

25 AIR SERVICE GROUP

MISSION

LINEAGE

25 Air Base Group constituted, 20 Aug 1940
Activated, 28 Aug 1940
Redesignated 25 Service Group (Special), 13 Jun 1942
Redesignated 25 Air Service Group, 5 Dec 1944
Inactivated, 25 Oct 1946
Disbanded, 8 Oct 1948

STATIONS

Maxwell Fld, AL to 2 Sep 1940
Orlando AAF, FL, 2 Sep 1940
Beaumont, TX, 20 Aug 1941 (Det at Lake Charles, LA 20 Aug 1941-20 Oct 1941)
Greenville AAB, SC, 8 Oct 1941
Raleigh, NC, 4 Dec 1941
Orlando AAF, FL, 6 Dec 1941-Aug 1942
Greenville AAB, SC Aug 1942
Aiken AAF, SC
Camp Patrick Henry, VA, 13 Jan 1944-25 Jan 1944
Kharagpur, India, 4 May 1944-6 May 1945
West Fld, Tinian, 5 Jun 5-Nov 1945
March Fld, CA, 27 Nov 1945-5 May 1946
Davis-Monthan Fld, AZ, 8 May-25 Oct 1946

ASSIGNMENTS

III Air Force
III AF Base Command, Jul 1941
III Air Svc Area Command, 13 Jun 1942
Air Service Command, Feb 1943
Warner Robins Air Service Command, Oct 1943

Unknown, Dec 1943-Apr 44
58 Bombardment Wing, Apr 1944
Air Service Command, CBI, May 1944
XX Bomber Command, Jun 1944
58 Bombardment Wing

COMMANDERS

Maj Robert E. Baston, 28 Aug 1940
Lt Col Charles F. Densford, 7 Nov 1941
Lt Col William Grohs, 7 Feb 1942
Maj William E. Baker, 7 Mar 1942
Maj Edward W. Thompson, 7 Apr 1943
Col R. A. Gardner, 14 Nov 1943
Lt Col Berton H. Burns, 8 Aug 1945

HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

EMBLEM

MOTTO

OPERATIONS

The 25 Air Service Group supported the 468th and 444th Bombardment Groups. Their mission took them to the CBI and Tinian Island. They provided 3rd Echelon Maintenance to the B-29s as well as running the Base in Kharagpur, India.

The 25 Air Service Group was originally designated as the 25 Air Base Group. It was activated on August 28th 1940 at Maxwell Field, Montgomery, Ala. The Cadre for the Group came from the 13th Air Base Squadron at Maxwell Field. The Group was composed of Hq. and Hq. Sq., the 26th Air Base Sq., and the 35th Material Squadron.

In September of 1940, the 25 left Maxwell Field for the Municipal Fair Grounds at Orlando, Florida, where the Orlando Municipal Airport was being converted into an Army Air Field. The function of the Group at this station was the operation of a Sub-Depot, as well as the operation of the Base.

On August 20, 1941 the Hq. & Hq. Sq., and the 35th Material Sq. left on maneuvers. The major portion of the personnel went to Beaumont, Texas. A small detachment of approximately 30 men went to Lake Charles, Louisiana where they serviced 2 Navy squadrons from the Aircraft Carriers USS Wasp and USS Hornet.

On October 8, 1941 the personnel who had gone to Beaumont Texas moved east to Greenville, South Carolina where they set up for a short period of time, then moved on to Raleigh, North Carolina, as the facilities at Greenville were not adequate for the fighters that the Group was servicing. The detachment which had gone to Lake Charles, Louisiana returned to Orlando, Florida, from whence they departed on October 20, 1941 to join the main body of troops at Raleigh, North Carolina.

On December 4, 1941 the Group left Raleigh, North Carolina to return to their home base at Orlando, Florida, where they arrived on December 6. On December 8, just one day after Pearl Harbor was attacked, the 35th Material Squadron was alerted and left the following morning, on the 9th, for Savannah, Georgia. After about twelve days at Savannah, the Squadron returned to Orlando, where they rejoined the group.

In March, 1942 the Group was moved off the main base at Orlando into tents that were set up at the edge of the base. Approximately two months later the Group returned to the base.

