

41st AIR SERVICE GROUP



MISSION

LINEAGE

41st Air Base Group
Redesignated 41st Service Group, 25 Jun 1942
Redesignated 41st Air Service Group

STATIONS

MacDill AAF, Tampa, FL
Tallahassee, FL
Tarquina, Italy

ASSIGNMENTS

COMMANDERS

Maj Ollie L. Blan
Maj Eugene C. Fleming, Apr 1941
Col Llewellyn C. Howell

HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

EMBLEM

MOTTO

OPERATIONS

IT WAS on January 15th, 1941, that the original unit of the 41st Service Group was activated. This organization was the 41st Air Base Group at MacDill Field in Tampa, Florida. The Commanding Officer was Major Ollie L. Blan. Three outfits comprised the Group: Headquarters and Headquarters Squadron, the 55th Materiel Squadron and the 42nd Air Base Squadron. This was the nucleus from which grew the Group, the 41st Service Group which, after months of training in five states in the Union, participated in the invasions of Africa, Sicily, Italy and France, building a well-deserved reputation of industry, loyalty and devotion to duty, winning decorations and praise, and, most important, fulfilling its functions and performing its services in a manner beyond the requirements of duty.

The able leadership of Colonel Eugene C. Fleming through the first part of the African campaign, and Colonel Llewellyn C. Howell through the finish of that campaign and through the Sicilian, Italian and French Campaigns was greatly responsible for this success.

The officers and enlisted men that made up the 41st were transferred from Air Corps Unassigned, 27th Air Base Squadron, G. H. Q., Air Corps Detachment at MacDill Field. During the period of a little over two months that the group remained at this base, the officers were busy completing the organizational work and collecting supplies and equipment. Many of the men were still at technical schools and a large part of the personnel was having its basic training.

On the 18th of March the Group moved to the Tallahassee Army Air Base. The group was ready to start functioning, to learn by actual experience, its shortcomings and its strong points, its requirements and its ability to fulfill those requirements. In April, 1941, Major Eugene C. Fleming succeeded Major Blan as Commanding Officer.

After an intensive period of training at Tallahassee army air base the group left for the Louisiana maneuvers. From there the group moved to Maxton, N. C., where it operated under actual field conditions. From here the group returned to its former base at Tallahassee.

Five days after the return to Tallahassee, the President of the United States, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, declared a state of war existing between the United States of America and Japan.

Immediately the Group began preparations for a move at any time, but the move did not occur for over two months.

Early in February, the 41st Air Base Group was relieved of assignment to the 3rd Air Force and was assigned to the 8th. This transfer only affected Headquarters and Headquarters Squadron; the 55th Materiel Squadron remained in the 3rd Air Force, but was still assigned to the 41st Air Base Group.

About the middle of February, Headquarters and Headquarters Squadron moved to Wilmington, North Carolina, where it serviced the 20th Pursuit Group until the latter part of April, when it was reassigned to the 3rd Air Force and returned to Tallahassee, to remain there until August 16th, 1942.

On June 25th, 1942, the 41st Air Base Group changed to the 41st Service Group and was relieved from assignment to the 3rd Air Force and assigned to the Air Service Command, III Air Service Area. The 41st was to be the first Service Group to operate a Service Center in the continental limits of the United States. In the month and a half following the redesignation of the 41st, the Group was to be considerably augmented by the assignment of eight new outfits which included the 62nd Signal Company and the 174th Quartermaster Company, later the 1062nd and 1127th respectively.

The 41st was alerted for overseas movement on August 14th, and soon after that date the various outfits comprising the Group. Assembled at the Army Air Base, Waycross, Georgia. They remained here for a little over a month preparing for the overseas move, filling personnel and equipment shortages.

By September 20th the entire Group was set for the temporary change of station to the Fort Dix Staging Area. The group moved by rail in three echelons and arrived at Fort Dix on the afternoon of September 22nd. It was from Fort Dix and Camp Kilmer that the four echelons of the 41st left for overseas service.

After final physicals, shots in the arm, and other unpleasantries that make up life at a Port of Embarkation, Personnel boarded the ships that were to take them to their first overseas station: Africa. To many who spent a great deal of the voyage leaning over the rail and "feeding the fishes," those days on the briny deep will be remembered as anything but pleasant.

THE FIRST ECHELON of the 41st arrived on November 8th, D-Day of the African Invasion. There were two sections of this echelon; one landed at Port Lyauty, crossing the Atlantic on the U. S. S. Nightingale, and the other at Fedala on the U. S. S. Ancon. The troops were carried ashore from the transports by assault landing craft, through occasional bursts of shell fire. Casualties were few at these locations and none were suffered by members of the 41st.

The largest echelon sailed on the U. S. S. Hermitage and the U. S. S. Cristobal. It was scheduled to land on D plus 5, but there had been so much naval action in the harbor at Casablanca, that it

was practically choked up with wreckage. The convoy entered the harbor on the morning of November 18th, and the troops disembarked the following day.

The third and fourth echelons also landed at Casablanca. The third crossed on the U. S. S. Uruguay and arrived on Christmas Eve. The fourth and last echelon came on the U. S. S. Santa Elena docking on January 25th, 1943.

Colonel Fleming assumed command of the Gazes Airport at Casablanca, French Morocco, on November 21st, 1942, and operation began at the 41st's Service Center on foreign soil. The airfield, hangars and administration buildings were in good condition, the field having been taken with practically no resistance, although it had been strafed by Allied planes. The first days after the Group's arrival on the 18th were spent in setting up the camp and hauling equipment from the docks. Trucking facilities were at a minimum and locating equipment was a puzzling problem. It had been unloaded anywhere between Safi and Port Lyauty and it was only after considerable searching that it was finally found. The inevitable red tape constantly increased the difficulties. Equipment, cut to the vital necessities before shipment, was found to be even further depleted, but finally everything was assembled and the outfits of the Group commenced their various jobs, doing the tasks of a full service group with considerably less than half their strength and under tremendously difficult circumstances.

The Group at Casablanca was composed of Headquarters and Headquarters Squadron less detachment; the 55th and 306th Service Squadrons less detachments; the 738th Ordnance Company less detachment and the 62nd Signal Company. Consequently, we worked short-handed until the end of December when the balance of the 55th, 306th, 738th, 174th and 1941st arrived. They were responsible for almost all airfields, POL dumps and ammunition dumps for the Air Force in the I Service Area Command from November 8th to January 15th, 1943. Detachments from the companies were stationed at various times at Port Lyauty, Fedala, Marrakech, Louis Gentil, Safi and Madouina in French Morocco.

During these days of heavy work, there was still some time for relaxation and diversion. Some patronized the French PX where beer was bought by the helmet full. New Year's Eve was celebrated by visiting German planes that were greeted by a display of anti-aircraft fire and searchlights unlike anything that the men had witnessed before. No casualties or damage were suffered.

During the A. N. F.A. Conference in January, 1943, the Group was operating Gazes Airport and received many dignitaries. Colonel R. Beam, Commanding the Moroccan Composite Wing, wrote this commendation to Colonel Fleming: "Upon your departure from the Casablanca area, I wish to express my deep appreciation for your loyalty and splendid work done at the Gazes Airport by you and members of your Command which has reflected in favorable comment from the President, the Chief of Staff and the Chief of the Army Air Forces."

