

37th ARMY AIR FORCE BASE UNIT

LINEAGE

STATIONS

ASSIGNMENTS

WEAPON SYSTEMS

ASSIGNED AIRCRAFT SERIAL NUMBERS

ASSIGNED AIRCRAFT TAIL/BASE CODES

UNIT COLORS

COMMANDERS

HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

EMBLEM

EMBLEM SIGNIFICANCE

MOTTO

NICKNAME

CALL SIGN

OPERATIONS

AAF BASE UNITS BY COMMAND ON 1 May 1945

200th (Hq, Base Unit) 1600 E. Boulder St, Colorado Springs, Colo.

201st (Hq, Base Unit) Colorado Springs, Colo.

203rd (Obsolete Base) (16th BOTW) Jackson Army Air Base, Miss.

204th (Air Transport) (17th BOTW) Colorado Springs, Colo.
205th (Search and Rescue) Colorado Springs, Colo.
207th (Tow Target) Deming Army Air Field, N. Mex.
208th (Special) Peterson Field, Colorado Springs, Colo.
209th (Special) Colorado Springs, Colo.
210th (Hq, Combat Crew Training Wing) (15th BOTW) Colorado Springs, Colo.
212th (Special) (17th BOTW) Smoky Hill Army Air Field, Kans.
215th (Combat Crew Training Station-Heavy) Pueblo Army Air Field, Colo.
216th (Special) (72nd Fighter Wing) Wendover Field, Utah
220th (Hq, Combat Crew Training Wing) (46th BOTW) Ardmore Army Air Field, Okla.



Edit 25Kingman49: In further research the exception noted below by darrelld Darrell Dvorak is extremely accurate and factual. The 216th AAF Base Unit (Special) was never attached to the 509th CG. This units reporting responsibility remained with the Second Air Force through CG Maj. Gen. Robert B. Williams with a dual and perhaps primary reporting responsibility to the Manhattan Project (MP) through CO Maj. Gen. Leslie Richard Groves, Jr. and Capt. William Sterling "Deak" Parsons USN. As a result I have edited the title of this thread to properly identify the 216th AAFBU with the Second Air Force and not being attached to the 509th CG. I have not edited the body of this thread as to continue to show my original misconceptions about the 216th AAFBU being attached to the 509th CG. I do this as these misconceptions may be common among MP researchers as so little record remains for the activities of the 216th AAFBU

Darrell has provided invaluable evidence of these facts with documents from his Father-in Law Col. Clifford J. Heflin, CO 216th AAF Base Unit (Special). With this new information in hand I filed three Freedom Of Information Act (FOIA) requests two with the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) and one with the AFHRA, Maxwell, AFB. Due to the possible nuclear security sensitivity of this requested information the first FOIA was filed with NNSA, which lead to the filing of the Air Force FOIA and then back to the NNSA for the third FOIA. I hope the following information is useful to future researchers to show what ground has already been covered. The responses to these FOIA's will be covered in a separate AAF forum thread titled "216th AAFBU records purged from history".

See: <http://forum.armyairforces.com/216th-AAFBU-Special-Wendover-Field-records-purged-from-history-m225919.aspx>

Below is the list of FOIA's filed in chronological order with filing and response dates, also including a description of what documents were requested:

1. NNSA FOIA request: 12-00256-H, filed: 18 July 2012, response: 24 July 2012; requesting: GO's and SO's issued by or under Col. Clifford Heflin's Command from 19 January 1945 – 22 October 1945 at Wendover Field.
2. USAF AFHRA FOIA request: 2012-05090-F, AFHRA Ref.# RFI # 2012-22105, filed: 24 July 2012 and revised on 6 August 2012 to include a search for: a copy of all GO's and SO's signed by Col. Clifford Heflin while commander of the 216th AAF Base Unit, at HQ Wendover Field, Utah during the period of 19 January through 22 October 1945. In the revision, I added a request for the Tables of Organization for the Flight Test Section and the Special Ordinance Detachment of the 216th AAFBU. Response: 14 August 2012.
3. NNSA FOIA request: FOIA 12-00303-H, filed 29 August 2012, response: 14 September 2012; requesting:
 - All Table(s) of Organization "TO" for the Flight Test Section, 216th Base Unit (Special), Wendover Army Airfield, Utah, under the Command of Major Clyde S. Shields, for the calendar year 1945.
 - Any and all Personnel Rosters for the 216th Base Unit (Special), Flight Test Section for the calendar year 1945.
 - All Table(s) of Organization "TO" for the Special Ordinance Detachment, 216th Base Unit (Special), Wendover Army Airfield, Utah, under the Command of Capt. Henry Roerkohl, for the calendar year 1945.
 - Any and all Personnel Rosters for the 216th Base Unit (Special), Special Ordinance Detachment for the calendar year 1945.

