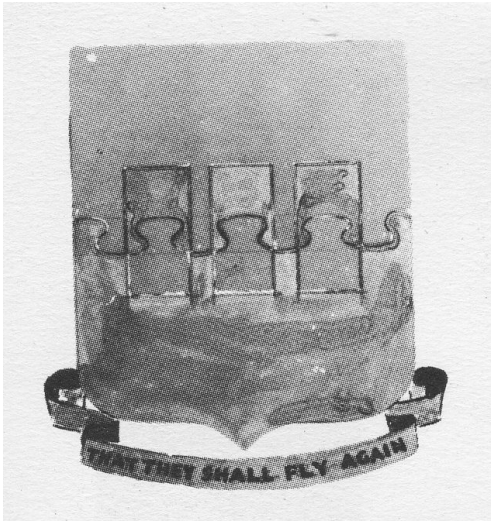
3 AIR DEPOT GROUP



MISSION

Subordinate squadrons 3d Depot Repair Squadron, 1941-1946; 3d Air Depot Supply Squadron, 1941-1946; 26th Depot Repair Squadron, 1941-1946; 82d Depot Repair Squadron, 1944-1946.

LINEAGE
3 Air Depot Group constituted, 28 Mar 1941
Activated, 1 May 1941
Inactivated, 6 April 1946

Disbanded 27 Sep 84.

STATIONS
Duncan Field, San Antonio, TX
Agra, Uttar Pradesh, India

ASSIGNMENTS

COMMANDERS

HONORS
Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers
Pacific Theater

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

EMBLEM

Per fess nebuly or and azure, three billets in fess counterchanged. Crest: On a wreath of the colors or and azure a representation of the Taj Mahal argent. **SIGNIFICANCE:** The shield is gold and blue, the color of the Army Air Corps. The nebuly or horizontal division line is the heraldic symbol for clouds. The three billets are symbolic of the numerical designation of the organization. The crest refers to the service of the unit at Agra, India during World War-II.

MOTTO
THAT THEY SHALL FLY AGAIN

OPERATIONS
The 3rd Air Depot Group was formed at Duncan Field, TX on 28 March 1941. It was the first Air Depot Group to be assigned overseas, shipping from Charleston on 19 March 1942 bound to Karachi. The group arrived at its final destination at Agra, Uttar Pradesh, India on 25 June 1942. In those days, Agra was merely an empty field, and everything had to be built on the spot. Fifty men were assigned to immediately erect 14 Butler steel buildings, 40' x 80', to be used as shops and warehouses. Accessory and engine overhaul departments were set up. Two 100' x 120' hangars were constructed, and a 6,000-foot runway was built with native help. On 4 January 1943, most of the infrastructure was operational and the first aircraft landed at the depot. In 1942, the group consisted in 43 officers, 6 warrant officers and 834 enlisted men. Eventually, its strength rose to about 4000 men and officers as it formed the heart of the Central India Air Depot. The runway was later lengthened to 11,000 feet to accommodate larger aircraft.

For those of us involved in this exotic experience - a mixture of excitement and tedium (English of "hurry up and wait"), it started when we moved from San Antonio to our port of embarkation at Charleston, South Carolina, in March of '42. We were the 47 officers and 871 enlisted men of the 3rd ADG and attached units. It is not practical to recite here the names of all personnel, but a roster is a part of the artifacts. The initial leadership and part of the subsequent changes and initial detachments are cited.

The USAT Brazil had been hastily converted from a 553, all first class, passenger liner in the South American trade to a troop ship for 5085. We were both the earliest and the slowest (60 days) convoy to make the passage to India.

We traveled on a 13,000 mile zigzag course, crossing the equator twice, convoyed a 10 knots by WWI aircraft and a naval escort. There were stops but no shore leave at Puerto Rico and Sierra Leone (westernmost bulge of South Africa). Two much appreciated stops with shore leave were made in South Africa. After existing in bunks 4 high to an 8 ft. ceiling with closed portholes at the equator, eating 2 stand-up meals of hard boiled eggs, oatmeal (no milk or sugar) and mutton (often overripe), we were amazed to be treated like valued guests in Capetown. They were reacting from a recent visit by ANZAC infantry and sought to save their city through super hospitality.

In '42 the east coast of India was not considered a safe place to dock a ship nor to build an air base. We landed at Karachi in mid-May on the northwest coast. For nearly a month we tarried at a new multinational holding camp, New Malir, on the edge of the Sind Desert. We slept on a stone floor and were nightly covered with the ever blowing sand. The area was treeless but cool at night, and this was a blessed improvement over the ship. But on a moonlit, midnight walk to the outhouse, every deep shadow had an imaginary garrote-wielding Thug - as in Gunga Din.