The day after the arrival of the last echelon, the main body of the Group left Casablanca for the new Service Center well up in the forward area in the combat zone, Ain M'Lila, Algeria.

The main body of the Group moved in four echelons, three motor echelons, and one, the largest, a train echelon. Not the train echelons of the States with comfortable Pullmans, but cramped and crowded French box cars, the famed 40 and 8's. It was a fascinating trip across French Morocco and well into Algeria.

By February 1st the Group was assembled at Ain M'Lila. It had moved forward to the combat area behind the Tunisian front. Here it was to service the 301st Bomb Group (B-17s), the 71st Fighter Squadron (P-38s), and the Second Fighter Squadron (Spitfires). It was the Group's first station as a service center in a combat area. It was a precarious time for the Allies. On February 14th, Von Arnim and Rommel launched their troops against the American forces west of Faid Pass and in front of Gafsa. It was an unexpected attack and the Allies could not meet it promptly. Strong thrusts developed in the direction of Sbeitla and on the road to Gafsa, and both of these places had to be abandoned. By February 20th the Axis had possession of the Kasserine Pass and the new American base at Tebessa was threatened.

Several Mobile Repair Units from the Service Squadrons that had been called forward to Telepte, Kasserine and Sbeitla were forced to evacuate, and trucks and drivers were furnished from the Group to assist in the evacuation of all troops, ground troops included.

The axis advance reached its height on February 22nd, and on the 23rd, Rommel began his withdrawal, the Allies using all available type of aircraft to pound his eastward moving columns.

During this period the Group functioned under the most inconvenient and uncomfortable conditions. The Service Center was set up in tents on the flat plain west of the air field, wide open to the winds, rain and snow that all did their share in making life and work difficult and uncomfortable. All the outfits of the Group were bivouacked on the " plain and the men's only protection from the weather was their pup tents, sometimes covered with snow, other times surrounded by mud, and on occasion, blown down by the windy blasts. Each pup-tent was pitched beside its fox hole or slit trench, or covering it. Air raid alerts were numerous and many a night's sleep was interrupted by a dash for the fox holes.

There was little diversion for the men of the Group at this station. The little village had practically nothing to offer. There were movies in the granary almost every night, the men bringing along their own cans or boxes for seats'. When the pressure of work, allowed, men were given passes to visit the city of Constantine, the nearest large city. But the main activity of the men, outside their work, was "sweating out" the Forts as they returned from their missions to Bizerte and Sicily.

By the first of March the Group was busy with preparations for a move further forward, and the first echelons were leaving to prepare for the Group's arrival at Youks les Bains, about eight miles northwest of Tebessa. From here the Group serviced some of the most forward airfields behind the then advancing, Allied lines where were located the 31st, 52nd, and 33rd Fighter Groups, and the 154th Observation Squadron.

Youks les Bains was a tiny village nestled in the trees and orchards in the foothills of the mountains at the southwest end of a huge plain. As the convoys descended the slopes of the hills at the northern end of the plain, the little village at the farther end could not be seen, hidden in its natural camouflage of trees. Some of the outfits turned off at the airfield, a dreary, desolate expanse of flat land extending to the mountains, in which some of the men were to live and work. They literally dug underground in the bleak landscape for a period of well over a month.

Other outfits bivouacked in the orchards on the edge of the village, well dispersed for safety sake; a pleasanter area than the sun-colored foot hills near the field. Despite the terrific mud under foot, the flowering almond and fruit trees gave a cheerier aspect to life. Other outfits and detachments of outfits bivouacked at Youks, were stationed at the more forward fields of Telepte No. 1 and No.2, Sbeitla and Kasserine. At these fields work went on at a terrific pace with the men subject to strafing and bombing, hut still a high standard of work was maintained. At the time of the Group's arrival in Youks, Colonel Fleming was Commanding Officer, but on the 13th of March, he was transferred to the 36th Air Depot Group and the duties and responsibilities of this command were given to Lt. Col. Llewellyn C. Howell. The various positions that he had held in the Group and his first-hand knowledge of all phases of a service group fitted him perfectly for the great responsibility of Commanding Officer, an honor and reward well merited by his service. As the Tunisian campaign moved to its final phase, fighter aircraft were moved in to the Le Sers-Ebba Ksour area to keep within effective range of the enemy. The 41st, as a result, moved forward to continue servicing and maintaining the combat units of XII Air Support Command. It was a move from Algeria into Tunisia, and took place between April 16th and 20.

The Service Center was set up in tents across the road from the airfield about three miles from the town of Ebba Ksour. Some of the outfits of the Group bivouacked in the vicinity and the remainder, on the three fields in. La Sers.

On May 7th, Tunis was entered by the British, and Bizerte by forward elements of the Americans and French. On May 13th the last remaining Axis forces in North Africa surrendered.

The 41st was alerted for movement to Cape Bon and by the end of the month the Service Center was set up at Menzel Temine. They accompanied units which were moving onto Cape Bon for shorter range against Pantallerria. They maintained and serviced the outfits in the Menzel Temine and Korba area. During and up to the all-out air attack on Pantallerria the problem of stocking bombs, ammunition and gas for the eighteen squadrons serviced, plus filling the needs of the 52nd Fighter Group and the 81st Fighter Group at Sousse proved to be the biggest task undertaken by the 41st up to that time. Entertainment and diversion was much more plentiful here than at the previous stations. Tunis was only seventy miles away and day passes were issued for this city.

Probably the most appreciated diversion was the wonderful swimming at the beautiful beach within a short distance of the companies' bivouac areas. Loot was found in great quantities. All manner of equipment having been left behind in the hurried withdrawal of the Axis forces. Everything from small arms, helmets, binoculars and cameras to German jeeps and trucks. Movies were shown out of doors for the various outfits practically every night. Beer and ice cream were welcome additions to the diet. THE SECOND contingent, D-4, invasion of Sicily went into the assembly-staging area on Independence Day. The day's character was matter of fact; there were no high spots. It was Africanly hot and nobody made any superfluous moves. D-4" stowed its barracks bags when the trucks came. They boarded the trucks and waited quietly, got under way with a minimum of goodbyes. At Korba they joined Capt. Harris and the 306th. Then all proceeded to Tunis and the next bivouac.

Why describe a particular olive grove? When D-4 hung up its mosquito bars and settled down to sleep on a blanket or two, the ground seemed a little bumpier and harder than before; that's all the difference. There were the standard Tunisian wells, complete with oxen and camels, the twisted trees, the ants, beetles and scorpions. One well, owing to the influence of nearby Tunis, was equipped with a gasoline driven pump, but it didn't work, it shouldn't count. A new sort of latrine accommodating eight was included; it was wooden, but flush with the ground like a slit trench. At a formation the men were told that it was permissible to go to Tunis if trouble were strictly avoided. Everybody got a last look at the famous city, the parent of Tunisia and the last city that the Germans held in Africa. Everybody had a final drink of the poor beer, the sweet Muscat, or the belly wash grenadine and water. Some of them got a last steak to stand them in good stead in the lean days to come; some said goodbye to a special girl. There was a daily truck run to the beach at La Gouiefté where an occasional girl embarrassed a GI who was swimming and sunning au naturel. The more intellectual visited the traces of old Carthage.

