

351 LOGISTICS GROUP

MISSION

LINEAGE

51 Air Base Group constituted, 4 Feb 1941
Activated, 24 Feb 1941
Redesignated 51 Service Group, 16 Sep 1942
Redesignated 51 Air Service Group, 5 Jan 1945
Inactivated, Jan 1946
Disbanded, 8 Oct 1948
Reconstituted and redesignated 351 Logistics Group, 28 Aug 1991
Activated, 1 Sep 1991
Inactivated, 30 Sep 1995

STATIONS

Maxwell AAF, Alabama
Orlando AAF, Florida
Morrison AAF, Florida
Chabua, India
Whiteman AFB, Missouri

ASSIGNMENTS

Third Air Force
1 AF Base Command
X Air Force Service Command
India-Burma Air Service Command
Northern Air Service Area Command
351 Missile Wing, 1991-1995

COMMANDERS

Col George H. McNair
Lt Col Lee W. Fulton

HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

Meritorious Unit Commendation

1 Jan 1944-10 Mar 1945

EMBLEM

MOTTO

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

The 80th Air Depot Group was designated as a group in early 1943 with personnel from the 51st Service Group. The 51st Service Group was formed at Morrison Field, FL in April 1941. Nine months after establishing Morrison Field events changed with the attack on Pearl Harbor. Two squadrons, the 53rd and 54th, left January 4, 1942, headed for San Francisco by troop train. They arrived on Friday, Jan 9, and were quartered for two days in the Cow Palace. On Sunday, Jan 11, the members of the 51st boarded the USS Mariposa which had been rapidly converted from a luxury liner, carrying passengers between the West Coast and Hawaii, to a troop ship.

In addition to the Mariposa, the convoy consisted of a freighter, the Sea Wolf, and an escort, the USS Phoenix, a heavy cruiser. The three ship convoy set sail the following day, Jan 11, 1942. There was no indication of the destination, those who had worked at packing squadron equipment knew the crates had been stenciled "Destination Manila, PI".

Fortunes of war being what they were in early 1942, the group was unable to get into the Philippines or an alternate destination, Java. After a brief stop at Melbourne, Australia, on to Perth to spend eight nights at an Australian army facility. The group changed ships and had the pleasure of traveling on the TSS Katoomba. The Katoomba was a small inter-island cruise ship which still had its entire peace time crew, including kitchen staff and waiters. They stopped in Colombo, Ceylon, and went on to arrive in Karachi, India on March 11, 1942.

Upon arrival in Karachi there were limited facility but Karachi did have a large dirigible hanger. There was room in the hanger as it was 900 feet long, 450 feet wide, and 220 feet high. It was situated on the Sind desert approximately 15 miles outside Karachi at the cities airport.

The early assignment was providing major overhaul and repair of aircraft and assembling fighter aircraft, primarily P-40s, for the Chinese Air Force and the American Volunteer Group headed by General Chennault.

The aircraft would be shipped overseas via ship in crates to Karachi harbor and then trucked to the airbase. As they were prepared for overseas shipment they were protected with creosote. All the black goo had to be removed which was a very messy detail.

They were then assembled in the hanger on a regular production line basis. As the planes were designed and manufactured in the States several months before arrival overseas they required modifications as they were assembled. After assembly the planes had to be tested by squadron pilots prior to their being flown for assignment in the forward areas.

The group's mission changed in mid 1942 to meet the needs of the Army Air Force as numerous fighter and bomber squadrons were assigned to the theater. This consisted of assembling and preparing for combat a wide range of aircraft: P-40s, P-43s, P-38s, P-47s, P-51s, and P-66s. The P-47 was a larger aircraft and was not crated resulting in their having to be unloaded with the wheels down and towed thru the streets of Karachi to the hangar. Combat gliders were also

assembled for Merrill's Marauders for combat in Burma. The hanger was large enough to hold a number of B-24s or B-17s for repairs or modifications.

Various machine shops, instrument and armament areas plus parts and supplies were stored in partitioned off areas. The crates that contained the aircraft and parts were used to make buildings (the flight line office) and partitions.

The hangar became the living and working quarters for the original troops until desert style tents could be obtained from the British. Until the tents arrived the troops worked, ate, and slept in the hangar. During the monsoon season the tents managed many leaks and during the dry season the dust storms coated everything with a fine dust. The wood and cord beds with light mattress made sleeping uncomfortable. The mosquito nets kept the bugs away but were a good place for the bedbugs. If it wasn't the heat it was the bugs. As time went on there were barracks built which were a great improvement. Over time conditions improved so the replacement of the original members of the 80th had a lot better facilities but the weather did not change - it was still hot most of the year.

DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE ORGANIZATIONAL HISTORIES

Created: 19 Feb 2025

Updated:

Sources

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