

40th SERVICE SQUADRON



MISSION

LINEAGE

Materiel Squadron, 29th Air Base Group
Redesignated 40th Materiel Squadron
Redesignated 40th Service Squadron

STATIONS

MacDill AAF, FL
Charlotte, NC
Rice Field, Rice, CA

ASSIGNMENTS

13th Service Group

COMMANDERS

Cpt Robert S. Hall
Lt. Thomas L. Spradling

HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

EMBLEM

MOTTO

NICKNAME

OPERATIONS

Following the War Department's efforts to speed up unit organizing, the 29th Service Group Headquarters and 40th Materiel Squadron, (later the 40th Service Squadron), prepared for foreign service to an unknown destination. Other necessary squadrons were in training at other bases and camps throughout the States. Two of these units joined the group at Morris Field when the 82nd Materiel Squadron and the 2020th Quartermaster Company (Truck) arrived in September of 1942. As orders came through to move the 29th to the Camp Stoneman, California, staging area, I was informed that six other units were also enroute to join the group at Stoneman, completing the organizational makeup. These included the 1137th Quartermaster Company, the 1021st 1653rd, and 1637th Ordnance Companies, the 1932nd Quartermaster; Company (Truck), and the 1003rd Signal Company.

Enough cannot be said for the 40th and 82nd Service Squadrons. Their hours were limitless. They furnished mechanics, machinists, instrument shop specialists, and the highly skilled supply technicians called upon for thousands of spare parts of every description. Although they were trained to do a 3rd Echelon maintenance level of aircraft repair, time after time Air Corps Depot type of 4th Echelon repairs were done night and day to keep combat aircraft flyable - under the most extreme field and wartime conditions possible. The minds of the Air Corps military planners knew their business when they created service squadrons, and the 29th was most fortunate in having the best.

The first combat fighter unit to arrive and train was the 56th Pursuit Group. The base began to take on noticeable changes now as the runway was lined with pursuit training planes and newly graduated pilots were arriving daily. Maintenance crews of the 29th were putting in long hours trying to keep all ships in top condition and in the air. In addition, cross-country aircraft had to be refueled and serviced as they set down at Charlotte from time to time, which gave our men much needed experience. The men of the 40th Materiel Squadron were assigned this work and valuable on-the-job training began with actual combat/training aircraft. These were primarily P-36 fighter planes; , later there were several other training-type planes being used and serviced, such as P-39's and P-40's.

When the Group first arrived at Santo, aircraft units stationed there operated out of Bomber Strip #1, but a second strip was under construction. Naval Construction Battalions were busily engaged in felling trees, pulling stumps, clearing underbrush, etc. B-17's had been operating out of Bomber #1 for strikes at Guadalcanal and Munda prior to the American invasion there as well as other forward bases. Peko Field contained a base of coral, but was being covered by Marston pierced plank metal matting that could be used for other purposes as the men soon discovered. One such use (after considerable horse-trading) was to construct a vault that could be used to store and protect Air Force combat whiskey which was part of the medical section's supply inventory as well as certain narcotics which had to be accounted for according to regulations.

The service squadron men primarily, as well as other personnel assigned to work the detail, will remember the original length of the runway was extended considerably in order to accommodate the big bombers. The original fifty-five hundred foot length was lengthened to seventy-four hundred feet.

Both the 40th and 82nd Service Squadrons that remained at Santo set up their operations as soon as possible relieving the 5th and 11th Bomb Group crews from doing tasks better suited to a Service Organization. The 40th and 82nd therefore established operations in Bomber #1 and Bunker #4 near Bomber #2.

The sound of an air siren (sometimes it was the clanging of a tire iron against an iron ring), and the bright searchlights of the anti-aircraft battalions scattered around the island illuminating enemy planes while firing their guns, were frequent experiences of the Group. Foxholes were dug in strategic locations in all unit areas. Huge palm tree logs were cut up and used to top off the holes which were later covered and camouflaged with huge palm fronds. At first this was very traumatic for practically everyone, especially when the noise of exploding bombs were heard. Later, as the incidents of raids were less frequent, some of the braver (?) men would stay outside with helmets on and watch as the lights followed the action. Foxhole safety and security was later verified when several tents were riddled by shrapnel and made believers out of everybody.

