

1st EXPLOSIVE ORDNANCE DISPOSAL SQUADRON

LINEAGE

1st Ordnance Squadron, *Special, Aviation* activated, 6 Mar 1945

Inactivated

Activated, 1 Nov 1946

1st Ordnance Squadron, Aviation

Inactivated, 1 Oct 1948

Redesignated 1st Explosive Ordnance Disposal Squadron, 16 Jun 1952

STATIONS

Wendover Field, UT

Fort Worth, TX, 7 Dec 1946-1 Oct 1948

Wright Patterson AFB, OH, 16 Jun 1952-7 May 1954

ASSIGNMENTS

509th Composite Group

Strategic Air Command

COMMANDERS

Maj Charles F. H. Begg

HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

EMBLEM

MOTTO

NICKNAME

OPERATIONS

Activated in March 1945 at a crucial stage in the progress of the War Department's atomic bomb program, the 1st Ordnance Squadron, Special (Aviation) became a member of the 509th Composite Group to bring overseas the men, skill, and equipment needed to assemble the atomic bombs which were dropped with such devastating effect on the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The blows against these cities were a culmination for the members of the squadron and more than rewarded them for the hard work and long hours spent in training and testing for the raids which were to startle the world. The men had been working with top scientists on the atomic bomb program for over nine months in a military unit different from any standard army organization. Under the leadership of Major Charles F. H. Begg the squadron's personnel consisted of a group of picked officers and enlisted men from all branches of the armed forces. So exacting were the technical and military security requirements for the squadron that only twenty per cent of those having basic qualifications for the work were accepted. All of those taken into the organization were told their jobs would be hazardous due to the experimental nature of the work; many volunteered their lives if the test program necessitated it.

During the preceding Fall, Winter, and Spring these men toiled day and night in all phases of the work to insure that tests on the atomic bomb were carried out according to schedule. This often necessitated improvisation of equipment and tools inasmuch as mass production of these items had not caught up with the accelerated test program. All the men were subjected to a loyalty check previous to assignment to the organization. Once men were accepted and commenced operations they were placed under a cloak of military secrecy and no transfers from the organization were permitted. They were not allowed to inform their families, nor anyone not connected with the squadron, including other members of the 509th Group, as to the type of work they were doing. No conversations between men in the squadron were permitted outside the restricted area within which they worked both at Wendover and Tinian. Only members of the Squadron were quartered in the same area at Wendover. All construction work in their restricted area was performed by the Squadron due to security restrictions. When troop movements commenced for overseas destination the men were accompanied by members of the Military Intelligence Department. While traveling by troop train the men were not permitted to mix with other travelers. No other passengers, military or civilian, were allowed entrance to dining cars while these men were eating. Many men traveled to overseas destination by air and these too were kept segregated from other personnel at all island stops.

Upon arrival at the overseas destination the organization unpacked tools, equipped special buildings, helped carry out a final test program and, working with the contingent of scientists from Los Alamos, produced the first atomic bomb only thirty-three days after arrival of equipment needed to do the work. Evidence as to the success with which members of the Squadron fulfilled the task assigned is the commendation the unit received from T. F. Farrell, Brigadier General, USA, and W. S. Parsons, Commodore, USN, in charge of the atomic bomb program in the advance theater. The commendation reads as follows: "The undersigned wish to commend the members of the 1st Ordnance Squadron, Special (Aviation) for meritorious service all have given to the atomic bomb program to bring it into being as a successful war weapon. It is felt that without your hard work, technical service, and careful heed to the military security placed upon the program the project could not have succeeded as it did. We are fully cognizant of the problems faced by you as a result of the new type of work and the acceleration with which it had to be carried out. Without your steadfastness and devotion to duty, the outstanding success of the atomic bomb would have

been impossible. You may feel that the influence the atomic bomb has had in bringing the world conflict to a successful conclusion is a direct result of your efforts. For this you have our profound appreciation."

General opinion of the members of the 1st Ordnance Squadron concerning the atomic bomb they have helped produce shows the men fully understand the fearful power such a weapon might reach in future wars. Many express the belief that the atomic bomb is capable of two things -- a weapon which can easily bring the world to ruin, or a weapon so potent that its availability to a united peace organization would prevent a future Hitler or Hirohito from ever daring to violate world security again.

Security was compartmentalized at both Los Alamos and the Wendover Air Force base. A group of six Army Air Force officers was attached to an Army Ordnance Squadron at Wendover for security reasons. When we traveled to Los Alamos, Security would pick us up at Albuquerque airport, then drive to their Santa Fe office where we exchanged Air Force insignia for Army Ordnance insignia. Evidently General Groves did not want it generally recognized at Los Alamos that the Air Force might be planning to drop their bomb.