Some only got as far as El Ariana where they found what they wanted, wine, women or ice cream. There was a notably hot day. The shade temperature was recorded in Tunis at 125. The famous Sirocco which can make Italy miserable after passing over the cool Mediterranean came directly from the desert and tortured Tunis. The breeze was as hot as exhaust steam. The men congregated at the wells and drew up endless helmetfuls of water to splash on their stripped bodies. Those who went to the beach stayed in the water until it was time to leave. The shaded sides of buildings were too hot to touch. There was a formation on the fourth day. Capt. Harris briefed the next day's departure. New terms, "LST's, LCI's" and a passenger list order subdivided into ten minute intervals for moving out, sounded like embarkation. "Breakfast at 5:00 A.M.; LST No. 2 pull out at 5:55" and so on until all were gone. Actually it was a preliminary move and regrouping a dress rehearsal in which the LST groups rode, the LCI's marched, to the split second, timed and culturally enunciated English P. A. sound truck, and wound up in a new bivouac area.

In the late afternoon of the 11th the news of Sicily's invasion was announced officially in the "Stars and Stripes". All reports were that great progress had been made; not a ship had been lost. That evening at a" corny movie about the navy, the boys saw a transport catch fire in the air and glide like a majestic fragment of the sun to a hillside where it scattered its flame in a

long trail. A grim spectacle, it took the edge off the optimistic news. The next day it was told that the passengers were all killed; wounded boys from Sicily, and two nurses who were with them. Our D-Day boys were already in Sicily; D-4's turn would be soon. Late in the afternoon another formation undertook the loading of barracks bags as soon as possible, and a three o'clock breakfast next morning. Someone had seen LCI group No. 7's boat and said it was under repair, having been damaged by enemy fire during the initial invasion. The men went to bed early that night and kept their thoughts mostly to themselves.

Food had been short but the chow line had been endless; RAF men, medical men, engineers and all the officers swelled the ranks. and sweated the chow line. At three o'clock breakfast on the thirteenth it was black night outside of the kitchen area where the cooking fires and impromptu gasoline flares blazed among the black moving shadows.

For the first time there was ample food; oat meal, graham crackers, bacon, coffee and candy. "All you want; come back for seconds" was a shock to hear. Before they moved out of the area Capt. Coment announced from the darkness that their ship's number was LCI 193, in case anyone became separated from the group. It was roughly an hour's march to the "bus stop". It's a wonder that no one did 'get lost; dust blackened the darkness and sweat ran into the eyes, eye glasses became grimed. In the woolen uniforms sweat was running like the snow melt in a winter thaw. Just a tinge of light was appearing as the men threw themselves down on their packs to wait for the trucks. Many were asleep when their turn came to ride. There was another hour's march ahead at the end of the bus line and at the end of that anabasis waited twelve odd-shaped boats of navy war gray. 193 was the first in line.

Checked on the passenger list, the men went aboard. One tapped the hull of the ship with his knuckles; a sailor who noticed him said that it wouldn't stop a thirty-thirty. Another GI asked if the craft had been fully repaired; it had, they had worked on it all last night. All went directly to their bunks, that is, as fast as they could; the sextuple bunks made bottlenecks at the cabin entrances and each man had to take off his pack and push it in ahead of him. Life preservers were handed out (with Sparklet automatic inflators for the non-swimmers).

Everyone was told to stay below deck. Nearly all fell asleep in their bunks. Sailing out of Tunis bay this diminutive convoy looked like two rows of ugly ducklings. Slowly the land to port fell away as the double procession, led and flanked by three corvettes, skirted the shore that led to Cape Bon. As the first emptied case of K-rations was heaved overboard, a squadron of PT boats cut angrily across the convoy's path seeming all bow, spray and wake; in short order they had bored from horizon to horizon, speeders in the traffic at sea. Two Spitfires, like airborne porpoises, played about for several minutes. From the other direction, as if it were a highway, another string of LCIs passed. "Where can they be going?" the men were asking each other, and then someone said, "Aren't those German prisoners on board that one?" Seven of them were swarming with captured Germans and Italians, an eighth was well filled. "Where are those babies going?" was asked again, as, like a procession of state, a heavy convoy, with soaring silver barrage balloons bore down from the east. With the possibility of invasion at other places than Sicily, the men counted the freighters and destroyers, and appraised the two cruisers. The

fortress not far from Menzel Temime Was the landfall left behind as the Lel's veered to port, leaving Africa behind in a heavy haze with invisible Pantalleria in their path. Later, as a Wellington and two P-38's overtook the slow, water-churning craft and disappeared ahead, the faint outline of the bomb-defeated island materialized, the silhouette, like a giant dorsal fin, looming out of the water; it had looked the same from the beach at Menzel Temime. Two hours later, larger on the horizon, and more detailed, it was seen to be more extensive than it had seemed before; besides the fin there was some of the fishes back.

Passing Pantalleria at sunset we saw transport planes landing on the piedmont. The scattered stone buildings on the outskirts of the town threw long shadows and the shaded cliffs were black. Soon it was all astern and the red sun withdrew into the sea alongside the island.

At eleven-thirty that night some of the men were still on deck watching lightning like flashes far ahead on the horizon. There was a siren signal from the LCI directly ahead as it turned sharply to port. A bell rang out 193'8 bridge and the engine was stopped dead. A sailor rushed forward to the splinter shield where the forward 20 mm gun was fixed on the bow. "Object sighted one point starboard bow!" he shouted. As the ship moved slowly forward a black object that resembled a slender periscope glided past her flank; it Was the visible quill of a marine mine.

The dawn was fogbound ... an hour later there was still a patchy mist. Soldiers eating their K breakfasts were asked by the skipper to watch out for more mines; they were in the center of a field. Now a crew member was stationed on the forward gun with his headphone on, binoculars in his hand. The ships were moving in single file, like Indians on the warpath, and as gun fire sounded in the distance the procession would move through thin tatters of fog. Three times they doubled back to where visibility was zero; as the lead ship emerged from the mist wall going west, the others were disappearing into it, one after another, to make the blind turn like railway cars. Two corvettes were firing at mines, trying to explode them.

The watchman forward cried, "Planes sighted, port beam, high!" Their whine could be heard, but they were hard to see. "What kind?" the men shouted; the sailor had his glasses on them. "I don't know what the hell they are" he cried, "They look like the ones that strafed us on the invasion; long, slim bastards!" A 306th man said, "Jerries, I can tell by the motors. They bombed us at Telepte." The planes disappeared.

The fog was lifting. As more could be seen on the ocean other convoys were sighted; transports and barrage balloons, all circling about sweating out a path through the fog obscuring Sicily.

Shortly, the curtain parted and there, just a few. miles away, was the embattled, stepping-stone island. At the base of a range of hills, far down the coast, a city sparkled in the morning sun. The convoys moved in.