One of the largest jobs to be undertaken was the storage and handling of aviation gasoline and oil, which was received in fifty-five gallon drums and fed to storage tanks by a spillway system. When taking over this job there was slightly over one million gallons of gasoline on hand, which was stored in two, four hundred thousand gallon storage tanks at four gasoline dumps, located in the jungle. During the next seven months, the 40th issued approximately thirty-five thousand gallons per day to all types of aircraft. When they were relieved from this work, they had over three and one-half million gallons of aviation gasoline stored in the two storage tanks and in seventeen gasoline dumps. Aviation gasoline and oil were also handled for the Navy and Marines, as well as other Army units stationed there.

Together with the 82nd, they took over the Island Air Corps supply which up to this time had been operated by combat Groups and a few men on detached service from the Hawaiian Air Depot. At this time a metal warehouse, forty by one hundred feet and a Quonset hut had just

been completed, but the warehouse had no shelves or bins so the supplies were still dispersed in the surrounding jungle by classes and covered with tarpaulin. Due to the lack of lumber, it was necessary to salvage packing crates for construction of bins, and the combined squadrons pitched in with vim and vigor. They were very fortunate that a large portion of the supply section had worked in the Sub-Depot at Morris Field, North Carolina, and were well qualified to handle the situation. Both squadron supply men worked diligently to help sort and re-arrange the stock, which was in a jumbled state, due to lack of personnel to handle the receiving, storage and issue of the large quantities of stock that were arriving on the island. Because of the great demand for Air Corps parts in this area, the supply sections were kept extremely busy, day and night.

After Pekoia Field was put in operation, it was good to see the big flying fortresses being put in top shape day and night, for bombing raids over Jap-held island bases. These aircraft flew missions over thousands of miles of water to reach targets spread out in many parts of the Pacific. Upon their return, the ground crews would anxiously wait to see if they all made it. For those returning with problems, there were medical technicians from the 40th, 82nd and Headquarters on duty in Group ambulances. Other crews trained in the use of fire-fighting equipment also were on hand. As time went on, the two service squadrons were able to improve their capabilities as additional supplies and equipment arrived.

Early in the war, US Armed Forces in the South Pacific Area Command (USAFISPA) had determined as part of its strategy, that the New Hebrides Islands were ideally located to fill requirements for supply and aircraft repair between the Fiji and Solomon Islands.

Efate, the most central and heavily populated island of the group, became the first Air Force Supply activity centered around Bauer Field. Espiritu Santo, , was chosen as the island base to build up Allied strength for bomber and fighter planes to attack Japanese installations at Guadalcanal, Bougainville and Rabaul. The 29th's assignment here was to serve all Air Force units with supplies and aircraft maintenance repair. The latter was divided into four echelons depending on the type of work required and amount of time estimated to complete the work. Generally, , 1st and 2nd echelon work was performed by the bomb or fighter squadron ground crews as these only consisted of daily inspections, changing plugs and/ or adjusting carburetors to keep the aircraft in top condition between missions.

When additional repair work was required, it fell into the 3rd or 4th echelon category, which was the responsibility of the 40th and 82nd Service Squadrons. This work involved more extensive, major repairs such as engine changes and overhaul, body and sheet metal work, hydraulic and electrical systems, wing and tail assemblies, propeller replacement, and anything else necessary to put the machine back into top condition. The group or squadron engineering officers would decide, after a careful survey, to either salvage the plane or take on the repairs. In the early days the 29th repair crews took on many jobs that should have been sent back to depot group repair stations because of the dire need to keep planes in the air. Parts were difficult to obtain in the field so the mobile repair shop crews often turned them out.

Each squadron's equipment included mobile repair trailers that were self-contained and could be moved from place to place rather quickly. This enabled the many skilled mechanics and technicians to perform repair jobs not generally done by a 3rd echelon crew. The men of the 29th's Service Squadrons were especially skilled in all phases of mechanical work. They could repair or rebuild motors, do electrical work, weld, paint, apply fuselage fabric, fix instruments, replace glass, weapons, and other necessities, machine parts, and most important, "improvise" in order to return planes to duty as rapidly as possible. The 29th performed many 4th echelon jobs at the initial stages of operations, but whenever an aircraft could not be put back into service by either the 40th or 82nd, it was returned to a rear base Air Depot group.