The latest of the special Silverplate B-29s were being manufactured in Omaha. I was sent there to check the installation of three multi-conductor electrical cables between the bomb bay and the monitor's position inside the pressurized cabin. When a bomb was installed in the bomb bay, cables were connected to the bomb and the control box inside the cabin, which was used to monitor the circuits in the bomb. In June 1945 our group flew to Tinian island, where a technical operations center had been prepared at the north tip of the island. Further test flights were conducted to establish the reliability of the fusing and detonation mechanisms. At that time reliability was a matter of extremely great concern.

Navy Captain (later Admiral) W. S. Parsons, now deceased, was second in command of the military in the Manhattan Project. Dr E. B. Doll of Los Alamos was my civilian boss. He was under Parsons. Parsons brought the report of the Trinity test of the implosion and explosion of the Fat Man weapon to Tinian island.

The *Little Boy* weapon was Parsons' design. He was greatly concerned that B-29s loaded with conventional bombs were crashing at the ends of runways on Tinian during take-off and that such an event could cause the U-235 projectile in the gun of the *Little Boy* to fly down the barrel and into the U-235 target. This could have caused a low-level nuclear explosion on Tinian.

On his own, Parsons decided that he would go on the Hiroshima mission and that he would load the gun after the Enola Gay was well away from Tinian. This was done, I believe at about 7000 feet altitude. I was his assistant on this. After returning to the cabin I periodically monitored the circuits in the bomb.

At this time there were three green electrical safety plugs inserted in the casing of the weapon. These prevented improper voltages going to the detonators of the gun charge. I reported to Parsons and the pilot, Colonel Tibbets, that everything was operating properly. I then returned to the bomb

bay, removed the green safety plugs, and replaced them with three red plugs that had connections to enable the detonation of the gun by the fusing mechanism. The bomb was now armed.

The plane then went to 30,000 feet bombing altitude. One observation I remember (I was not a regular crew member so I was not too experienced with some of these things) is that the B-29 crews normally stacked their parachutes in a corner of the cabin. When we started over Japan toward the bombing run I got kind of chicken and I strapped on my parachute. This caused some nervous glances but I can't today remember that any other crewmen picked up their chutes. We had been cautioned not to look back at the bomb explosion and to wear welders' goggles. The plane jerked up as usual when the heavy *Little Boy* was released. I counted the seconds to myself. I believe I had calculated it would take about 43 seconds to reach either the ground or the planned detonation elevation above the ground. For a second I thought, "It didn't work; it must be a dud." I had been told before the flight, "This bomb cost two billion dollars; don't lose it." To my relief, there was a flash, and less than a minute later the plane, now in a tight rolling-away turn, was slapped by a shock wave, and about two seconds later by a second shock wave. The second shock wave, obviously reflected from the ground, indicated that the bomb had in fact detonated in the air above the ground, as it should have.

On 21 May 1951, the Air Force assumed explosive ordnance disposal responsibilities and assigned EOD operational duties within the Zone of Interior to Air Material Command. Accordingly, the AMC activated its first explosive ordnance disposal squadron, effective 16 Jun 1952, when the 1st Ordnance Squadron, Aviation, was redesignated as the 1st Explosive Ordnance Disposal Squadron with an authorized strength of 11 officers and 65 airmen.

On 24 November 1953, Headquarters, 1st Explosive Ordnance Disposal Squadron at Wright-Patterson AFB, OH, had eleven detachments in the United States which were responsible generally for EOD within an Air Force installation's geographical area. These detachments performed emergency EOD work at the following locations:

- Det 1 Tinker AFB, OK
- Det 2 Griffiss AFB, NY
- Det 2 Norton AFB, CA
- Det 3 Norton AFB, CA
- Det 4 Eglin AFB, FL
- Det 5 Hill AFB, UT
- Det 6 Wright-Patterson AFB, OH
- Det 6 Olmsted AFB, PA
- Det 7 Eglin AFB, FL
- Det 7 McClellan AFB, CA
- Det 8 Robins AFB, GA
- Det 8 Eglin AFB, FL
- Det 9 Olmsted AFB, PA
- Det 9 Wright-Patterson AFB, OH
- Det 10 Kelly AFB, TX

Air Force Order of Battle
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Sources

Air Force Historical Research Agency. U.S. Air Force. Maxwell AFB, AL.
Organization history. *Chronology Ogden Air Materiel Area, Hill AFB, UT, 1934-1961*. Ogden Air Material Area history office. Hill AFB, UT. 1962.