

75th AIR SERVICE GROUP



MISSION

LINEAGE

75 Air Base Group
Redesignated 75 Service Group
Redesignated 75th Air Service Group
Activated, 22 May 1944

STATIONS

Greenville, SC
Herbert Smart AAF, GA, 6 Jun 1944-5 Nov 1944
Tinker Field, OK, 7 Nov 1944-4 Dec 1944
Walker Field, KS, 4 Dec 1944-5 Apr 1945
Ft. Lawton, WA, 10-15 Apr 1945
Northwest Field, Guam

ASSIGNMENTS

COMMANDERS

HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

EMBLEM



MOTTO

NICKNAME

OPERATIONS

This military organization was a small group of men under the command of Captain O'Conner. The personnel shipped into this group were unassigned and after talking to the classification personnel they were assigned to various Air Force schools: Sperry Gyro School, Clerks Schools, Mechanics School, etc., whatever the classification section thought the man would be best in doing.

The replacement center soon broke up and the group was assigned to a base group under the command of Captain Walker. Later they formed a cadre called the 75th Air Service Group and were to report to Warner Robins Airfield, Georgia. There were six men that made up the cadre: Charles Ahrens, B J. Rutherford, Carl Weinberger, Bob Frazier, Joe Schoene and the sixth is unknown. They left for Georgia the 6th of June, 1944.

These men arrived in Birmingham, Alabama, had a two hour layover and decided to investigate the joints," then decided to miss the train and spend the night in Birmingham.

The following day they arrived in Macon, Georgia, ate their lunch in town then called for transportation to the field. Reporting to headquarters they found they were not expected.

The first group of men making up the 75th Air Service Group consisted of the Headquarter & Base Service Group, 587th Air Engineer Squadron, 581st Air Materiel Squadron and were assigned 22nd June, 1944, at Warner Robins Field, Georgia per special order #2.

The 75th soon had their own orderly room with commanding officer Lt. Colonel Ernest C. Muchmore, Executive Officer Major Harvey G. Turner (later Lt. Colonel) and Major Herman T. Sapei as Adjutant.

The communication section was organized at Warner Robins Field, Georgia, in June, July, and August 1944. The officers were: 1st Lt. Thomas M. Hebb, 2nd Lt. Stanley Dorfman, 2nd Lt. George Terlinden, and Master Sgt. J.D. Sheppard (Pop) who was ranking non corn. The troops consisted of cryptography, radio operators, messenger center, clerks, messengers, jeep drivers and repairmen.

The conception of the first elements of the 587th Engineering Squadron could be said to have started in 1944. The officers and enlisted men were ordered to report to the Army Service Forces Training Center (ordnance) at Flora, Mississippi, on 8 June 1944, and attached unassigned to the 4053rd AAFBU at that base. The officers reporting at that time were: Lt. George Terlinden, Lt. Frank Springer and Lt. Robert Sprague. They were assigned to the armament, automotive section. These officers and enlisted men were given training in the basic functions of the soldier and training in their MOS at Flora, Mississippi—all in the process of joining a tactical unit. Upon completion of training they were ordered to report to Warner Robins Field and to join the 75th Air Service Group.

The entire 75th Group was transferred via military transportation to Herbert Smart Airport, a civilian field leased by the government and situated near Macon, Georgia. They were joined by other groups including the 581st Materiel Squadron.

Frank Springer recalls a march they made on which Lt. Liljebald tested their skill on the use of the gas mask by releasing tear gas. Unfortunately, it was released on a nearby cabin of ancient quality which housed a woman and her children. This was in Georgia.

Training continued at this base until it was determined that their ultimate duty was to be with the 315th Bomb Wing whose flight crews were then training at various Air Corp bases in Nebraska.

The 75th left Herbert Smart Airport, Georgia, the 5th of November 1944, (per special order #264) by troop train, arriving at Tinker Field, Oklahoma, the 7th of November 1944. Upon their arrival they marched, in formation, from the train to their barracks hoping to impress the brass.

The remainder of the month the group filled out forms, had clothing checked as well as having medical checkups.

While at Tinker there was a change of command: Lt. Colonel Joe L. Neyer, Sr. (later Colonel) was named to replace Lt. Colonel Muchmore. However, Lt. Colonel Neyer was unable to join the group until after the first of the year as he had to await his replacement with the 6th Air Rescue Unit in Mobile, Alabama.

The 75th left Tinker Field 4 December 1944, (per special order #137) by truck convoy for Walker Field, Victoria, Kansas, as a permanent change of station. The weather was so cold that straw was placed in the trucks to keep the men's feet warm.

That evening the Group had a warm meal and stayed overnight at the armory in Wichita, Kansas.

Arriving after dark at Walker AFB Victoria, Kansas, the Group was rewarded with a hot meal and let to sleep in the following morning.

The weather warmed up overnight, and in the morning we looked out on a sea of mud. This was to be our home for the next four months.

The quarters at Walker Field consisted of plywood pyramidal shelters, uninsulated, with shutters on the upper half of the walls which could be raised in summer and lowered in winter. The heat was from coal burning heaters which were a source of smoke and soot, and it was a cold, cold winter.

Lt. Colonel Joe L. Neyer, Sr., the new commanding officer reported in shortly after Christmas and by this time it was no secret that the final destination would be in the Pacific theater supporting the combat crews of the B-29 aircraft.

