

IX AIR FORCE SERVICE COMMAND

MISSION

LINEAGE

IX Air Service Command

IX Air Force Service Command, 29 Jan 1944

STATIONS

Stansted, Kent, England

Sunninghill Park, England

Luxembourg, Luxembourg

ASSIGNMENTS

COMMANDERS

HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

EMBLEM

MOTTO

OPERATIONS

The IX Air Force Service Command was more clearly patterned after its Eighth Air Force opposite number than any of the other Ninth Air Force commands. A number of officers and enlisted men had been brought to England from Egypt, but most of the key members of the headquarters came from the Eighth Air Force. General Miller, for most of the past year the commander of the VIII AFSC, took over the IX AFSC in October 1943 and brought with him members of his former staff. From the Tactical Air Depot Area came additional officers and men to round out a headquarters staff rich in experience. In mid-November, the service command

headquarters moved into newly constructed quarters across from the Ascot race course, adjacent to the Ninth Air Force headquarters at Sunninghill Park.

The projected size of the Ninth Air Force and the scope of its operations clearly required a large and mobile service command. The service command, in turn, recognized early that its own size and wide-flung operations made decentralization of its organization desirable. Accordingly, borrowing from the experience of VIII AFSC, in October it set up a base air depot area (BADA) and an advanced air depot area (AADA) which were areas in terms of function rather than geography. The base air depot area was intended primarily for supply and aircraft assembly functions. In December the IX AFSC divided the advanced air depot area into a 1st and 2d AADA. This further decentralization of the command was purportedly in preparation for the move to the continent, where mobile warfare would require decentralized operations. In addition, the two headquarters could be, and were, of value in organizing and training the many service units formed in the United Kingdom by the IX AFSC. General Miller and his staff succeeded in having the service groups, as well as the air depot groups assigned to the service command. All of these groups, in turn, were assigned to the advanced air depot areas, which contained the bulk of the service command strength and performed the major part of its functions. In all, the IX AFSC had twelve air depot groups by the spring of 1944. From the VIII AFSC came five experienced and three inexperienced air depot groups, and the IX AFSC organized four new ones by splitting old ones in two and adding personnel.

Originally known as the IX Air Service Command, the name was changed to IX Air Force Service Command by an unnumbered Ninth Air Force Memorandum of 29 Jan. 1944. The latter form is used throughout this chapter for convenience.

The success of the strategic air depots in the Eighth Air Force pointed the way for the organization of the tactical air depots in the Ninth. The air depot groups were paired, usually an experienced and an inexperienced group, and six tactical air depots were established. The two depot groups, although sharing the same stations, remained independent insofar as their actual operations were concerned and no attempt was made to set up a depot headquarters. This type of organization was desirable because it permitted maximum utilization of existing sites and of the specialized types of units which were usually attached to air depot groups signal companies, military police companies, station complements, etc. Furthermore, the device of two air depot groups working together would produce a continuity of service when the time came to move to the continent, for one group could go ahead and while it was in transit and establishing itself, the other could carry on with the work in England. The tactical air depots theoretically specialized in different types of aircraft, but in practice there was much overlapping. The six depots were divided equally between the 1st and 2d AADA's.

The service groups, which were assigned to and administered by, the advanced air depot areas, were under the technical control of the tactical air depots, each of which supported anywhere from four to fourteen service teams. Like the Eighth, once again, the IX AFSC found it expedient, beginning in December 1943, to split the service group into two equal parts (designated teams A and B), each of which was stationed with a combat group. Unlike the Eighth, which was

forming subdepots out of its service groups, the IX AFSC retained the service group headquarters, which usually resided with Team A and administered both teams. Once again, this was done with an eye to future operations on the continent, where it might be necessary to operate the service group as an entity rather than as two teams.

Each team usually consisted of one service squadron; one ordnance supply and maintenance company; one-half of a supply and maintenance signal company; one-half of a QM company, service group; one-half of a QM truck company, aviation; four units of the mobile reclamation and repair squadron; one-half of the chemical section of the service group headquarters; and a detachment of the medical section of service group headquarters, Each team contained about 500 men.0

The structure of the service command was completed by the organization of several miscellaneous agencies. The 13th and 20th Replacement Control Depots permitted the command to handle the receipt, processing, and distribution of personnel, with the exception of combat crews, for the whole air force. Two truck regiments, one of which was a provisional organization, and an air transport group, also responsible directly to service command headquarters, formed an integral and indispensable part of a command which would depend heavily upon mobility for the performance of its function.