They passed that city, and miles, of beaches, flat and sandy, below green topped bluffs. "Was that Gela?" they asked. And there appeared another city, like a medieval fortress built upon a steep hill that sloped to the sea. There were other ships before them; transports, LST's, cruisers,

destroyers. There was a long pier jutting out into the shallow bay. It was severed almost exactly in half, had been blown up by a bomb, a mine or shell fire. If this was the appointed beachhead, the troops were going to have to get their feet wet. Someone said authoritatively, "This is Gela."

Closer now to shore than before, this was the scene. The city of stone and stucco, built in a jumble similar to a kazbah, like blocks spilled on a tilted table, was smashed in places by war. Wig wag and blinker signals showed on the busy shore where the amphibian "ducks" were crawling in and out of the surf. Every so often a cloud of gray smoke would mushroom out of the town and float beyond the buildings on the crest. Down on the beach to the east two large explosions sending geysers high in the air drove an LST back into the harbor. Flights of three A-36's or Spitfires swooped over the area. 193 heeled far over as everyone crowded the rail watching. Then it was announced that all should prepare to land.

Back on deck again and wearing field packs the men watched the first LCI ram the shore and empty its passengers into the surf. A moderately heavy sea, submarine bomb craters. and other irregularities combined to cause shore bound soldiers sinking in water to their armpits. Some were carrying barracks bags, packs and rifles; it was humorous to watch but unpleasant to look forward to in subjective terms. 193 dropped the stern anchor and made full speed ahead for shore where a signal man was wigwagging to the bridge.

When the "Landing Craft Infantry" struck the sandy bottom some who weren't braced for the shock went reeling into the others that were. A sailor in trunks waded out from the shore until the water came up to his neck. They backed the LCI out again and tried a different spot on the beach. D-4 was only wet up to the hips when it reached shore. They were ordered off the beach immediately by someone who had forgotten about the barracks bags. Sailors attempted to float the bags ashore in a collapsible rubber life boat; the soldiers came back and carried the soggy baggage to a common pile near the road. Then a non-com yelled the inevitable "Fall in! Let's go!" and with a squishing of shoes the combined 306th and Headquarters struck out along their first Sicilian road.

The 41st arrived in Sicily in numerous echelons, the first echelon landing on D-Day, July 9th, at Blue Beach about five miles down the coast from Gela. While the LST's of his convoy were waiting to beach they were subjected to air raids during which some of the ships were hit, but again the 41st escaped without injury. On landing they proceeded to their assembly area about a quarter of a mile in from the beach where they immediately dug their foxholes, by, and in which they lived for two nights and part of three days. They Were intermittently being strafed and shelled, but again, no casualties. On D-4 they were joined by the second echelon and moved to an area near the air field about five miles south of Gela. After a short stay here they moved to Licata where the remainder of the Group joined the first echelons. Here the first Sicilian Service Center of the 41st was set up in an almond grove. But it was to be for a very short time. On July 18th; eight days after the landing of the allied troops on the south coast of Sicily, Agrigento and Caltanissetta were taken by American troops, and on July 22nd, the U. S. 7th Army entered Palermo. without military opposition. A detachment of 41st men from HQ at

the 306th Service Squadron were Advance Headquarters of III ASAC in Palermo and were among the first air force troops to enter that city on July 23rd.

The latter part of July and the first of August, 1943; found the 41st busy shuttling its companies across the island, transferring its Service Center from Licata to Termini Imerese. By motor convoy, and in many echelons, the Group traversed the narrow, winding, mountainous roads, torn up by bombs and shells, and littered with abandoned and destroyed enemy equipment. It was a drive through beautiful scenery and dirty, crumbling towns. The Service Center was set up on the side of a steep hill overlooking the sea and the coastal plain, on which was one of the fields that the Group would service. The sections were set up in tents. A sub Service Center was set up at the Palermo Airfield, the servicing and repairing of which was being supervised by the 41st, as well as the Trapani Airfield. Other detachments from the Group were at Licata and Agrigento.

The period in Sicily passed quickly; all the outfits were kept busy and the time was broken up by the cessation of hostilities on the island in mid-August. At the close of the Sicilian campaign, the 31st Fighter Group moved to Milazzo West for shorter range against Salerno, and some of the companies in the Group accompanied them.

The weather in Sicily was beautiful and warm, and the men, living in the olive groves, hung their pup tents like awnings from the tree branches and lived in the open air. There were movies and USO shows for entertainment as well as good swimming at a nearby beach. Day passes were given for Palermo, a beautiful and interesting city to visit.

By the first of September the Group was moving in echelons into the staging area at Milazzo, preparatory to the Italian invasion. DDAY for the invasion of Italy was September 9th. Again the 41st was well represented, but this time was not as fortunate as on the previous invasions. One officer and two enlisted men suffered wounds for which they received The Purple Heart. Some of the 41st units were the first AFSC units to arrive safely on the beachhead in the British X Corps Sector.

For about the first week the echelons of the 41st suffered their worst experiences of the war to date, being subjected to shell fire, bombing and strafing. Reports circulated that the Germans might break through, and that the service group personnel might have to make a stand against ground troops. No breakthrough occurred but the men were continually on the alert. A gas alarm considerably increased the tension but turned out to be a false alarm. During the first days of the invasion the purpose of the Group was to move unit personnel and equipment from the beach and transit areas to airfields as soon as the tactical situation would permit.

One encouraging thought was uppermost in everyone's mind and that was the fact that General Montgomery was pushing up from the toe of Southern Italy with his powerful 8th Army. We all were certain that when contact could be made with his Army and our 5th Army the beachhead would be secure and together we could push north. On the morning of 14 Sept. these two great armies joined and we went to work with renewed enthusiasm.

It was Sept. 18th that the 306th Service Squadron was able to occupy and operate the Monte Corvina Airfield. In the meantime, Col. Howell moved the Service Center Hq. to a less vulnerable location at Paestum. The moves between beaches, dumps, Monte Corvina Airfield, Paestum Airfield, Sele Airfield and Capaccio Airfield were over passably good but very dusty roads. The main crossing over the Sele River was under shell fire through September 18th, and the road from the crossing to Monte Corvino was under fire until September 19th. The traffic was excessively heavy and vehicles were closely packed and at times moving in a double column.

The fact that the source of Class III A supply as the American VI Corps Beach dumps, and that two strips were operating north in the X Corps Sector, was extremely unfortunate. Attempts to supply these northern fields by road subjected trucks with highly inflammable and explosive cargoes to dangerous routes which were under intermittent shelling.

Even the echelons arriving late in the month at the Salerno Beachhead experienced the excitement of German shells from the mountains landing in the congested bay, witnessed Allied ships shelling the Germans in return, watched smoke screens being laid to conceal the beaching of LST's, and unloaded boats during air raid alerts. These later echelons were able to proceed immediately from the beach to their company bivouac areas. Center was in operation before the end of September from a brick office building in the midst of farm lands, in the town of Paestum. It was approximately a mile from the Paestum Airdrome, which was occupied by the 33rd Fighter Group, and about 16 miles from the Monte Corvino Airdrome, occupied by the 31st Fighter Group. For the first time in its overseas history, the Base Sections were housed in a building, practically all under the same roof. The various companies assigned to the Group were bivouacked in tents near the Group Headquarters or near the air fields of Paestum, Monte Corvino, Sele or Capaccio. Rain and terrific mud considerably hampered operations for the short time the Group was in this area.