As days passed, aircraft of several newly arrived outfits were serviced, including the 307th B-24 Heavy Bombardment Group plus P-38 and P-40 fighter planes. From time to time transient aircraft came in for repairs which added to the workload. In April, the 40th was ordered to send another twelve men to Guadalcanal and again in June, twelve additional men went to Henderson Field to assist overworked personnel. Sections of the 82nd were busily engaged in other necessary activities while the line operations were functioning at Bomber #2.

In addition to the crane, three, one-fourth ton trailers were equipped with power plants and compressors so that a mobile repair trailer could be dispatched quickly to aircraft in need of work at the bunker where it was parked. Floodlights were included so as to continue repair work under darkness, enabling repair crews to keep working with only breaks for meals. These activities proved the value of the mobile repair crews as the 40th worked on thirteen B-17's at one time, making wing changes, repairing damaged fuselages and a variety of other necessary jobs. The excellent training and experiences gained at Morris Field were evident as the men of the 40th tackled all assigned repair needs with rapidity and excellence. Their training was further verified by the record. In a six-month period, 40th mechanics alone, performed 3rd echelon maintenance on one hundred, sixteen aircraft, most of which were bombers - B-17's, B-24s, B-25s, and B-26s. Fighter and other type aircraft serviced included P-38, P-39, P-40, P-70, LB-30, C-86, L-48, and L-38s. This work was accomplished without benefit of enclosed hangars or similar shelters.

Machine shop personnel with nothing more than a mobile shop trailer received high recognition for performing the first bomb rack modifications in the Pacific Theatre. It was found that the twenty bombs carried by the B-24s could be increased by modifying the racks in the bomb-bay so the 40th set about to tackle this job through specifications worked out by the engineering section. This small crew of 40th machinists turned out a B-24 capable of carrying forty bombs every fifth day, which increased the amount of destruction that could be dealt to the enemy.

After considerable experience of the mobile repair units through trial, error, and daily aircraft needs, the engineering section decided to store airplane frames in a set-aside bunker. The engineering office found that aircraft framework was very valuable and much time was saved by reclaiming all serviceable and repairable parts. In this way they either used them as needed or turned them into Air Corps Supply for shipment to the supply depot for other units to use. As planes were damaged by crash landings or combat action, they could be put back into service

more rapidly by using repaired frames, fuselages or wing panels as salvaged by the men and stored nearby.

On one occasion, repair crews of the 40th noticed a disabled flying fortress setting in one of the storage areas with her nose completely destroyed as a result of enemy action. "Madame X" was painted on her side and stories began making the rounds of her terrific combat record as part of the 98th Bomb Squadron operations. Some of the men made a list of necessary repairs and parts and wished they could tackle the job, but the Commanding Officer felt this was a 4th echelon repair job which would have to be done by a depot group. The crew of the Madame X also felt the job could not be done and that she would never fly again. The men of the 40th didn't give up, and finally convinced the engineering officer to let them try to fix her in their off-time. Permission was granted provided the work did not interfere with regular daily service needs of other combat aircraft. Charles Rust, Edell Hardy, and other machinists improvised parts, replaced inner and outer panels, rebuilt the nose from salvaged parts, replaced necessary wiring, and put the four power plants into top condition. Robert "Bullneck" Bishop, E. M. Hardy, and others on the line, changed all props and serviced operating systems until they all agreed no more could be done. The Group and Squadron Commanding Officers and Engineering Officer inspected the work as well as the Bomb Group Commander to which the plane belonged. He was amazed at what he saw and soon authorized a test flight. Word of this spread throughout the camp and, needless to say, every man who could get a way, went down to the runway on the appointed day and cheered loudly as the Madame X soared off into the blue. This was one of several significant achievements that caused the 29th to become recognized as a mature, capable and efficient service organization.