Testifying to the ubiquitous role played by the IX AFSC in support of Ninth Air Force operations was its No. 1 rank in size among the Ninth's commands from the very beginning. Unlike the combat commands, which received from the Zone of Interior groups already organized and trained, the service command had to organize and train in the theater a large number of its units particularly air depot and service groups. During the "Gold Rush" period of late 1943 and early 1944, the service command received thousands of casual officers and men who had to be trained and organized into units in a short period of time. By D-day the command had reached its maximum strength of approximately 60,000 officers and men, ten times its strength of 16 October 1943 and more than a third of the total strength of the air force.

The problems faced by the Ninth Air Force in accommodating its units were similar to those which had faced the Eighth during its first twelve to eighteen months in the United Kingdom. The almost daily multiplication of headquarters within the various commands during the fall and winter created a demand for headquarters sites which had not been foreseen in original building plans. Additional facilities were found, but often only at the expense of extra construction work.

The lack of time or means to enlarge bases which were overcrowded caused resort to tent camps which could be erected easily and quickly. Many larger units, particularly service and air depot groups, had to parcel out their men among many small camps in order to house them, and the task of reassembling them at one place sometimes took months. Storage space for equipment and supplies, large quantities of which had to be housed under canvas or left in the open, was particularly inadequate at many depots and bases. Finally, runways on the fighter bases had been built originally for the light British planes, but it was the comparatively heavy P-

47 which became the Ninth's chief fighter aircraft. During the winter and early spring of 1944 an extensive program for strengthening and lengthening runways was undertaken.

The advanced landing grounds, the last combat installations to be occupied by the Ninth in England, were especially deficient in facilities of all kinds. Since they were only temporary airfields, most of them had merely grass or Sommerfeld track runways. These proved to be inadequate for the Ninth's fighters and had to be extended or replaced by a more durable surface, usually pierced-steel plank. Most of the landing grounds were crowded to more than twice their capacities, and the units which occupied them lived under virtual field conditions, in tents, short of water, and with difficult sanitation problems.

The service command's depots and other installations were centrally situated with reference to the stations of the tactical commands. Four of the tactical air depots were in Berkshire and Hampshire, west and southwest of London, while the other two were in Essex and Lincolnshire, close to large clusters of combat stations. The other service command installations minor depots, truck transport stations, replacement depots, etc. were scattered throughout the area stretching to the coasts south and west of London.

Especially difficult were the tasks of logistical organization and planning, and from its very inception in the United Kingdom IX Air Force Service Command enjoyed a position of eminence within the Ninth Air Force beyond that of the average service command. Not only did air force headquarters divest itself of some of its administrative functions, as with the assignment to the service command of control over all personnel replacement depots, but it was recognized that a war of movement on the continent would require an unusually large, strong, and flexible logistical organization because of the wide dispersion of combat groups and the consequently long extension of supply lines.

Fortunately the IX AFSC, as a result of USSTAF's assumption of administrative authority over both U.S. air forces in ETO, came under the control of the theater's chief air logistical officer, for General Knerr insisted on eliminating all avoidable duplication of effort. Beginning in March 1944, Air Service Command, USSTAF progressively took over all base service functions. The IX AFSC did away with its base air depot area and on 17 May transferred its most important installations (Baverstock and Filton) to ASC, USSTAF, which continued to use them to provide base services for the Ninth. Knerr actually went still further and assumed responsibility for and authority over service command functions below the level of advanced depots, "with such exceptions as experience may prove to be desirable." During 1943 and early 1944, the IX AFSC had sought to organize a system which would give it maximum control of its own supply procurement. Against the opposition of Knerr this effort made little headway, although, for a while, from December 1943 until March 1944, the Ninth received permission to deal directly with the Air Service Command in the United States and the SOS in the theater for certain items of supply-specifically, Air Corps supplies for aircraft peculiar to the Ninth Air Force (A-20's, B-26's, and C-47's) and certain ordnance, signal, and quartermaster supplies, particularly rations. Burtonwood, having been designated the supply control depot, in March 1944 was "charged with the responsibility for receiving and processing all requisitions for supplies to be obtained

from the United States, the SOS, and the British, with such exceptions as may be authorized by ASC Headquarters, USSTAF from time to time." The exceptions were rare.