The Group continued, as in Sicily and Africa, servicing tactical outfits at the forward fields. Two days after the fall of Naples, about October 1st, the first echelons of the 41st were going forward to prepare for the arrival of the Group at the Pomigliano Airdrome, seven miles northeast of Naples, and about twenty miles behind the front lines to the north.

Pomigliano was a quiet, dirty little town spotted with bombed and burned buildings. Its half-starved, dirty population was unhealthy after years of war deprivation. One felt that life had always been dirty, unhealthy and meager here. But just beyond the town to the left of the main road was what was once one of Italy's proud modern airplane factories and airfields, the Alpha Romeo Corporation, now a twisted mass of steel and piles of rubble half concealing the well planned layout of streets, buildings, gates, walls, swimming pool, ball field and airdrome, acres of destroyed buildings, materiel and equipment too valuable for the Germans to leave intact.

To the right of the main road was a housing development, set in cultivated fields at the base of the northern slopes of Mt. Vesuvius, four city blocks of offices, stores, hospital, recreation

center, apartments, gardens and playgrounds. But the housing development, unlike the factories across the road, was practically undamaged. Here the Base Service Center was established, and many of the outfits were comfortably quartered in the apartments. This was to be the home of the Group for nearly four months, longer than any previous stop overseas, and it was by far the best setup that they had ever had. The outfits which the 41st Service Group was servicing were XII Tactical Air Command outfits of the 12th Air Force.

Their missions were to support the ground forces and knock out enemy installations in the rear of the front lines, bombing and strafing bridges, roads, bivouac' areas and supply dumps; softening up and crippling the enemy and hindering their flow of supplies and reinforcements. It was the Group's function to keep the personnel and planes of these outfits in the best flying condition, a responsibility shared by the many and varied sections comprising the Group. The Pomigliano Airdrome rivaled La Guardia Field in the immensity of its traffic, and the housing development was the busiest Service Center of the Air Force in Italy. In addition to Pomigliano, many other fields were serviced at various times. This included Paestum, anta Maria, Cercola, Vesuvius, Castel Volturno, and Monte Corvino. A tremendous task was satisfactorily accomplished.

It was a period of hard work for all the companies, but it was spiced with an abundance of diversified entertainment. Enlisted men's clubs were organized by practically all the outfits in the Group.

Naples and the surrounding countryside offered a variety of diversion. Air raids were frequent during October and November with the harbor of nearby Naples the target: Except for two raids, no bombs were dropped on the field. The flak was very heavy in most of the raids and duds fell on the 41st area, but the phenomenal luck of the 41st still held. There were no casualties during the whole period.

The Service Center's next move was to Santa Maria, about twenty miles north of Naples. Although Group Headquarters did not move until the latter half of January, 1944, parts of the Group had been here since November. The new Service Center area was on a flat plain between the airfield and the main road several miles outside of the town.

Again it was a tent city set up in a muddy field, and it was to remain in this location for a longer period than any other camp since the Group's activation-a period of about five months. During this time the 41st serviced seven different fields at various times. The fields were Castel Volturno, Cercola, Anzio Landing Strip, Amendola, Marcianese, Santa Maria and Pignataro. The work of the Service Center continued in the usual manner.

Outfits and detachments from the Group that were stationed at the Anzio Beachhead suffered their worst experiences of the war. Almost continual bombing, shelling and strafing, day and night, hindered their work, and made living hazardous and chaotic. Two men of the 41st lost their lives at Anzio. Lt. Lloyd Brower was injured when a building in which he was sleeping was hit by a bomb and he died the next day in the hospital on the beachhead. Pfc. Maurice Mahn

was killed when a shell made a direct hit on his dugout. There were numerous casualties, and it was a bitter experience for every man stationed there.

The 41st Service Group was represented at the Anzio Beachhead by a large part of the 306th Service Squadron and detachments from the 1983rd Quartermaster Company, 1062nd Signal Company, the 1658th Ordnance Company and the 1127th Quartermaster Company. The men in these organizations accomplished their work under seemingly impossible and dangerous conditions, worse than any that the 41st had heretofore been subjected. The following is quoted from the War Diary of the 306th Service Squadron for January and February. January 28: Four Officers and eighty-five Enlisted Men, advance echelon, departed from Castel Volturno for Port of Naples at 2115 hours. Two Mobile Units and Air Corps Supplies were taken to service the 307th Fighter Squadron, 31st Fighter Group.

January 29: Embarked on British LST for Port of Anzio, Italy, at 0200 hours. Daylight hours uneventful. Some fifteen miles from destination we had an air raid; raids continued through the night. Our ship was not damaged but an ammunition ship was hit in the harbor and raised merry hell all night.

January 30: Disembarked at Anzio at 0800 hours and moved to a bivouac area two miles south of NeUuno and one and one half miles from the beach. The entire area is congested and we are located three miles from the artillery.

We are set up in pyramidal tents and have some stoves. The hot meal at 1400 hours really put everyone back on their feet. January 31: Some salvage aircraft are on the field and the Mobile Units are working on them. Operational installations are located and the organization is ready for the planes to come in. The men are in good shape and swinging into regular jobs. 1600 hours. German artillery shells are passing overhead and bursting on the beach. 2230 hours. Great activity up near the front and sounds like a tank battle. German shells have been coming over at regular intervals all evening.

February 1: All quiet this morning. Planes are arriving and the job of servicing is now ready to begin. At 2130 hours this evening enemy shells again came over bursting well beyond this area. An air raid alert sounded MAJOR HARRIS at 2200 hours and some anti-aircraft fire went up but quickly ceased. Colonel Howell Group' Commander, arrived this evening by LST and inspected the area.

February 2: Usual duties throughout the day. An air raid is expected as radar units reported a large force of enemy planes landing at Rome. 1800 hours. The Navy seems to expect Jerry over tonight as they are laying a smoke screen. 2130 hours. Enemy shells are beginning to pass overhead again. Rumor 'has it that there are 170 Mobile Guns firing at about fifteen miles. 2330 hours. The shells have stopped for the night, I hope.

February 3: The enemy threw over a couple of shells this morning. Two of the shells last night landed in a building on the field and pieces damaged one of the aircraft in the dispersal area.

Identification of the enemy gun as a mobile railroad gun and a Mark VI tank has caused the men to dig the foxholes deeper and cover them with heavy timber and dirt. Many are large enough to allow four men to move in complete. Jerry was a little late in getting started tonight but at 2200 hours his shells began and lasted about two hours.

February 4: Enemy shells came over again at 0300 hours and 0600 hours but they were plenty wide. High wind blowing and rain falling, really a nasty night. The Jerry gun is still in operation.

February 5: Shelling continues through the hours of darkness. Enemy plane came over around 0830. A Spitfire gave him a few bursts from his guns and he turned and ran. 0930 hours. Air raid by fifteen planes, but anti-aircraft fire kept them high and no damage was reported. 1140 hours. Anti-aircraft fire going up very high and I couldn't see the planes. 1230 hours. Jerry shells passing over and landing some 200 yards off the runway. There was a big fire caused by abandoned enemy powder. Shells have come over all afternoon and two landed within 100 yards of the bivouac area. 2120 hours Exploding shell wounded Cpl. Hiller in the leg and caused the first casualty. The weather is cold and it's going to be a bad night for the foxholes.

