paratroop in bad weather over severe mountain terrain.

On July 31, 1945, secret orders received by the message center, directed the 318th and the 343rd to move to Ie Shema in preparation for the invasion of Japan. The Air echelon flew to the new location while the 343rd joined the other ground units of the 3rd Air Commando Group of LSMs for a rough ride to Ie Shema.

While aboard ship, word was received of the atomic bomb being dropped on Hiroshima. On August 10 the ground echelon landed on Ie Shema and set up housekeeping and on August 19 the first peace mission from Japan landed on the coral strip of Ie Shima. The War was over.

In September 1945, first units of the 343rd arrived with the 318th flight crews at Atsugi Air Base, a major Tokyo-Yokohama military base. From here the troop carrier planes flew many missions, evacuating prisoners of war from all parts of Japan.

Late in the month the first 70 men with high points started home. The rear echelon of the 343rd and the 318th men still on Ie Shima were moved to Chitose, Hokkaido, Japan. On 18 October 45 the Air echelon of the 318th joined the ground echelon on Hokkaido and on 29 October 45 the 343rd was combined with the 318th Troop Carrier Squadron. The job of the Airdrome Squadron was done.

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Air Force Order of Battle

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Sources

Air Force Historical Research Agency. U.S. Air Force. Maxwell AFB, AL.