The Ninth's supply system for both Air Corps and common-user items followed routine channels: from base depots through tactical air depots and service teams to the combat groups. Exceptions were made for certain signal and quartermaster items which the tactical air depots were permitted to secure directly from the SOS depots. Because of the special bomb and ammunition requirements of the Ninth, it was permitted to retain its own ordnance depot at Grovely Wood, Wiltshire, even after it had given up its other base depot functions. The tactical air depots were authorized a ninety-day level of supplies, which was attained or exceeded for some items and never reached for others.⁶⁵

The supply system was bound together by a truck and air transport service which operated under the direction of the Transportation Division of IX AFSC headquarters. The truck companies, drawn from the service and air depot groups and organized into regiments, never reached the number actually authorized for the command; and, , there was delay and difficulty in equipping those on hand. The 31st Air Transport Group was a valuable cog in the distribution machinery of the air force, flying cargo and personnel in support of operations, playing the same role that the 27th Air Transport Group did for the Eighth Air Force.⁶⁶

Supply problems of the Ninth prior to D-day were similar to those which had faced the Eighth during 1942 -43. The unit equipment problem was particularly aggravating because of the approach of D-day, which imposed a more rigid obligation on the Ninth than the Eighth had ever faced. The many special types of units which were activated in the theater complicated the problem because adequate arrangements had not been made for their supply. Then, too, the Eighth Air Force was organizing its subdepots, which were given priority for equipment ahead of the Ninth's units. As late as April 1944 a number of IX AFSC depot and supply squadrons possessed as little as 5 to 15 per cent of their equipment, but the IX AFSC as a whole was more than 80 per cent equipped in March. In April, IX AFSC officers were given permission to visit the base depots and the Eighth Air Force service units in search of any equipment that could be made available. The speeding-up of the supply flow from the United States during the spring enabled the Ninth Air Force to have its units, with few exceptions, ready for full action on D-day.

Other supply problems were solved in similar fashion by the arrival of huge quantities of supplies and equipment in the months before D-day. Bombs and ammunition had to be carefully husbanded, even during the spring, because the stockpiles in the theater were being consumed at a much faster rate than planners in the United States had expected; as a result, the Ninth's bombers could not always have the type of bomb they requested for use against particular targets. Complaints about the shortage of small bombs were frequent. Aviation fuel presented primarily a distribution and storage problem, particularly at the advanced landing grounds, which had been expanded far beyond their original capacities.

The Ninth's maintenance organization was patterned after that of the Eighth and leaned heavily on ASC, USSTAF for assistance. During its earlier months in England, while it still anticipated that

it would be logistically independent of ASC, USSTAF, the IX AFSC made arrangements to perform much of its own assembly and modification work. Assembly depots were constructed in open fields at Filton in Gloucestershire and at Greenham Common in Berkshire, the latter for gliders. Assembly of aircraft increased steadily, reaching a peak of 496 in April and declining to 301 during May, when Filton was transferred to ASC, USSTAF. Glider assembly made slow progress until April when 930 gliders were assembled, and by the end of May the IX AFSC had assembled more than 2,000 gliders for the troop carrier command. By this time arrangements had been made for ASC, USSTAF to take over this work also, but the aircraft and glider assembly program of IX AFSC made a definite and substantial contribution to equipping the combat groups of the air force, for the ASC, USSTAF assembly depots could not have met the needs of both the Eighth and the Ninth at a time when dozens of new groups had to be equipped.⁷⁰