February 6: Shells continue to land in several areas around the field. 0400 hours. Air raid, sounds like a single plane. 0530 hours. Air raid, a number of planes over. Bombs dropped along the beach near the field. Shells continue through the afternoon and until 2200 hours.

February 7: 1st Lt. Brower, of the 1983rd Quartermaster Trucking Company, attached to this Headquarters, was seriously injured during an air raid this morning. Injury was caused by an exploding bomb. 1535 hours. Another air raid, this is the third today. One of the enemy ships was shot down. A hospital, the 95th Evacuation Hospital, one half mile away, was hit in this raid causing a number of casualties.

February 8; Lt. Brower died at 0335 hours from injuries received in the air raid yesterday. After a day without shelling, Jerry began early this morning and has continued coming over all day. Air raid at 1150 hours, strafing and bombing. No casualties in this organization. The 307th Fighter Squadron has discontinued operations from the field.

There is a shortage of parts needed to repair the damaged aircraft on the field. Shelling and air raids have greatly restricted our operation on the field. The men after a week are jittery and their nerves are a little raw. Six men of this organization are repairing the electrical system of the hospital. By night the lines were repaired. The German pilot who bombed the hospital was shot down with a bullet through the lung and is being treated at the hospital which he bombed. February 9: The day has been a little quiet. Had a couple of air raid scares but they turned back before reaching the field. . Had three air raids since dark and again there are shells passing overhead.

February 10: I understand there were more raids during the night but fortunately I slept through them. Father Martin; Group Chaplain, arrived last evening and I think it will help brace

the morale. Large flights of B-17s and B-24s are going over. They are welcome sights. It is quite a sight to see the smoke and dust rising from their objectives.

Bad weather has closed in and activity is limited this afternoon. Had steak for dinner today and it was good. 1700 hours. Shells are bursting in air over the area. One hit the 33rd Evacuation Hospital setting fire to a tent. Heavy winds blowing in from the sea. Rain driving hard and the surf is almost as loud as the roar of the big guns. . After the short session of the shelling the night, outside of the elements, has been very quiet.

Feb 11: The weather has restricted all activity today. Received some good news. According to the bulletin, the 170 gun, railroad, was temporarily knocked out by the large flights of heavy bombers yesterday. The shelling last night was either a mobile 88 or a tank near the front. Two nurses at the 33rd Evac were killed and several minor injuries were caused. This organization fortunately escaped injuries. During the night the Chaplain's bedroll caught on fire and after a brief scramble in the Officer's tent everything was back. under control. Strong winds blowing. The day passed very quietly but we are still afraid to hope the heat of shelling and air raids of the past two week are over. All Officers and men are still living underground. Shells bursting again in the area; this has been going on for an hour.

February 12: 0200 hours. Pfc. Maurice Mahan killed when a shell made a direct hit on his dugout. 0850 hours. Air raid and no casualties. 1100 hours. Funeral services for Pfc. Mahan in the chapel at the hospital. Another heavy shelling lasting from 1130 to 1200. Flights of medium and dive bombers have gone over. Two of our medium bombers were shot down by German anti-aircraft fire.

The weather has cleared some. We all hope that the weather will hold. Tonight shells have been landing in the bivouac area without causing casualties. From 2045 to 2230 hours continuous air raids. The German aerial bomb was used on the harbor.

Again we were fortunate and had no casualties. February 13: Early hours of the morning passed quietly and gave us an opportunity to get some sleep. 0815 hours. Air field strafed and bombed by enemy raiders. 2250 hours. Pvt. William Dray, S/Sgt. Robert Martin seriously injured and Sgt. Fred Ruckle slightly injured when an enemy shell landed in their dugout. Sgt. George Hoydenish, hearing the explosion, checked the dugout and found it caved in. Chaplain Martin and Capt. O'Dea and enlisted men dug the men out during a very heavy air raid and evacuated them to a hospital. Another shell landed in the area destroying tents and equipment. Air raids have been continuous all night.

February 14: One air raid at 1130 hours. We have moved the bivouac area about a mile away in a grove of stunted trees where coverage is very good. Shells passing overhead sound much further away and that is giving me comfort. . Anti-aircraft fire went up a couple of times tonight but we were not bothered. A number of planes flying overhead. They sound like Beaufighters, we hope.

February 15: Trucks from the Group arrived today bringing Air Corps supplies and mail. Plenty of mail for everyone. It is the best morale builder we have. The Chaplain has gone back. He has been a great help to the men these rough days. Had a couple of dog fights high overhead at noon today. Never a dull moment here. Several heavy air raids tonight, can't remember just how many. We weathered the storm. February 16: From midnight to 0600 hours several air raids and they have been heavy.

According to reports there was a total of seven raids last night. Today has been very rough. German shells have been passing over in a steady stream and landing in Nettuno, on and all around the air field. Several planes have been destroyed by shell fire. All serviceable aircraft are being flown away from the field. That field is too hot to stay on. Our men are working on the field every day, but today there are too many shells.

February 17: Lt. Early Bozeman, Squadron Engineering Officer, and the crews of the mobile units attempted to work on the field but were forced to leave by shells exploding near the units. Raids and shell fire are continuing day and night.

February 18: The men have dug in again and are spending all the time in the bivouac area. Cpl. Alexander Bizzell was wounded during an air raid when a plane dropped a stick of anti-personnel bombs in the bivouac area. Injuries are not serious but will require evacuation. Pfc. Henry Corley was slightly wounded during this raid.

February 19: Our artillery is going today. The front is a continuous roar from the guns. Two or three air raids tonight.

February 20: Early 'this morning heavy raid on the buildings of the field and some were hit and damaged. Since this field is no longer operational, plans are being made to return to the rest of the squadron. Lt. Bozeman reports 32 repairable and salvageable aircraft on the field.

February 21: The Engineering Section is again working on the aircraft on the field. Shelling on the field has lifted enough to permit working. Air raids and shelling of the beach continued. Lt. La Torre and some communication men arrived from Naples to set up radio communication with the Group.

February 22: Washington's birthday and the Chaplain arrived with enough cold storage turkeys to feed the organization. Work continued on the field today without too much' interference.

February 23: Turkey today for dinner with rice, potatoes and fresh bread. The cooks did a fine job in preparing the meal. Heavy rains limiting air activity but shelling of the beach continues. We received a report today that the 5th Army would have the enemy artillery out in the next five days and the planes of the 307th Fighter Squadron will return.

February 24: Rain has caused the naturally swampy ground around here to become a quagmire. Clearing weather tonight has brought over a number of enemy aircraft. Raids have been heavy.

February 25: Raids continued this morning until 0415 hours. Shelling by enemy artillery also continued throughout the night. The men have built a volleyball court and a league is being organized. Mobile units continued work on aircraft on the field. Aviation gasoline and oil moved from dispersal area on the field to a new dump, two miles south of here. Some gas and oil has been destroyed by enemy action. Enemy planes over again tonight and anti-aircraft fire is heavy but no damage or casualties to organization.