The Beginning:

The 216th Army Air Force Base Unit was already in existence as it was originally affiliated with the original mission of Wendover Field as a training base for B-17 and B-24 bomber groups and even a wing of P-47 fighters. The P-47's would be the last conventional unit to be trained at Wendover field, departing in August or September 1944. During this interim time period in August 1944 only the permanent cadre and a half dozen administrative aircraft remained. There was some confusion at Wendover as training operations were being suspended and there was some speculation among base personnel that the base might be closing. During this odd period at Wendover, a lone B-29 landed and the pilot came into headquarters declaring his desire to inspect the general facilities of the base. This pilot was at the time Lt. Col. Paul Tibbets on his mission to select a home for the 509th CG, unknown to base personnel Wendover had already been placed on a very short list of possible homes for the 509th CG. At the time of this visit the ranking headquarters officer was Captain Thomas L. Karnes who provided the tour of the base for Lt. Col. Tibbets.

Tibbets returned a few weeks later having made up his mind that Wendover was the perfect location to headquarter the 509th CG. Tibbets again met with Karnes this time explaining he was organizing an unusual bomb group that would have a large number of men with rare qualification, but thought many of the base cadre could be utilized as the nucleus of the group and offered Captain Karnes the job of 509th CG Headquarters Adjutant, which Karnes immediately accepted. This resulted in the genesis of the 509th CG at Wendover before the official activation of the group. Upon activation on 17 December 1944 approximately 800 personnel from Wendover were immediately transfer into the 509th CG. From this point

forward crews and personnel started to flow into Wendover from all over the country after meeting the strict background security evaluations imposed on all new members.

216th Base Unit evolution:

Upon inclusion into the 509th this base unit would take on a role unlike any other base unit in the USAAF. Although attached to the 509th CG it acted in autonomy to the group it fell under the direction of the Los Alamos Weapon Development laboratory, as they were in charge of weapons development and set the test schedule for the unit. Although the unit had other Wendover Field responsibilities, from the weapons test aspect the unit was comprised of two elements.

- 216th Base Unit, Flight Test Section

As indicated by its name the function of this section was to drop test prototype bomb shapes, as the designs evolved for both Little Boy and Fat Man up to the final nuclear weapon designs as well as pumpkin bombs, the non-nuclear variant of Fat Man. In CONUS there were three bomb assembly locations; Los Alamos, Wendover and Inyokern; the latter two had their own bomb loading pits; The loading of Los Alamos assemblies were performed at Kirtland Field near Albuquerque with its own loading pit. Test drops were performed in a number of locations including the west desert near Wendover, Sandy Beach-(Salton Sea), Inyokern as well as early tests at Muroc Army Air Field.

- 216th Base Unit, Special Ordnance Detachment

This Detachment had the duty of assembling test units at Wendover under the stick guidance of the Los Alamos Ordnance Group designated as Z-Division by July of 1945. As changes in design evolved Z-Division would evaluate drop test data adjust designs again and instruct the Wendover Special Ordnance Detachment about what change to incorporate in the next test units and provided the test schedule which was generally updated weekly and near the end, close to combat use the schedule was beyond hectic as answers were needed before combat use. The 216th initially assembled inert bombs or "shapes" which were dropped by B-29s to furnish information on ballistics, electrical fusing and detonators, release mechanisms, and flying characteristics of the aircraft. As the design progressed, personnel assembled more and more complex versions of the "Little Boy" and the "Fat Man" bombs. The 216th base unit at Wendover also continued to improve the assembly procedures and techniques on the "Fat Man". Pits were constructed with hydraulic lifts to hoist the huge bombs into the bomb bay and between October 1944 and August 1945, 155 test units were dropped.

Security and secrecy were paramount with fraternization between the bomb assembly teams and the flight test crews being strongly discouraged. The 216th Base Unit was never deployed to Tinian as test drops continued right up to combat use. After the 509th CG was deployed to Tinian the majority of the Wendover Special Ordnance Detachment was transferred to the 1st Ordnance Squadron Special (Aviation) and deployed to Tinian. This resulted in an influx of new personnel in the SOD to replace them at Wendover. It would appear that the majority of the Flight Test Section remained behind in Wendover continuing their flight test duties.

The 216th is one of two attached unit to the 509th CG where there appears to be no complete roster or roster photo of personnel assigned to these units, the other being the 1395th Military Police Company (Aviation). There are some names mentioned with some photos in published works, but this is primarily of the personnel that moved into this role at Wendover after the

509th CG was deployed to Tinian. If anyone has knowledge of such an overall roster and or roster photo please post it here.

