

# **78 AAF BASE UNIT**

## **MISSION**

78 AAF Base Unit acts as a receiving station for commissioned and enlisted personnel and indoctrinates such personnel in the particular skill and training plan in the mission of the Army Airways Communication System.

## **LINEAGE**

78 AAF Base Unit

## **STATIONS**

Selfridge Fld, MI

Sheppard AAF, TX, Nov 1944

Langley Field, VA, Dec 1945

## **ASSIGNMENTS**

## **COMMANDERS**

## **HONORS**

**Service Streamers**

**Campaign Streamers**

**Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers**

**Decorations**

## **EMBLEM**

## **MOTTO**

## **OPERATIONS**

In November 1944, Army Airways Communication System moved its two Overseas Processing Sqs (the 76th and 77th AAF Base Units) from Smyrna AAF, TN and McClellan Fld, CA and the Army Airways Communication System Screening & Processing Center (78th AAF Base Unit) from Selfridge Fld, MI all to Sheppard Fld, TX. the 78th absorbed the 76th and 77th on 20 Nov 44, when they were discontinued, and on 1 Dec 44, changed its name to the Army Airways Communication System Overseas Screening & Processing Center).

The primary mission in the AACS Overseas Screening, Professing and Replacement Center, better known as the "78th," is one in which AACS men all over the world are deeply interested—that of sending out the replacements to make possible their returning home as soon as possible. Here at Sheppard Field, Texas, we operate a pool of personnel peculiar to the needs of AACS, out of which foreign shipments are activated and started on their way to far-flung destinations. Because the need of AACS are highly specialized, it is our job to see that the replacement sent to foreign theaters are physically qualified, technically proficient, and psychologically capable of starting their work overseas with a minimum loss of time spent in on-the-job orientation and training.

Officers and enlisted personnel pour daily into this unit from many sources. They come from technical schools, domestic AACS activities, and other AAF commands, to be screened for their proficiencies within their individual specialties and made available for foreign shipment accordingly. Those with insufficient training are further adjudged to determine their capabilities for potential AACS specialties and sent to technical schools for such training. Here the 78th plays an important role in assuring that the personnel arriving at foreign destinations are as technically proficient as is possible under such conditions. The operating inactivity which must of necessity occur during the period of movement from the Zone on Interior to a foreign destination results in a decrease in technical efficiency. Much of this lost time occurs unavoidably here in the states while awaiting shipment, and consequently a program of continuation Training is conducted by and many times increase, the operating efficiency of such personnel. Old-timers are given an opportunity to keep in practice, and new tech-school graduates are acclimated as nearly as possible to operating conditions as they will meet them in the field.

Likewise, as the increased needs of AACS have been met by acquiring personnel from other commands, and other branches of the service, these "newcomers" have been found to be deplorably lacking in information about AACS, its overall mission, its operations, and its organization. To counteract this deficiency, an aggressive program of "AACS Orientation" has been initiated for both casual officers and enlisted men, to acquaint them with at least a basic knowledge of the great communications system, and to develop a motivating spirit which will help them feel the part they as individuals play in the comprehensive war effort.

Not all of the features of an individual's stay at the 78th are attractive; there is the tiresome but necessary repetition of some phases of military training, there are the inevitable work details, frequent formations, and sometimes substantial waits before shipment. What may seem to be unnecessarily long delays in shipping may be occasioned by be occasioned by events over which

we have no control, as we are but a small part of the tremendous job of logistics with which our army and AAF must cope. On the other hand, while awaiting shipment at the 78th, there are opportunities for relaxation, G! entertainment, and educational improvement.

To those men of AACS still in the States who are the 78th endeavor to make processing and assignment soon scheduled to go overseas we of as efficient and pleasant as possible.

An important link in the great AACS chain is the 78th AAF Base Unit at Sheppard Field, Texas, the Systems only Overseas Screening, Processing, and Replacement Center. As the name implies, the 78th is the tremendous overseas clearing house of the AACS.

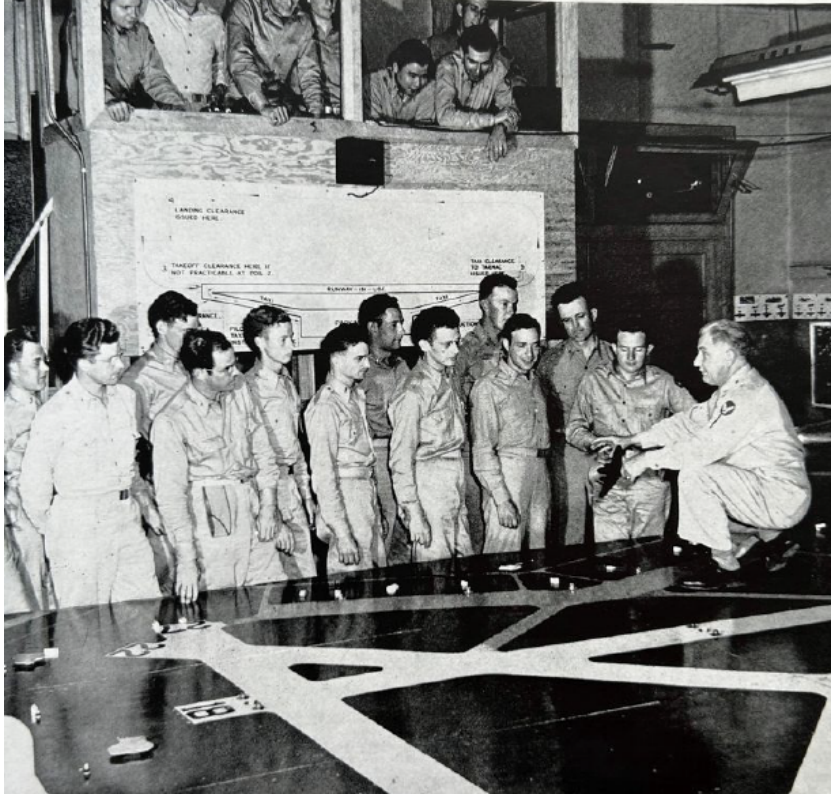
From tech schools, 1st AACS Wing, redistribution centers, POEs and other AAF commands they come to the 78th. They come in dribbles and droves, strange faces, familiar faces—each an individual with individual gripes and problems, each wondering what the future holds, how long he'll be here and why and how come he was sent, "of all places" to Sheppard Field. They all come—the station chiefs, radio and teletype operators and mechanics, control tower operators, D/F technicians, radio and crypto specialists, clerks, typists, etc.—few fully realizing that they are "essential" in the greatest military communications system on the face of the earth. Yes, they all came privates masters, rookies, veterans, youngsters, oldster, tall ones, short ones, skinny ones, fat ones, good ones, bad ones, early ones, late ones, AWOLS and what have you. The first thing they usually think of upon arriving is "chow," mail call. KP, furloughs and delays, back pay<sup>1</sup>, the local pass set-up, classification, PT, living off the post, ad infinitum.