On the way to Agra, our home-to-be, we took the indirect route about 300 miles north of a nonexistent direct rail to Agra. We had our round WWI metal hats and bolt action Springfield rifles ready because some trains had recently been assaulted by sword carrying Huq bandits. The only real problems we met were the desert heat (119 degrees F) and having to transfer equipment (including hangar steel) whenever the width of the track changed. India had very few roads or railroads, especially West to East, and the few rail lines were afflicted with 4 different gauges of track. Transport from west coast ports was a problem in '42.

On first arrival at Agra in June, we lived in tents amid existing shops inside a walled subdivision of the British-Indian cantonment area. Some of us, like machinists, were able to practice our trade immediately. We worked on small scale equipment along side Sikh craftsmen who were proud of their metal cutting lathes, operated by foot treadles - as sewing machines once were. So urgent was the need and so concentrated the effort (7 days/week, 3 shifts/ day) that by August 1, '42 even engine overhaul was ready to go. There were no hangars and no pavement, but depot operations had begun! And so had the monsoon rains! These created one more job - that of frequently moving by massed manpower (U.S. and Indian) our crates of full-scale machinery to ever higher ground as inundation threatened.

Meanwhile, another group, the 50 men of the "steel gang," became overnight structural steel workers with the challenge of building two 100' x 120' hangars and fourteen 40' x 80' permanent shops in on open field about two miles from town.

Company "D" of the 45th Combat Engineers assisted in the erection of the buildings and poured the concrete floors in all 16 buildings. They were in Agra for several months on their way to assist in the construction of the Ledo Road. The steel gang felt the maximum impact from the Indian sun, and we all felt the humidity. Agra is at about the same latitude as the southern tip of Texas. There are three seasons: very hot and dry, very hot and very wet, and a chilly 50 degree winter.

Our brick barracks and the airport runways were built with Indian peasant labor, hired by the entire village - men, women and children. Men dug the foundation with a hoe-like tool and hand placed the stone in decreasing sizes, Macadam style. Women carried earth and stone in straw baskets balanced on their heads. Wood-fired, steam-driven rollers compacted the layers of stone.

With our personal autos we can practice "If it ain't broke, don't fix it". With an airplane you fix it before it is broke if you want to survive. This is especially true when that airplane must fly over the world's highest mountain chain and may be the target of enemy action. Periodic preventive engine overhaul was the 3rd ADG's reason for being in Agra. Almost as important was the repair, modification and adaptation work that fit between what could be done in forward bases and what had to depend on replacement via the long thin supply line from the USA. For this purpose a comprehensive repair and overhaul capacity was developed in Agra. By January, '43, runways were paved, permanent barracks and shops were built, and full scale capacity was in use. Engines were completely disassembled and magnofluxed for otherwise invisible flaws. All of the functions of a major depot were in operation including: salvage, blueprinting, foundry, welding, machining. sheet metal, armament, communications, parachute rigging and medicine.

The original "Brazil gang" was augmented in December of '42 by the arrival of the 82nd Supply and Repair Squadron (the latter becoming a permanent attachment), and in October, '43, the depot organizations were reinforced by the arrival of 600 more enlisted personnel. Even so the total American presence was insufficient for the job undertaken. Indian civilian employees were an important supplement, not only in janitorial and mess hall capacities but also in substantial numbers in shop, working along side GI's. At least 2700 were so engaged.

Despite the heat, heat rash, threat of malaria and the universal affliction of dysentery (in India cow dung is burned and human feces is fertilizer), no one shot at us. We suffered few lasting casualties. In fact after the Japanese navy met its critical defeat at the Battle of Midway and the high tide of their island conquests was finally reversed at Guadalcanal in '43, the supply line to India became ever stronger. Even amenities were possible. PX supplies were greatly expanded, sport facilities were built, and a week per year in a Himalayan foothills rest camp was a real treat. In March '44, 46 men passed the aviation cadet exams, were willing to give up non-combatant status and ready to start the war over as pilots. They were sent to Bombay for return to the United States. Then after 2 weeks of waiting, they were sent back to Agra. "Someone" had recognized that using trained technicians from Agra as cadet recruits was no way to help the war effort.

The reduced pace did make an opportunity for touring the India around us, mostly by bicycle. Very close to our base, located on the banks of the Jumna River (a Ganges tributary), is the huge Agra red fort and that world renowned gem of architecture and stone masons' art, the Taj Mahal. At long bike range there were other artistic and structural shrines. The walled capital city and the tomb and memorial to the greatest of India's moguls, invader-emperor Akbar, was one of these.

In September of 1944 came that most anticipated event! 315 old-timers from the Brazil received orders to return to the USA. The last of the Brazil gang stayed a while longer, until January of 1945.

Sources

Air Force Historical Research Agency. U.S. Air Force. Maxwell AFB, AL.
Walt Neidert. *3rd Air Depot Group.* CBI Roundup. Jul 1997.