Sources: 1) <http://www.afhra.af.mil/shared/media/document/AFD-080128-037.pdf> 2) "Atomic Bombs The Top Secret Inside Story of Little Boy and Fat Man", by John Coster-Mullen 3) "The Silverplate Bombers", by Richard H. Campbell 4) "The 509th Remembered" Edited by Robert and Amelia Krauss 4) "Sandia National Laboratories The Post War Decade" by Necah Stewart Furman

The book: "Project W-47", by James Les Rowe, (JA A RO Publishing, Livermore, CA, 1978 ISBN-0-9605562-0-6) covers in amazing detail the assembly of test units at Wendover after the 509th deployed to Tinian. According to Rowe, he was "the Project Officer of the military detachment responsible for the modification and assembly of the flight test units and the final assembly of the A-bomb during the last 107 days of the war". The problem with this work is Rowe's assertion that his group at Wendover assembled both the Little Boy and Fat Man combat weapons at Wendover and then shipped them to Tinian ready for combat use. There has now to date been enough documentation released on this subject to render this assertion completely false. One Los Alamos source refers to the book as "seriously flawed" The information contained in this book should therefore be viewed with caution by researchers. There is a much more elaborate description of the pros and cons of Rowe's book in John Coster-Mullen's book: "Atomic Bombs The Top Secret Inside Story of Little Boy and Fat Man", end note 45 on page 385.

All that being said, the Rowe book is worth reading for its pros. I believe one of Rowe's objectives in writing this book was to gain credit for his assembly team(s) in the 216th AAF BU (Special) Special Ordnance Detachment, Wendover Field that had been omitted from history primarily due to the restraints imposed by the Smyth Report post war forbidding any discussion of atomic ordnance development. This was a valid goal then when this book was written as it is today as few knew about the atomic ordnance efforts at Wendover and erroneously credited the 509th CG with this testing effort.

To date there has never been any reasonable explanation for why Rowe and one of his assembly team members Cpl. Joseph A. Badali believed they assembled the combat weapons "ready for use" at Wendover. My speculation is that during the final war month at Wendover Rowe and his teams may have been performing some low level radiation tests for Los Alamos in the RaLa range, see this link for an explanation of RaLa experiments (RaLa = Radioactive Lanthanum) <http://hps1.org/chapters/snv/RaLaProgramSNChapter.pdf> this is pure conjecture on my part, however if true this may have led Rowe to believe he was working with the active materials U-235 and Pu-239. The RaLa testing used Lanthanum-140 (140La), see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/RaLa_Experiment well cited for Wiki. generally speaking 140La is safe unless ingested, but special handling is in order. If this speculation has any merit, Rowe may have been instructed by Los Alamos to use caution during assembly leading to his belief they were dealing with active materials - all just a guess on my part.

Your description of the 216th is accurate with one major exception: it was not "attached" to the 509th. Rather, it was the official designation of the unit assigned to the Wendover base and was

under the command of Col. Clifford J. Heflin, who reported to 2nd Air Force HQ in Colorado Springs (and was also accountable to Parsons & Groves. Heflin was my father-in-law and I am working on a manuscript that resurrects his story.

I would be in complete agreement of your assessment, with the caveat that inside Manhattan there was a fine line between attachment an associated with; considering the reporting responsibilities to Parsons and Groves. The 216th AF Base Unit was at Wendover prior to the arrival of the 509th CG and continued there after the 509th CG deployed to Tinian. It became rather a unique umbrella organization over many and various base activities. The uniqueness of the base unit over others was its connection to the Manhattan Project with two of its units formed specifically to establish and operate test facilities under the direction of Los Alamos. The Flight Test Section and Special Ordnance Detachment were the two specific units inside the 216th that made it so special.

Once the 509th CG deployed to Tinian the full brunt of testing fell to the 216th, which was made more difficult as many of the Special Ordnance Detachment were realigned and deployed with the 509th, this is where James Les Rowe comes on the scene and allegedly took command of the Special Ordnance Detachment. There is some controversy here with Rowe not only stating but publishing a work saying that the combat Little Boy and Fat Man weapons were fully assembled at Wendover for combat used and then delivered to Tinian. This is a controversy I would prefer not to do battle with but will if I must, as these claims are totally erroneous.

Moving beyond that; the mission of the 216th Base unit was far from over with the 509th CG's deployment to Tinian, if anything the test schedule accelerated. The Little Boy design was finalized as this might be considered a dumb nuclear weapon and the design was never even tested before combat use, as it was so simple the chance of failure was negligible. Fat Man was a whole different animal with many aspects of the final design still being tested and verified by the 216th almost right up to combat used.

