

# 51<sup>st</sup> SERVICE GROUP

## MISSION

## LINEAGE

51<sup>st</sup> Air Base Group

Redesignated 51<sup>st</sup> Service Group, 16 Sep 1942

## STATIONS

Maxwell AAF, Montgomery, AL

MacDill AAF, Tampa, FL

Chabua, India

## ASSIGNMENTS

Air Service Command

## COMMANDERS

Col George H. McNair

LTC Lee W. Fulton

## HONORS

**Service Streamers**

**Campaign Streamers**

**Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers**

**Decorations**

## EMBLEM

## MOTTO

## NICKNAME

## **OPERATIONS**

Early in 1941 the 51st Air Base Group was activated at Maxwell Field, Montgomery, Alabama, but shortly after its inception moved on to MacDill Field at Tampa, Florida. The call for overseas duty reached the group while it was at Morrison Field, West Palm Beach, Florida. Morrison Field acted as a group collecting point for almost all the organizations then assigned to the group met there and collectively made plans for the trip across the United States to the San Francisco Port of Embarkation by way of the Sunset Trail Route.

Taking stock before leaving it was found that the following organizations were present and would comprise the 51st Air Base Group:

Hq and Hq Squadron  
54th Materiel Squadron  
Co "H", 31st QM Co (Trk)  
Detachment 3rd QM Co Supply (Avn)  
686th Ordnance Co (AB)  
729th Ordnance Co (AB)  
Co "B", 89th QM Bn (LM)  
43rd Signal Co (Avn)

These then were the organizations which left the United States on the former luxury liner and now Army Transport Mariposa at 3:25 A.M. January 13. The vessel sailed under the Golden Gate Bridge and out to the harbor to join the cruiser Phoenix and USATs Monroe and Coolidge which made up the convoy. The small convoy crossed the Equator for the first time on January 25th. On February 1st the Mariposa docked at Melbourne, Australia and on the following day troops debarked for Bacchus Marsh to which they proceeded by rail and from that point to Camp Darley by foot. The walk seemed all up hill and after the five mile hike the men dropped onto straw filled mats to settle down to a ten-day feast of mutton.

On February 12th the troops left Camp Darley by truck for the dock area and at noon embarked on the USAT Katoomba which had carried troops in the last war. The Katoomba, Holbrook and the Duntroon arrived at Fremantle on the 18th The officers of the group had been told in Australia they were being sent for duty to Java but as events proved they never reached that island. The group was on its way there when word was received of the Japanese invasion of that area and of the collapse of allied resistance.

The convoy made one other stop at Columbo, Ceylon on March 5th before pulling into Karachi harbor on March 13th. It is hard to describe the position of the 51st Air Base Group for everything was in such a condition that plans and planning were subject to change almost without notice. Whether or not the high command had ever planned on sending troops to India at that time it is quite certain that the 51st had not been included in those plans for no preparations had been made for its arrival in that country. When the time came for disembarking the troops were moved into the huge Airship shed, Reinforcement Camp, west wharf, and there they began their round of working eating sleeping and living until a camp could

be constructed for the Americans on the outskirts of the town. Some of the organizations managed to bring their equipment and were not so badly off. Others had packed their property on their motor vehicles. These latter units were the unfortunates for, although arrangements were made to send the vehicles by the next convoy from Australia, nothing more was ever seen or heard of vehicles and organizational equipment. The biggest handicap for all units was the absolute lack of transportation.

In Karachi the 51st Air Base Group was hard at work. With little previous training in the states these men planned menus, procured, broke down and distributed subsistence, purchased property locally, set up and ran warehouses, and handled such other items as salvage, shoe, tent, and typewriter repair, and laundry facilities.

Almost every unit in the group has enlisted men on detached service throughout India. The following figures show the gradual growth of the 51st Service Group since its removal to Chabua:

February 28, Officers & W/O 39, Enlisted men 624

March 31, Officers & W/O 41, Enlisted men 634

April 30, Officers & W/O 50, Enlisted men 691

May 31, Officers & W/O 55, Enlisted men 803

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Air Force Order of Battle

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Sources

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