The Madame X made several missions after it was released and added more Jap Zeroes to its credit. After each mission, service crews would give her an inspection as they were especially proud of her. When she did not return from a mission over Bougainville a few months later, they felt as if part of the Squadron had been lost.

Later, when the balance of the 82nd was ordered to join the advance detachment at Guadalcanal, the 40th was left on Santo to perform on its own, In picking up the additional work left by the 82nd's departure, the supply section had a much bigger job than before because additional units were arriving, and the 40th was responsible for providing them with necessary supplies. A Photo Reconnaissance Group came in, plus the Royal New Zealand Air Force. Additions were soon made to the warehouse area when three additional Quonset huts were obtained. All aircraft requiring complete overhaul were returned to the 13th Air Depot Group stationed at Tontouta Field, New Caledonia. This group possessed equipment and parts not available at forward bases and could undertake extensive repair jobs. Both the 40th and 82nd drew upon this installation for parts often, and, at times, flew down to obtain them personally.

Upon arrival of the entire Group, the balance of the 82nd Service Squadron joined crews already established at Henderson Field, while the 40th Service Squadron set up at the Metapona River area off Koli Point. Increased activity by bomber and fighter squadrons on the island required service as rapidly as possible. The squadron living area was set up in a heavily wooded area near

Henderson while the Engineering Section set up its shops and mobile repair units near an abandoned Japanese hangar which was ideal for engine changes. Air Force Supply quickly set up its operation and the 82nd was now in a position to prove its worth as a complete squadron.

The Squadron had some of the finest Aircraft Maintenance and repair crews anywhere. Such men as *MI* Sgt. W. H. Bill Slay, one of the best aircraft sheet metal fabricators in the Islands. One of his feats accomplished at the Canal was on a Navy Admirals personal plane that had lost six feet of its right wing. Bill Slay and his men rebuilt the damaged wing in record time and the aircraft was able to fly once again.

Another incident involved a "totaled out" B-17 that was lying in a jungle at the edge of the landing strip. A General Officer saw it and ordered it to be repaired. 82nd men got the plane out and found it had no engines or wiring, no windows, plus one outer wing panel was missing. After completely working the craft over, it was returned to the field for a test flight with M/Sgt. Don Holley aboard. Despite having a left wing from a B-17E and a right wing from a B-17F, it successfully made the flight and was returned to duty at a rear base and used as a tow-target aircraft.

Daily duties of the service squadron men were performed under extremely adverse conditions. Heat, rain, mud, malaria, dengue, and interrupted nights due to the constant return of Washing Machine Charley and his nuisance raids. Esprit-de-corps was always high as everyone realized aircraft had to be kept in good repair if pilot and crews were to carry out their missions effectively. This outstanding work resulted in several commendations issued by Higher Headquarters.

After establishing its camp area at Metapona River off Koli Point, the 40th Service Squadron noticed a marked decrease in Dengue fever due to the screening of all tents and the fact wood flooring was installed. Malaria fever increased despite the Atrabine prevention program required by Group and Squadron Surgeons.

Air Force supplies were now becoming more abundant so the Supply Sections of both the 40th and 82nd obtained and erected additional steel warehouse buildings, constructed shelving and parts bins and served the entire Service Center with badly needed aircraft parts. A shipment of California Redwood arrived on the Island about this time and the bins to handle the thousands of aircraft parts and components were soon to be located in these new 40 by 100 foot metal parts supply structures.

Meanwhile both Squadron Engineering sections erected a huge metal hangar and were now in a better position to perform needed work through any kind of weather. Sites were cleared for all mobile shops and the two Squadrons performed as one unit except for one flexible mobile repair unit that functioned at Henderson Field whenever necessary. Instrument repair was one important function of the 40th and it became very proficient with any type aircraft they came into contact with. They repaired not only units of the 13th Air Force, but Navy and Marine craft as well.

Whenever flight crewmen were stymied on repairing instruments, the crew in the 40th were usually called upon to solve the problem. They were even issued I.D. cards which enabled them to draw supplies from Navy units and the Island Air Transport Command. One notable achievement recorded was the invention of a new tester that enabled them to speed up the process of testing equipment. This workable apparatus replaced a 400 pound tester that required trucking to the site of damaged aircraft. The new tester was easily carried in the pockets of repairmen.

