

3rd AIR DEPOT GROUP



LINEAGE

3rd Air Depot Group constituted, 28 Mar 1941
Activated, 1 May 1941
Inactivated, 6 Apr 1946
Disbanded, 27 Sep 84

STATIONS

Duncan Field, San Antonio, TX
Karachi, India, 15 May 1942
New Malir Cantonment, Karachi
Agra, India, 25 Jun 1942

ASSIGNMENTS

Tenth Air Force

COMMANDERS

HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

Pacific Theater without inscription

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

EMBLEM

Coat Of Arms Shield: Per fess nebuly or and azure, three billets in fess counterchanged.

Crest: On a wreath of the colors or and azure a representation of the Taj Mahal argent.

The shield is gold and blue, the color of the Army Air Corps. The nebuly or horizontal division line is the heraldic symbol for clouds. The three billets are symbolic of the numerical designation of the organization. The crest refers to the service of the unit at Agra, India during World War II.

MOTTO

That they shall fly again.

NICKNAME

OPERATIONS

Periodic preventive engine overhaul was the 3rd ADG's reason for being. Almost as important was the repair, modification and adaptation work that fit between what could be done in forward bases and what had to depend on replacement via the long thin supply line from the USA.

In March of 1942, the 3rd ADG was on its way to Agra, India to build from scratch a major air base with full maintenance and repair facilities.

The USAT Brazil traveled on a 13,000 mile zigzag course, crossing the equator twice, convoyed a 10 knots by WWI aircraft and a naval escort. There were stops but no shore leave at Puerto Rico and Sierra Leone. Two much appreciated stops with shore leave were made in South Africa. After existing in bunks 4 high to an 8 ft. ceiling with closed portholes at the equator, eating 2 stand-up meals of hard boiled eggs, oatmeal (no milk or sugar) and mutton (often overripe), we were amazed to be treated like valued guests in Capetown.

We landed at Karachi in mid-May on the northwest coast. For nearly a month we tarried at a new multinational holding camp, New Malir, on the edge of the Sind Desert. We slept on a stone floor and were nightly covered with the ever blowing sand. The area was treeless but cool at night, and this was a blessed improvement over the ship. But on a moonlit, midnight walk to the outhouse, every deep shadow had an imaginary garrote-wielding Thug - as in Gunga Din.

On the way to Agra, our home-to-be, we took the indirect route about 300 miles north of a nonexistent direct rail to Agra. We had our round WWI metal hats and bolt action Springfield rifles ready because some trains had recently been assaulted by sword carrying Thug bandits. The only real problems we met were the desert heat (119 degrees F), and having to transfer equipment (including hangar steel) whenever the width of the track changed. India had very few roads or railroads, especially West to East, and the few rail lines were afflicted with 4 different gauges of track. Transport from west coast ports was a problem in '42. On first arrival at Agra in June, we lived in tents amid existing shops inside a walled subdivision of the British-Indian cantonment area. Some of us, like machinists, were able to practice our trade immediately. We worked on small scale equipment along side Sikh craftsmen who were proud of their metal cutting lathes, operated by foot treadles - as sewing machines once were. So urgent was the need and so concentrated the effort (7 days/week, 3 shifts/ day) that by August 1, 1942 even engine overhaul was ready to go. There were no hangars and no pavement, but depot operations had begun! And so had the monsoon rains! These created one more job - that of frequently moving by massed manpower; U.S. and Indian our crates of full-scale machinery to ever higher ground as inundation threatened.

Meanwhile, another group, the 50 men of the "steel gang," became overnight structural steel workers with the challenge of building two 100' x 120' hangars and fourteen 40' x 80' permanent shops in on open field about two miles from town. Company "D" of the 45th Combat Engineers assisted in the erection of the buildings and poured the concrete floors in all 16 buildings. They

were in Agra for several months on their way to assist in the construction of the Ledo Road. The steel gang felt the maximum impact from the Indian sun, and we all felt the humidity. Agra is at about the same latitude as the southern tip of Texas. There are three seasons: very hot and dry, very hot and very wet, and a chilly 50 degree winter.

Our brick barracks and the airport runways were built with Indian peasant labor, hired by the entire village - men, women and children. Men dug the foundation with a hoe-like tool and hand placed the stone in decreasing sizes, Macadam style. Women carried earth and stone in straw baskets balanced on their heads. Wood-fired, steam-driven rollers compacted the layers of stone.

By January, '43, runways were paved, permanent barracks and shops were built, and full scale capacity was in use. Engines were completely disassembled and magnoflaxed for otherwise invisible flaws. All of the functions of a major depot were in operation including: salvage, blueprinting, foundry, welding, machining, sheet metal, armament, communications, parachute rigging and medicine.

The original "Brazil gang" was augmented in December of '42 by the arrival of the 82nd Supply and Repair Squadron, the latter becoming a permanent attachment, and in October, '43, the depot organizations were reinforced by the arrival of 600 more enlisted personnel

Despite the heat, heat rash, threat of malaria and the universal affliction of dysentery, no one shot at us. We suffered few lasting casualties. In fact after the Japanese navy met its critical defeat at the Battle of Midway and the high tide of their island conquests was finally reversed at Guadalcanal in '43, the supply line to India became ever stronger. Even amenities were possible. PX supplies were greatly expanded, sport facilities were built, and a week per year in a Himalayan foothills rest camp was a real treat. In March '44, 46 men passed the aviation cadet exams, were willing to give up non-combatant status and ready to start the war over as pilots. They were sent to Bombay for return to the United States. Then after 2 weeks of waiting, they were sent back to Agra. "Someone" had recognized that using trained technicians from Agra as cadet recruits was no way to help the war effort.

In September of '44 came that most anticipated event! 315 old-timers from the Brazil received orders to return to the USA. The last of the Brazil gang stayed a while longer, until January of '45.



Published:

Sources

Air Force Historical Research Agency. U.S. Air Force. Maxwell AFB, AL.
The Institute of Heraldry. U.S. Army. Fort Belvoir, VA.