February 26: Radio message received ordering half of personnel back to Castel Volturno. Major Harris leaving with the personnel. After the capture of Cassino and the rapid advance of the Allies, the fighter groups and service squadrons hurriedly packed and moved forward to keep the fighter support as near as possible to the fast moving front.

Trucks and drivers were working day and night. Ration strength dropped as rapidly as it had risen during the early part of the Santa Maria period. Supplies left behind because of the shortage of trucks when the service squadrons pulled out, necessitated assignment of details from the Group for policing and guarding. Also volunteer truck drivers were called for to help the overburdened trucking companies. Details were supplied to load bombs and gas on C-47's at the air field.

Entertainment facilities at Santa Maria were equal to those at Pomigliano, plus the added attraction of the Air Force Rest Camp at Capri and the greatly appreciated and enjoyed 41st Rest Camp at Vico Equense. During the five months that the Group was stationed at Santa Maria there were dramatic changes in the war. In January there was the landing of Allied forces at the Anzio Beachhead, later the stalemate at Cassino, then the terrific bombing of the Abbey, and finally the capture of Cassino and the rush northward of the Allies. Finally came the capture of Rome followed by the rapid advance through Tuscany. The latter part of June the 41st resumed its usual position not far behind the front lines when it moved to Grosseto by motor convoy; a two-day trip, the longest that the Group had made since the early days in North Africa. Many of the convoy echelons stopped for the night just south of Rome, and the men were able to visit that historic city, for the first time, in the early hours of the evening.

Grosseto was quite a different town from any in which the 41st had been quartered. Beyond the landscaped wall of the ancient town, with its 13th century cathedral, radiated straight, tree-bordered streets lined with walled villas, apartments and business buildings.

It was the agricultural center of the district, a progressive, Fascist dominated town. Advance details of the 41st had to camp on the outskirts before moving in for the Germans were still there. When the 41st did move in, it was strangely deserted, everything closed up except the gaping wounds of bombed and shelled buildings. The greater part of the population of 30,000 had evacuated the town or remained shut up in their homes.

Once again the 41st occupied the most advanced position of any XII AFSC unit, and, in this instance, of any air corps unit. Appropriate buildings were requisitioned and practically every section and outfit was ideally located from a standpoint of work as well as of comfort.

At Grosseto the 41st serviced units at Ombrone, Grosseto, Fallonica and Piombino airfields. The 4th Bomb Group, XII TAC and their subordinate units were the chief units serviced. Later these units left this area' and were superseded by the 51st Troop Carrier Wing of the 9th Troop Carrier Command. For them, bivouac 'areas, tents, messes, transportation. and all necessary equipment for the field life were installed at four air fields prior to their arrival.

Previous to the departure of the Troop Carrier Groups, the 41st was relieved of its commitments in Grosseto, and between August 11th and 16th, moved to the staging area at Santa Maria, to await its departure for France. The invasion of Southern France was expected any day. On September 25th, 1944, the 41st left the Staging Area in Santa Maria for the Assembly Area in Nisida, just outside of Naples.

This was the first invasion in which the Group was not represented on D-Day; practically the whole Group was going in together on D-14. Originally the Group had not been scheduled to go until D-25, but the success of the invasion and the need for trucks in France had stepped up the departure of the Group. The move was complicated by a shortage of trucks and all equipment had to be separated into two classes; the vital equipment necessary for operation would go on the organizational vehicles with the men, the balance would go as dead weight. A detail was left at Santa Maria with the dead weight equipment which would be loaded and taken to the docks as soon as trucks were available.

Headquarters and Headquarters Squadron left the assembly area late on the night of the 25th, all vehicles and men were loaded aboard LST's that night. Trucks had been secured for the dead weight equipment, and that also was loaded aboard the LST the same night, the loading detail working well into the early hours of the morning. The 1983rd Trucking Company, the 1658th Ordnance, the 1127th Quartermaster and the 1062nd Signal remained at the assembly area until the morning of the 26th. The 1983rd was divided up with the other outfits, their trucks and drivers hauling equipment. The convoy of five LST's on which the Group was loaded did not pull out of the harbor until 0600 hours on the 27th. On each ship besides the Group men, there were English detachments as well as French African troops.

It was a beautiful morning; when the convoy pulled out of the harbor and sailed up the coast of Italy, and the weather remained perfect for the three days and two nights of the crossing, lovely sunny days and moonlight nights, and the sea was as smooth as glass.

The only incident of the trip occurred at chow time of the first day out. The men were lined up in a queue between the vehicles crowding the topside, waiting their turn to pass through the narrow corridor of the galley. Suddenly the clang of the alert gong sailors clambered up and down ladders, out of companionways, rushing to their positions at their guns, adjusting their

life belts and putting on their helmets as they ran pushing aside men that did not have sense enough to clear the way or who were taken by surprise and did not realize what was up.

Whatever the alarm was, and judging from the position of the guns it was probably a submarine warning, the danger was soon passed, service on the chow line commenced again, and the sailors resumed their normal routine. By noon of the second day, the convoy passed through the Strait of Bonifacio, Corsica on one side and Sardinia on the other, and when the sun set in a pink haze on the port side of the ship, the blue and mauve rocks and gray mountains of Corsica were still visible on the starboard side.

It was a lazy, relaxed life aboard the LST's except for the few men on KP or guard duty and the harassed first sergeants who were continually approached by Officers for this detail or that. Men stretched out on whatever deck space they could find between the crowded vehicles and read, played cards or sun bathed. Shelter-halves were hung up at all angles between jeep windshields and truck sides to furnish a little shade on the topside. Cots were set up wherever sufficient space could be found; and one developed the agility of a mountain goat climbing from one end of the ship to the other, over jeep and command car hoods and mud guards, under gun barrels, dodging wires and ropes. The troop quarters and latrines below deck were hell holes in the day time but cooled off a bit at night, but the ideal place for sleeping was on the topside, where the majority of the men did sleep, with a muddy vehicle wheel a few inches on either side of them, but with the starlit sky above and plenty of fresh, salt air.

At daybreak on the morning of the 29th; the coast of Southern France could be seen in the distance. After chow, men were busy folding up cots and taking down shelter halves, gathering equipment and getting ready to land. D-Day had been on the 15th, fourteen days previous; German opposition had been feeble, and the Allies had made tremendous strides inland. There was none of the excitement that the first echelons of the Group had experienced in the invasions of Africa, Sicily and Italy ... just the thrill of landing in another new country and the anticipation of what it would be like.

The convoy sailed past St. Tropez on up to St. Raphael, where it turned back on its course, and returned to enter the protected bay of St. Tropez, filled with French, English and American shipping. The LST's leisurely threaded their way through the busily unloading boats up to the beach at the very end of the harbor. A very early mid-day chow had been served and everything was ready for unloading. All the LST's in the convoy made successful beachings on the first attempt except the LST on which was Headquarters and Headquarters Squadron.

It took that ship all afternoon and four attempts before it was successful. At each attempt the ship would approach the beach at a greater speed and it would seem that it would plow right through the sandy beach into the lagoon beyond. But each time it would stop short of the beach, stranded on the sand. After a disgusted pause the engines would resume again, churn up clouds of sandy water and finally the ship would creep off the bar and out into the harbor again. This performance took most of the afternoon, but by 1700 hours the ship finally tied up

at a pontoon landing at which another LST had been unloading, and. it was cleared of personnel, vehicles and dead weight equipment in excellent time.