By the end of 1943, when modifications had become a major function of the base air depots in the theater, the IX AFSC, in the interest of a faster flow of aircraft to the fighting units, undertook to modify planes at the tactical air depots. In December 1943 the tactical air depots were modifying B-26's, P-47's, and P-51's; by March 1944 they were also modifying P-38's, C-47's, and gliders. The chief fighter modification involved the installation of jettisonable tanks. Service teams, some of whose combat groups had not yet arrived in the theater or were not yet in combat, were of great assistance in performing modifications on aircraft, using modification kits which had been sent from the base air depots via the tactical air depots. In all, from February through May, the tactical air depots and the service teams modified approximately 2,400 aircraft, more than 1,500 of them in April and May. After the Ninth began to move to France in June, the modification output of its service command declined to a fraction of April and May production and the base air depots of ASC, USSTAF assumed the larger part of the modification load. Thus, after D-day, the theater air service command, which was already responsible for the receipt of all aircraft in the theater, assembled, modified, and delivered virtually all of the Ninth's planes.

Day-to-day maintenance and repair services remained in the hands of the tactical air depots and the service teams. The depots performed fourth-echelon repair and maintenance, overhauling engines and propellers and doing major repairs on heavily damaged planes; what they could not handle they sent on to Burtonwood and Warton. The two advanced air depot areas specialized in handling the various aircraft of the Ninth: the first area concentrated on bombers and miscellaneous aircraft; the second area handled the fighter aircraft. Service teams, like the Eighth Air Force subdepots, were located on the same stations with the combat groups and handled third-echelon repair and maintenance for them.⁷² Each service team had four of the nine self-sufficient and completely mobile units which comprised the reclamation and repair squadron assigned to the service group; the ninth unit was generally assigned to the service group headquarters.*The several mobile units could be sent wherever needed; they performed on-site repairs and routine maintenance work, salvaged aircraft, and even assisted in glider and aircraft assembly. In the period from February through May 1944 the service command performed maintenance and repair work on almost 2,400 aircraft. Most of the work was done by service teams, for the tactical air depots were largely occupied by the time-consuming modification of aircraft.⁷³ By D-day the Ninth Air Force itself was completely self-sufficient in

the performance of the first three echelons of maintenance, but it would remain partly dependent on the base air depots of ASC, USSTAF for fourth-echelon maintenance.

Meanwhile, a group of IX AFSC officers headed by Col. Vernon M. Babcock, one of the most experienced planning officers in the theater, had worked out in close collaboration with representatives of the British Second Tactical Air Force and of U.S. ground and naval headquarters the Ninth Air Force Administrative Plan for OVERLORD. Issued on 21 April 1944 and, after some revision, reissued on 8 May, this plan was based on three major assumptions: the air force would operate initially from England and would move to the continent as rapidly as possible after D-day; the United Kingdom would be the main base for OVERLORD; and the major repair facilities and the main reserves of men and equipment would remain also in the United Kingdom. The detailed plan itself was at almost all points subject to factors beyond the control of the air force the availability of invasion shipping, the movement priority actually accorded the air force, and the rate of build-up.

In preparation for D-day, the service command would pre-stock the combat bases in the United Kingdom about D minus 15 and especially would stock each of the advanced landing grounds of IX and XIX Tactical Air Commands with 90,000 gallons of aviation gasoline, a precaution against the road congestion that would blanket all of southern England in the several weeks preceding D-day. With the supply of the combat bases thus assured, the service command could then use its trucks to help combat groups, airdrome squadrons, and service teams move to the ports of embarkation. The actual movement machinery would be in the hands of other agencies, but at key points in the transportation pipeline the Ninth would provide liaison officers who would help smooth the way for air force units. To replace anticipated losses of noncombat personnel on the continent, the service command would establish a reserve manpower pool of some 3,000 men in England.

The IX Air Force Service Command had one of the most difficult training tasks because large numbers of its troops arrived from the United States as casuals or fillers, unorganized and with a bare minimum of basic training. Others arrived with their qualifications obscured, and the Ninth had to carry out a major reclassification program which ultimately affected thousands of the new arrivals. The greater part of training was conducted on the job by the units themselves. This training was hampered by a shortage of unit equipment which persisted almost until D-day. The specialized training in RAF and ASC, USSTAF schools was accelerated in March when USSTAF gave the IX AFSC first priority on available technical training facilities for the ensuing ten weeks. Much time was spent in preparing the special type units which would be required on the continent.

DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE UNIT HISTORIES

Created: 4 Sep 2012

Updated:

Sources

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