460505	C-46	8268	216AAFBU	Wendover Fld, UT	SAC	LAC	Brock, John W	Wendover Fld
430916	PT-22	41-20947	216BU		Wendover Field, MA	LAC	McCauley, Harris K	Mines Field, Ca
430916	PT-19A	41-14665	216BU		Wendover Field, UT	LACMF	Heflin, Clifford J	Wendover Field, UT

440724	P-47D	42-28272	216BU		Wendover Field, Wendover, UT	FLEF	Lehman, Philip T	Wendover Field, UT
440731	P-47B	41-5949	216BU		Wendover Field, Wendover, UT	TOA	Mauer, Henry T	Wendover Field, UT
440810	P-47D	42-22146	216BU		Wendover Field, Wendover, UT	GAC	Turner, William E	Wendover Field, Wendover, UT
440810	P-47G	42-25178	216BU		Wendover Field, Wendover, UT	GAC	(parked aircraft)	Wendover Field, Wendover, UT
440825	P-47D	42-23267	216BU		Wendover Field, Wendover, UT	FLoG	O'Connor, Mark E	Wendover Field, Wendover, UT
440828	P-47D	42-28269	216BU		Wendover Field, Wendover, UT	CBLMF	Gangloff, James A	Salt Flats SE of Rwy 12, Wendover Fld, UT
440829	P-47D	42-23144	216BU		Wendover Field, Wendover, UT	KBCRGC	Kellerman, Robert M	23 mi ESE of Wendover Field, UT
440508	AT-6C	41-32802	216BU		Napier Field, Dothan, AL	LAC	Tacker, Irving J	New Orleans NAS, LA
440527	P-47B	41-5985	216BU		Wendover Field, UT	LACMF	Hackley, Harold H	Wendover Field, UT
440608	P-47D	42-28263	216BU		Wendover Field, Wendover, UT	TAC	Silver, Richard D	Wendover Field, Wendover, UT
440608	P-47D	42-28198	216BU		Wendover Field, Wendover, UT	TAC	Setka, Frank E	Wendover Field, Wendover, UT
440614	P-47D	42-28249	216BU		Wendover Field, Wendover, UT	BOSSP	Markell, James E	Wendover Field, Wendover, UT
440628	P-47D	42-23267	216BU		Wendover Field, Wendover, UT	TAC	Jones, Robert E	Wendover Field, Wendover, UT
440628	P-47G	42-252238	216BU		Wendover Field, Wendover, UT	TAC	Markell, James E	Wendover Field, Wendover, UT
440628	P-47C	41-6114	216BU		Wendover Field, Wendover, UT	LAC	Johnson, Hilding R	Wendover Field, Wendover, UT
440705	P-47D	42-28210	216BU		Wendover Field, Wendover, UT	KCRGC	Norpoth, Theodore	12 mi SW of Wendover Field, UT

440708	P-47G	42-25267	216BU		Wendover Field, Wendover, UT	LAC	Madsen, Keith D	Wendover Field, UT
440708	P-47C	41-6596	216BU		Wendover Field, Wendover, UT	TAC	Fraser, Louis E	Wendover Field, UT
440708	P-47B	41-6027	216BU		Wendover Field, Wendover, UT	TAC	(parked aircraft)	Wendover Field, UT
440715	P-47D	42-75032	216BU		Wendover Field, Wendover, UT	KBOCR	Leeds, Philip V	4 mi E of Wendover Field, UT
440728	P-47G	42-25032	216BU		Wendover Field, Wendover, UT	TOAEF	Hart, Harvey J	Fairfax Field, Kansas City, KS
440807	P-47D	42-28182	216BU		Wendover Field, Wendover, UT	GACF	Jorgensen, Luther E	Wendover Field, Wendover, UT
440807	P-47D	42-28199	216BU		Wendover Field, Wendover, UT	KCRGC	Kusky, Clarence W	15 mi W of Hill Field, Ogden, UT
440808	P-47D	42-28193	216BU		Wendover Field, Wendover, UT	TOA	Nickels, Albert B	Wendover Field, Wendover, UT
440808	P-47D	42-75132	216BU		Wendover Field, Wendover, UT	GACFMF	Green, James R	Wendover Field, Wendover, UT
440811	P-47D	42-23167	216BU		Wendover Field, Wendover, UT	KSSP	Dougherty, William A	Wendover Field, Wendover, UT
440819	P-47G	42-25232	216BU		Wendover Field, Wendover, UT	MACLA	Kinney, Frank W	Wendover Field, Wendover, UT
440819	P-47G	42-25235	216BU		Wendover Field, Wendover, UT	MACLA	Smith, Aiken V	Wendover Field, Wendover, UT
440823	P-47G	42-24952	216BU		Wendover Field, Wendover, UT	TOA	Rice, Phillip M	Wendover Field, Wendover, UT
440902	P-47G	42-25267	216BU		Davis-Monthan AAF, Tucson, AZ	MAC	Bailey, John D	20 mi W of Davis-Monthan AAF, AZ

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Sources

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