The 1658th was the first to unload and they proceeded to their area, a dusty, unpleasant place, where they were to camp for the night. The same with the other outfits. Headquarters was the last to unload. Their bivouac area was a grassy field surrounded by Villeyards right on the edge of the town of St. Tropez, a welcome relief from the dusty areas of Nisida and Santa Maria.

Drivers and trucks from the 1983rd, as well as the loading detail from Headquarters were kept busy until late unloading the dead weight and trucking it to Headquarters area. The trucks had to be emptied first of essential equipment, then loaded with the dead weight which was unloaded in the area, and the essential equipment reloaded. It was not an easy job, but it was well done, and the Captain of the LST complimented the Colonel on the efficiency and speed with which the job was accomplished.

On the morning of the 30th, the outfits moved in separate motor convoys to a temporary area. The area selected was the Chateau Bas near the village of Lambesc, about twenty miles northwest of Aix. It was an 18th century chateau surrounded by rolling hills, flat, green fields and woods. Headquarters took over the chateau and the other outfits bivouacked in the fields and woods, setting up temporary kitchens and orderly rooms, but not setting up for operation, except for the 1983rd which was kept busy hauling equipment and personnel and the 1062nd which set up the radio station, message center and crypt, and also ran a courier service to Aix and Salon.

On September 2nd the Air Base area controlled by the 41st consisted of the airfields at Istres, La Vallon, LaJasse and Salon. On September 11th five more fields that had been serviced by the 19th Service Group, were added to the 41st Air Base Area, Frejus, Le Luc, Ramatuelle, St. Raphael and Sisteron.

Until about the middle of September the Group serviced combat units, but when these groups moved to the forward areas, the 41st's primary function became a supply activity. Transport missions were flown by plane from Istres Field. The 41st was in charge of getting supplies, to the field and loaded on these planes. Additional supplies were trucked to the forward areas. In addition to the re-supply activities and servicing of the transport units, the Group had the responsibility of continuing repair work on planes left by the departed combat units, and also the cleaning of air fields on the Riviera coast that were inherited from the 19th Service Group when it moved to a forward area.

On the 5th of October the Group received orders to move the following day. Installations were closed down quickly and on the 6th of October LST's were loaded for the return to Haly. A detachment of the Group remained to complete unfinished business. It was with regret that most of the men left France! To them it had seemed more like home than the other countries in which they had been stationed overseas.

ABOUT THE 9th of October, 1944, the companies comprising the 41st Service Group, arrived at Livorno on their return to Italy. Temporary bivouac areas were selected about six miles north toward Pisa.

The Group was not to operate from this area, and it was indefinite just when or where the Group would become operational.

What everyone expected to be a short stop, developed into a stay of nearly two months. During this period of non-operation, many of the men took advantage of the numerous opportunities for three day passes in Rome and on the Isle of Capri. Furloughs were issued on application and many revisited Sorrento, Santa Maria and Naples. Day passes were spent in Florence, Pisa and Leghorn. The months passed quickly, with so much opportunity for diversion and entertainment, but it was a willing and rested Group that went back into operation in November. The Group became operational on November 22nd, shortly before leaving for the new area, when they took over the servicing of the Pontedera Airfield.

The Service Center moved to San Miniato, about ten miles north of the town of Pontedera, during the first part of December. The new area was at the Castellonchio, a large estate situated well off the main road in surroundings of flat, cultivated fields. A straight, cypress bordered driveway led to the walled villa which was the home of Barone Livio Carranza, whose family remained in residence after the 41st took over. Tents were put up in the garden in the rear of the villa to house all the Base Sections.

Some outfits bivouacked in tents in the fields, others were in buildings in the town of Pontedera, and others were located at the air field. Here the Group again serviced tactical outfits until the latter part of February when the 41st moved to Tarquinia. While at Pontedera the 41st Service Group was redesignated the 41st Air Service Group. Unlike most previous moves, the change to Tarquinia carried the 41st well to the rear. The Service Center was located in partially demolished factory buildings on a plain below the hill-town, five or six miles from the airfield. Once again they took over after another service group. Their function here was to service a Troop Carrier Group.

On March 31st, Brigadier General Joseph T. Morris, Commanding General of the 12th AAF Service Command; visited the 41st area. At impressive ceremonies he presented Colonel Howell with the Award of the Legion of Merit. Tech Sergeant James C. Bell of the 1062nd Signal Company was presented the Bronze Star Medal, and Headquarters and Headquarters Squadron was awarded the Meritorious Service Unit Plaque. This brings the history of the 41st Air Service Group up to the present time.

During the last week of July and the first three weeks of August, the 41st Service Group was charged with servicing a wing of the Provisional Troop Carrier Command who were engaged in intensive operations in preparation for airborne operations as a part of the invasion of Southern France. During the period D-1 to D-3, a large force of airborne troops, both Paratroopers and Airborne infantry, were mounted from the 41st Service Area. The Troop

Carrier units participating arrived during the last week of July from England as a flight echelon only. Equipping and servicing these units in the limited time available were problems to tax a depot. Undaunted by the enormity of the task, every available source of supply in the theater was checked by the Group and the required equipment for issue to the Troop Carrier Group was secured. Much of it had to be obtained on a temporary basis. During this period the 41st Service Group was charged with servicing approximately 300 aircraft and 150 gliders together with the supply of common Class I, II and IV supplies for approximately 10,000 troops. In July and August, the Group directed the servicing of six airfields:

Ombrone, Orbetello, Grosseto, Biondo, Fallonia and Piombino. These responsibilities were discharged in magnificent fashion. In the invasion of Southern France, the Forty-First Service Group was moved in to handle the entire Marseille-Lake Bene Area. This included the clearing of Air Corps supplies from the beach area and the supervision of the flow of supplies into Istres les Tuhe Airfield from points and beaches. The latter was a complicated and vast task in itself since Istres is the largest field in Southern France and was used as a base for the 484th Bomb Group and 4th Troop Carrier Group in their mission of supplying the Air Force in Southern France.

Were it not for the splendid training and esprit of the Group, this vast supply project might well have broken down. Superior planning and management kept reserve supplies available for the shuttling supply planes. Only superior coordination in unloading rail cars from the beaches, the use of trucks, the locating and stocking of dumps and the loading of planes could have accomplished the superior feat of supplying the unexpected and unparalleled movement of Allied units pursuing the fleeing enemy. The work of the 41st Service Group is a credit to this Command and to the Military Service. It successfully handled one of the biggest servicing jobs since the African Campaign.

The 41st Service Group has achieved and maintained a continuously high standard of discipline. (1) Its personnel demonstrate superior military courtesy. (2) Inspections of their personnel have shown them to be clean, neat and correctly attired. Installations and equipment are maintained in superior operating condition. (3) Personnel have always exhibited the highest esprit and have executed their orders with enthusiasm and dispatch. (4) There were no cases of AWOL nor Courts Martials during the entire period covered.

Air Force Order of Battle

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Sources

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