On June 13, 1942, while under the Command of Major WILLIAM E. BAKER, the 25 Air Base Group was redesignated the 25 Service Group. During the same month a detachment of Officers and enlisted men were sent to Fort Dix, New Jersey for instructions in the operation of a Service Center; and the 349th Service Squadron was assigned to the 25 Service Group.

In August, 1942 the 25 Service Group was given a new Table of Organization, and moved to Greenville, South Carolina to establish a Service Group Training Center. Six new units were assigned to the Group. They were the 815th Ordnance Co. AB (Avn.) 67th Signal Co. Service Group, 194th Quartermaster Co. Service Group, 1756th Quartermaster Co. MM (Avn.), 1757th Quartermaster Co. MM (Avn.), and the 846th Quartermaster Co. Truck (Avn.).

On August 19, 1943 the Group, under the Command of Lt. Colonel Edward W. Thompson, was sent for maneuvers and bivouac training, to Aiken Army Air Base, Aiken, South Carolina.

After having been alerted for overseas duty in November, 1943, the Group departed from Aiken for the staging area at Camp Patrick Henry, Virginia, on January 13, 1944. On the 25 of January, 1944, under the command of R. A. Gardner, the Group sailed from Hampton Roads Port of Embarkation, Newport News, Virginia aboard the Free French Ship, Athos II, on one of the longest, most diversified ocean voyages ever undertaken by large bodies of American troops. Following the southeast coast of the United States it proceeded through the Caribbean Sea stopping at Colon, Republic of Panama. It proceeded through the Panama Canal to Cristobal on the Pacific side. It then proceeded to the South Pacific via the Galapagos Islands. In the South Pacific serious engine trouble was encountered and the United States Navy ordered the ship back

to Cristobal for repairs, during which time the Group was garrisoned at For Kebbo in the Panama Canal Zone. The ships engine repaired, it proceeded past the Galapagos Islands toward the South Pacific stopping at the Island of Bora Bora in the Society Island Group, but 140 miles from Tahiti itself.

It left Bora Bora for the eastern coast of Australia proceeding along the coast into the Bass Straits where heavy rains and antarctic winds were encountered. Leaving the Bass Straits, it proceeded along the southern coast of Australia to the City of Perth, West Australia. Out of Perth it rounded the southern tip of India and docked at the explosion scarred harbor of Bombay, India. By train, the Group traveled the breadth of the torrid Indian plateau to Kharagpur, where it proceeded by truck convoy to Salua Air Field, first base of operations for the B-29, being but 90 miles from Base Section #2 , Calcutta, India.

Shortly after the arrival of the Group at its base of operations, it was evident that a change in organization was eminent to better coordinate supply and maintenance within the individual unit and consequently achieve more fluent operation together with the Bombardment Groups. Within a few days after our arrival at Salua Air Field, Kharagpur, India, men began to trickle from the Group in transfers to outlying units of the Bomber Command, among which were Paridoba, Kalaikunda, and Dudikunda. On July 1, 1944, the new Table of Organization officially reached the Service Groups and were immediately put into effect. It was a special T/O for the Service Groups intended for those units servicing the B-29. The new T/O dated April 15, 1944, provided for three squadrons per Service Group, a Headquarters & Base Services Squadron, an Engineering Squadron, and a Material Squadron. In November the Group was redesignated the 25 Air Service Group, followed by redesignation of the Engineering and Material Squadrons as Air Engineering Squadron, and Air Material Squadron.

The next major change effecting the Group was put on the fire January 27, 1945, when Group Headquarters received movement orders from XX Bomber Command. At 0200, February 25, 1945, the advanced detachment consisting of 578th Air Material Squadron, including personnel attached from the other two squadrons, departed from Kharagpur for Calcutta, from whence a boat in the Hooglic River was boarded. After thirty-eight days of traversing the Indian and Pacific Oceans, the mighty ship dropped anchor in Tinian Harbor, in the Marianas.

The rear echelon departed Kharagpur on May 6, 1945, and after following the same course as the advanced detachment arrived at Tinian on June 5, 1945. Although there has been no reorganization since our arrival at Tinian, as far as Tables of Organization are concerned, there have been numerous changes in organization. The four Service Groups of the 58th Bomb Wing have been combined into a huge Service Center for all operational purposes.