One particular day the crew of a B-24 was frustrated over their inability to maintain the manifold pressure on one of its engines, until the 40th was called in. After carefully checking everything without being able to detect the trouble, one of the men noticed that a new wing had recently been installed. This was the clue they needed as it was soon discovered the Cannon plug through which all wires were routed was pinched so that the manifold wires were not contacting. The flow was corrected and a happy flight crew returned to their squadron and resumed missions.

On another occasion, the instrument shop encountered a Pilot that had just returned from an overhaul job at a rear Air Depot Group and was disturbed that his automatic pilot and other instruments were not functioning. He offered several bottles of scarce spirits if the men could find the problem, take on the repairs, and put him back in the air. Needless to say, Russell Myers, George Fort, Dick Chiseling and Frank Borgia found and repaired the problem areas. Although the men at first refused the gift from the grateful Major, they did accept three quarts of whiskey and a rum bottle which were later put to good use to celebrate the New Year. Later, when the war was over, Russ Myers was offered an opportunity to take over the Instrument Shop Facilities at the Philadelphia Navy Yard, and a promise of a Chief rating at the Willow Grove Naval Air Base by a Naval Commander that had watched his skillful work. The offer was refused as Russ, like so many others with long jungle service wanted to return to civilian life.

During the period in which research material was being gathered, meetings were being held and interviews with former members conducted, one story stood out as worthy of a place in this documentation. This tale was given voluntarily by an enlisted man of the 40th who wanted everyone to know how he discovered that Officers had the welfare of their men at heart although it was seldom displayed openly. It was during the Guadalcanal period when this man, who shall remain nameless, had been called to the Group Commander's office by his 1st/Sgt. The man wondered what he had done wrong as he had never even been called into his Squadron CO's office, let alone the Group Commander.

Not being able to guess what he had done, he bravely entered Headquarters and reported his presence. The CO assured him he had done no wrong and tried to relax him with plain conversation - not the usual military style. It seemed that the CO had been informed that this soldier's Mother had passed away and wanted the G.1. to know he had his sympathy.

He remarked that. this was a shock to anybody, especially one so far from home who had been working so hard with many hours of overtime. "Why don't you take a few weeks off and fly down

to New Zealand . for some rest and relaxation? This will help to take this sorrow off your mind". The G.I. thanked him, but declined saying he did not need it, it wasn't fair to the others and although he appreciated the offer, he felt he should stay with his Squadron. The CO thereupon said OK, but asked him to think about it some more as the offer remained open.

The next day the CO sent his Jeep and an Orderly over to the Soldier's tent asking that he pack-up, get ready and prepare to go on a rest leave. That was all he needed to hear, he packed his gear, got in the Jeep and took off. The Orderly stopped at Group Headquarters where the happy man received some welcome spending money, compliments of the Commander and departed for a very enjoyable leave in Auckland. After he returned, he realized how glad he was the CO had insisted he take the opportunity.

Years later he relayed this incident to the Author so that others would know that the 29th Officers were great people and really were concerned about the welfare of the men. Meanwhile, over at the 40th's camp area the men were becoming tired of being awakened every morning by blowing whistles and kept hoping they could find a bugler. They thought they had found one but learned he was being transferred to Navigation School. 1 st/ Sgt. Scowden learned that another man had played trumpet back home in a dance band so approached him with an offer to become Squadron Bugler in return for excuse from guard and KP duty.

Naturally he agreed but did not have a bugle. A search began throughout the Island for an instrument and it turned out that one of the cooks located a trumpet and successfully made a trade. The man started his new career on a trumpet and often times, as a diversion, instead of the usual and normal Military fare, gave out with songs like, "All the World is Waiting for the Sunrise", "Oh What a Beautiful Morning" and "Dark Town Strutters Ball". Many of the Squadron men did not appreciate this bugling, but they became used to it and accepted it just as they did so many other things.