Every man's case is a little different so we must deal in broad generalities. Processing in the 78th is comprised of five phases: Classification, Physical screening, personal affairs, Section "B" processing, and continuation training. How much processing a man undergoes depends on his individual status. The "average" man stays in the 78th from six to eight weeks, depending on how long he must sweat out a project. If he stays longer, he will probably be sent to school or placed on. "permanent" detail. He may do KP three or four times a month, PT four times a week. He finds as much or more entertainment in the 78th as he will at any other post in the country. There's something doing every night—dancing, variety shows, radio programs, concerts, boxing, baseball, bingo, bowling—and there are noon dances at the service club.

An overseas returnee is given particular attention. Upon arriving in Section "A" he is assigned to a special barracks. His average stay in the 78th is about a month. If possible, the overseas returnee is assigned to a domestic station of his choice. If a man is permanently physically disqualified, he is sent to a domestic station as soon as possible. Processes most frequently carry MOS numbers of 055, 237, 405, 759, 760, 760-D, 805, and 778. Two years ago AACS normally used only six or seven MOSs, today we use about sixty MOS numbers. Indicative of morale in the 78th is the fact that there was only one "duty to AWOL" case last month. Since our activation in December, some 12,000 men have been handled here; during that period of tune the percentage of duty to AWOL" cases have been remarkably low—one-half of one percent.

The 78th is divided into three sections—Section “A,” Receiving; Section “B,” Processing; and Section “C.” the casual pool. From the first moment of arrival in Section “A,” each EMs records are under constant examination. His POR card is prepared and he is called to Classification for interview. He verifies all entries on his service record and form 20. He may be classified on the spot. He is advised regarding insurance, power of attorney, wills, allotments, and beneficiaries and is informed of his many privileges under the GI Bill of Rights. He signs the payroll and is paid up to date. All records are shipshape before he takes his overseas physical. In Section “B” the EM learns of the world-wide operational functions of AACS. He runs the gamut of processing for a week and is familiarized with life in AACS, Wings, Groups, and Detachments. He assimilates the essentials of chemical warfare, camouflage, first aid, malarial control, sanitation; and arctic, jungle and desert survival. He may go through the gas chamber or fire on the range. A timely orientation program includes open discussions of current events. All deficiencies on his record of military training are taken care of before he leaves Section “B.”

When the processes passes into Section “C,” the casual pool, he is physically, mentally and statistically prepared for overseas duty at any one of a thousand AACS stations throughout the world. “Our job is to serve the casuals,” declares Lt. Col. Samuel N. Lapsley, CO of the 78th. “And I desire that every casual who passes through this unit be treated with the utmost consideration—” For a better picture of life in the 78th, let’s get the unbiased reactions of some of the men themselves. Here’s an ex-marine, a veteran of 30 months’ service in China, now a 778 in AACS. He says: “It’s the best outfit I’ve seen but I’m getting itchy feet—” Pvt. Kenneth Miller, a 778 who just arrived from Scott Field, echoes: “The officers and non-coms here are very fair, especially on passes and furloughs.” Sgt. Anthony Laskey, from Hensley Field, on his way overseas as an 055, states: “My only complaint is that they ought to move Dallas closer to Sheppard Field.” And here’s Cpl. Andrew Crichton, erstwhile infantryman and coast artilleryman, now an 805 in AACS. “Andy” spent 18 months in Greenland with AACS before coming to the 78th. “I’ve seen plenty of this man’s army,” he avers. “But this outfit beats all. They treat you like a human being. They give you a chance to speak your mind and their Information-Education program is the best I’ve seen in the Army—” Cpl. Everett Photiades, 784, former weather man in ETO, declares; “The chow is swell, the officers are swell. As a matter of fact it’s the most improved outfit in the country. The officers really try to understand the enlisted man’s point of view” Pvt. John Hutton, 778-03, recently arrived from Scott Field, says: “Brother, it’s wonderful! They gave me a 5-day extension !”



Control tower instruction, 78 AAFBU, Sheppard Field, TX. Date unknown.



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Sources

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

Unit yearbook. *78<sup>th</sup> AAF BU. AACS Overseas Screening, Processing and Replacement Center, Sheppard Field, Texas.*

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Dwight W. Tuttle. *Sustaining the Wings, A Fifty-Year History of Sheppard Air Force Base (1941-1991).* Midwestern State University Press. Wichita Falls, TX. 1991.