It seemed to be the fate of the 25 Air Service Group to move into an area, clean it up, make it livable, and then move on again before reaping any of the benefits of the improved area. The general opinion of this subject, was in favor of those frequent moves, as it often prevented monotony, and opened new fields of adventure. Under conditions which ranged from torrid tropical heat beginning in April and the heavy monsoons which began in July, the Group

constantly alert to the prevalence of malaria and other tropical diseases, began its mission. Though these conditions tried both men and ships, the mission was accomplished.

These are the events and anecdotes of the very first day. The men had traveled past the runways and had seen the Superforts which were now to be their babies. Despite the sultry, infernal heat--the most adverse climate could not touch the morale and outlook of these men. Yet they were tired from the harrowing sea voyage, and the incessant cry of the Indian native, of "Bachshoosh", which in English, means, to beg for alms, that greeted them at every hamlet as they crossed to plateau from Bombay to the Last. The truck convoy halted. Officers and First Sergeants equally moved by the laterite bed, the site which to house the unit areas, dismissed their men who immediately flocked to the desert tents already standing and hurled themselves on the Army and rope cots. No sooner were the men prostrate, the work "Chow" rang out in the various units. Chow! The men stirred, dropped the remainder of their equipment and proceeded to the messes. Sanitation was a problem that the men of the units would have to cope with at the earliest possible opportunity. Flies were devilish--huge and green--swarming over mess kits. One man said that he had placed his dessert (chocolate pudding) at the edge of the table to act as a decoy for the brutes so that they would not "pay too much attention" to the main bulk of his meal. Near the mess kit wash, the black birds, the like of which had been unseen in the states, did not hesitate to swoop down for bread even as the left-overs were in the very hands of the men. It had been unbearable weather. Appetites were perhaps not too high, yet word had it that the men had wolfed down their meal. Back in their tents, each man readied himself with, not abnormal thought of how he would take it day in and day out. That was the kind of thought expected of a man from Minnesota, or one of the Dakotas; even those familiar with the cool, Florida dawn, were not aloof to the thought of the Indian heat.

This was the first day. Many more pages could be written about what each man thought, and what he said, and little or none of it could be above the unfailing efforts that each individual gave to the accomplishment of the mission. The ensuing days saw progress of every kind. Tents were made as livable and as comfortable as conditions permitted. Gulleys were dug around each tent, preparatory to the monsoons which men were already talking about. In time, the town of Kharagpur with its canteen service aided the men in their off-duty hours. Monthly leave to Calcutta was a further respite. At the end of six months, there was a Rest Camp for the majority of men. Upon asking one returnee, how he liked it, he would say; "Ranikhet--why, I caught one helluva cold; I wished that I had stayed back in camp." The monsoons finally came. Sheets of rain that inundated everything, strong winds prevailed, and lucky were they who were on hand to prevent collapse of their tents.

December 25, 1944. Somehow, the Japanese had found a heavenly sun or two, to ferry a few bombs our way--the first and last of the Group's career. It happened just after our Christmas dinner. Alert sounded and men scurried to their slit trenches. Of course, a few said; "It's just a practice alert." But, the explosion visible, and audible from our slit trenches did not indicate anything of the sort.

Cool weather had been visiting us during those months, and though we had withstood a whole season of Indian heat, we hated to think of spending another hot season there. Faces lit up--with eyes as big as saucers--when word came that we were moving on, to send more planes with heavier loads against the Japanese homeland. Finally, Tinian loomed up ahead, and the job that all men did with Superfortresses in the Marianas, was climatic.

During operations in India, several members of the 35th Air Engineering Squadron, became members of the Caterpillar Club. Flying in an Army Transport on mobile operations in China, these men made their first emergency jump. M/Sgt O'Donnell, since returned to the States, and Cpl. Brienza tell how the Chinese of a village remotely situated from the airfield, doted the men after each had removed his chute and harness. Unmistakable is the fact that the men of the Service Group did a variegated job.

Primary contribution of this unit towards winning the war is the assistance given in the proving of the B-29 airplane in one of the worst countries on the face of the map.