The bugle assignment came to a sudden halt the night he decided to play "Taps" in his own style, which sounded more like Reveille. When he returned to his tent that night several angry G.I.'s were waiting for him with fire in their eyes, as they were sound asleep during this rendition and thought they heard Reveille, got up, went to the mess hall only to find it locked up.

After he was officially removed as Squadron Bugler, he was promptly detailed as Latrine Orderly. One day he was ordered to burn out the Latrine, but wasn't sure just how to go about this. He figured there must be an easy way, so procured some 100 Octane Aircraft fuel and poured some down each hole in the latrine. Next he poured a line of gas along the ground about 75 feet away as a fuse. When he ignited the gas -O-W - and took off with tents, mosquito bars, etc. flying throughout the camp. Disciplinary action resulting from this fiasco included digging another latrine (alone) and in the Islands hard, Coral Base, this was no easy task.

Sad news shocked the Group in late 1943 as word spread throughout camp areas that another

fatality had occurred. The 40th Service Squadron had received some newly assigned enlisted men and three of them decided to take advantage of some free time one day and go exploring up river. Being unfamiliar with the island hazards, especially during the rainy season, they were unaware of the speed with which the rivers could swell and travel down from the mountains. The three had gone up quite a distance from camp, built a raft and were traversing the river current back to camp when they were caught in the river's rising and rapid current. The raft capsized, two of them made it to shore, but Herbert S. Morris lost his life unable to handle the menacing river. After searching for their buddy in vain, the two returned to camp reporting the incident to First Sgt. Sherman Scowden, who immediately sent a search detail to the scene. The body was located and returned to the 40th's area. A full military funeral was held and attended by all Group and Squadron personnel that were able to be away from assigned duties. Interment was in the Guadalcanal cemetery containing hundreds of white crosses marking the resting place of fallen US servicemen. Morris' parents were properly notified by Squadron Commander Thomas Spradling.

Soon orders were received for all units to move to other bases with both the 40th and 2020th included. They were both relieved from duty with the 29th Air Service Group in June, 1945, and reassigned to the 570th Air Service Group which had been organized into one of the newly created streamlined groups and sent to the Philippines. None of the men were looking forward to another move, and while packing and making ready to leave Morotai, orders were issued on the 5th of August to standby on "alert", as orders were being changed for each of these units to move up to Okinawa. Morale dropped to an all time low for a time, as everyone was by now looking forward to a trip back home, what with the rotation plan and the long period of time spent in the islands. Then, out of the blue, came the exciting news of the Air Force strike against the Japanese homeland and the drop of the first atomic bomb.

Shortly thereafter, a second atomic bomb raid caused such terrible destruction to life and property over a wide area that the Japanese command announced their unconditional surrender.

This unexpected situation changed command strategies throughout the entire theatre of operations and orders to move to Okinawa were rescinded. All equipment and supplies were returned to original camp areas and each unit resumed normal operations. , on the 24th of August, both units were ordered to pack once again and make ready to move out on a LST bound for the Philippines. On September 5th, after an uneventful voyage, the 40th and 2020th arrived and disembarked at Subic Bay, Leyte. Almost immediately, orders were issued for the 2020th Truckers to participate in an 80 vehicle convoy between Subic Bay and Clark Field at Manila to transport men and equipment to the new base of operations.

Daily convoys continued for over a week covering the 70 mile trip and upon completion, both units became part of the 570th Air Service Group. When they learned that Lt. Col. John Woodward was group commander, they went about their tasks with renewed enthusiasm knowing that they were in friendly territory once again.

Major Paul Mehrtens took over the group at this time and remained through the period covered by this document. In September, Lt. Col. John Woodward was again relieved from his command with the 570th Air Service Group and transferred to the 8th Air Service Group, again as group commander. He was not alone in his new surroundings as most all former 29th men in the 570th, including the 40th Service Squadron, were also reassigned to the 8th. This duty lasted until November, when the 8th Air Service Group was deactivated and ordered to return to the States, although during the period September to November most of the original 29th personnel had been relieved.

Air Force Order of Battle

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Sources

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

Unit history. *29 Air Service Group, Palm Tree a Historical Record of the 29 Air Service Group*. Chester J. Jansen. Franklin Printing, Grand Haven, MI. 1983.