The B-29, a new airplane, not tested and untried, was sent to India with the 25 Air Service Group, and one of the ground echelons of the V.L.R. project. Very few men had seen a B-29, let alone work on one. The unit did not have the equipment necessary to handle the maintenance problems. The T/E this organization had set up for the handling of the B-25 and B-24, thereby making it necessary for improvisation and extra hard work.

This organization make and installed many modifications that were discovered in the field that increased the efficiency of the B-29. These modifications were; the installation of the emergency landing system, the making and installation of the secondary locks for the pneumatic bomb bay doors, removal of oil tanks located on the rear of the nacelle, this is one of the most outstanding field modifications ever performed in the field. The airplane now has this feature included in the factory production. Installation of the Radar Revolving Antenna. Slings were built in the field for the handling of the outer wing panels as the vertical stabilizer. Rudders were changed by hand. There was no equipment available for the removal of stabilizers and rudders. On this particular job slings were improvised until a hydraulic lift was finally authorized.

In the first forty days of operation on Tinian, the Service Group made fifty four major repair jobs that would not have ever returned to combat had it not been for the excellent maintenance. The jobs were; Outer wing panel changes, vertical stabilizer changes, the repairing of the fuselage caused by enemy attacks, which was all sheet metal work. The sheet metal department repairs all damage caused by flak, and fighter attacks, the work often times called for replacing of stringers and formers in the fuselage.

The sheet metal department did not have the equipment necessary for the cutting and forming; accomplished by improvisation, ingenuity, skill, and the will to do a job.

The propeller shop, and electrical shop made third as well as fourth echelon maintenance on propellers, and starters as well as all other electrical appliances found in the B-29.

Through continued study of supply problems this organization was able to set up supply levels in adequate quantities of all classes of supply, including critical items to maintain maximum aircraft in combat condition for use against Japan. Experience gained in India contributed immeasurably to our ability to foresee needs of certain classes of equipment and supplies to meet demands. During the entire duty of this organization in India, the Bombardment Group serviced by this unit won the Billy Mitchell Award on a permanent basis for having the greatest number of tactical aircraft over the target. A "Fly Away Pack-Up Kit" was designed by members of the 25, which was made up of critical items that was used by all organizations of the XX Bomber Command. This kit was flown over the "Hump", into China, and used to service and keep planes in the air for combat missions into Japan; many aircraft had been grounded while in China for lack of critical items until this was devised and put into use.

After many months of continual study most of the problems that were major hindrances became routine, and most problems could be answered with a minimum of effort and trouble. There is no substitute for skilled and experienced personnel, by full usage of this kind of personnel the new type of Air Materiel Squadron seems ideal, and well able to cope with all problems of supply, and are staffed with Officers and Enlisted Men to operate with utmost efficiency.

August, 1945 was a very quiet month for the 25 Air Service Group, with the exception of August 15 and 16th. On the 15th news reports over the radio stated that Japan had verbally accepted the Allies' surrender terms. The 16th was declared a holiday, and a Group party was held on that day. It gave everyone a feeling beyond explanation to know that at last Victory was here. There was no immediate relaxation, as everyone was well aware of the tactics of the Japanese, and realized the possibilities of a Japanese trick.

Of primary importance in the line of transfers during the month, was the loss of Colonel R. A. Gardner, Group Commander, who was transferred to the 58th Bombardment Wing Headquarters as Deputy Chief of Staff for Supply and Maintenance. Colonel Gardner was replaced by Lieutenant Colonel Berton H. Burns, who is one of the 58th Bombardment Wing's Ace Pilots. Shortly after his assignment to the Group, Lieutenant Colonel Burns called a meeting of all personnel in the Group, at which time he discussed his policies, and some of the problems that were facing the Officers and Enlisted Men of the Group. On August 5th, the same day he was assigned to the Group, orders were issued further assigning him to Headquarters and Base Services Squadron, and on 8 August 1945, he assumed command of the Group.

A number of the Group personnel left for the United States during the month. A few of the old timers, who were over 40 years of age left, but the majority of personnel losses were on points. On August 26, 1945, Wing Headquarters issued orders sending nineteen Enlisted Men of the Group on their way to reception centers for processing, and eventual return to civilian life.

Subordinate units
35 Air Engineering Squadron
578 Air Materiel Squadron

DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE UNIT HISTORIES

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Sources

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