At Walker Field the 75th Service Group consisted of the following: Headquarters & Base Service Squadron: Lt. Colonel Ernest C. Muchmore, Major Charles A. Roche, Major Herman J. Sapei, Major Harvey G. Turner, Jr., Captain Charles Gibel, Captain Edward J. Haluska, Captain Clifford E. Loader, Captain Frank A. Spellman, Captain John H. Brown Jr., Captain Alien L. Cooper, Captain Philip A. Dieterich, 1st Lt. Malcolm H. Cox, 1st Lt. Thomas D. Hebb, 1st Lt. Waldron E. Leonard, 1st Lt. Edward B. Liljebald, 1st Lt. Bruce D. Ridgeway, 2nd Lt. Stanley G. Dorfman, 2nd Lt. AuthurW. McKinney, 2nd Lt. William M. Rice, 2nd Lt. Charles H. F. Swarm, 2nd Lt. William Weitzberg, 2nd Lt. Hosea L. Williams, 2nd Lt. Constantine G. Yeonas, 2nd Lt. Emest Zimmerman, CWO Lloyd M. Rawson; 587th Engineering Squadron: Captain William Lee Wood, Jr., 1st Lt. Frank L. Springer, 1st Lt. George O. Terlinden, 2nd Lt. Hill W. Beasley, 2nd Lt. Andrew J. Corrigan, 2nd Lt. James E. Donnelly, 2nd Lt. James P. Duffy, 2nd Lt. George W. Kekauoha, 2nd Lt. Waldo C. Kester, Jr., 2nd Lt. Paul P. Plovanich, 2nd Lt. Richard F. Skinner, CWO. ClydeW. Doyell; 581st Materiel Squadron: Major Roy D. Justice, Captain Riley Hayes, 1st Lt. John Gentry, IstLt. Robert C. Sprague, WO Clarence Dahm, and 1st Lt. Sol Mayer.

The engineering squadron requisitioned the tools and other items needed to service the aircraft

while other specialists (and there were many) were kept busy in training for the use of the equipment they would be using overseas. Specialists in ordnance, chemical warfare, communication, finance, cryptography, dental, medical, utilities, provost marshal, radar and quarter master continued training in their specialties and in selecting their final personnel. Those men (including officers) who were found by their superiors to be not fully qualified were replaced and transferred out of the unit - Captain William Lee Woods, Jr., because of illness was replaced by Captain Matthews Abromowitz.

The group was short on morale equipment until many people came to their aid: Joe E. Brown (the comedian) donated baseball equipment as well as basketball equipment; Beau Brummel (a menswear company) donated playing cards, pencils, score pads, etc.; and Fred Goldman, Sr.

of Kansas City, Missouri as well as others, donated items and money. The men themselves gave money, and someone donated an ice cream maker.

Al Seeloff was in charge of packing and marking the morale equipment for overseas which included the following: Ice maker, ice cream making machine, juke box with records, sport equipment, sugar, coffee, beans, flour, meal, salt, baking powder, milk, etc.

The government had also given the 75th an allotment of beer and soft drinks and these were packed for overseas.

The last couple of months at Walker Field the men were coming and going on furloughs so fast one of the officers asked Lt. Colonel Neyer if he planned to meet his men at the train station to hand out furloughs. The Colonel knew the group would leave soon and wanted everyone to get home one more time.

The 5th of April the 75th left Walker Field for Ft. Lawton, Washington. As the train went through Hays, Kansas, wives, sweethearts and friends were at the station to wave at them and to say goodbye.

Many of the men enjoyed the train trip because of the scenery. They had never been in the west or northwest.

The train arrived the 10th of April 1945, at Ft. Lawton. Here they had their final processing. At this time 2nd Lt. William (Manion) Rice left the group for another assignment.

The 15th of April the 75th boarded the troop ship, a Dutch liner, "Kota Baroe," at 0930. Coffee and donuts were served on the dock by the Red Cross and a band played "Don't Fence Me In."

The Dutch ship, "Kota Baroe" was built in 1929, was less than 500 feet long, had a gross tonnage of close to 8000 tons and a speed of 12 to 14 knots. "Kota Baroe" is a Malayan name meaning new or beautiful town.

Captain A. Voorduyn was the master of the ship and the crew were all members of the Dutch Merchant Marine.

The waiters and cabin boys were from Coa, a Portuguese province on the west coast of India. The ship was designed to carry 1000 to 1200 Mohamedan Pilgrims to near Mecca.

The ship sailed from Seattle, Washington, Pier #42 at 1600. A blimp escorted the ship for a short time.

April 20, a Friday, there was naval gunnery practice. On the 21st there was rifle inspection, and many of the men wrote letters to be mailed from Hawaii.

The ship docked on the 23rd of April, a Sunday, at pier #28 in Honolulu, Hawaii Harbor at 1900. From the 75th—only Colonel Neyer left the ship, but at the dock, one could buy ice cream and pineapple juice for a quarter each.

The ship remained in port until the 25th as repairs were needed. When they did leave, no escort boats were with them.

The ship broke down again on the 29th of April and they had no escort ships. Al Seeloff was on guard duty in the engine room and visited with some of the crew; one of the engineers told him that the Dutch crew had not seen their families in 10-11 years. They left the Netherlands (Holland) in 1934 for a five (5) year tour of duty and were on their way home when the war broke out in Europe 1939. They then began to sail for the allies.

April 29th, Sunday, they passed the International Date Line, but the Chaplain didn't want to lose Sunday so Monday was lost.

May 2nd was pay day and the ship broke down again—just for an hour—so many men wrote letters to be mailed at Eniwetok. The group were left alone in the middle of the ocean, just drifting, not knowing when the ship would be repaired, just open targets for the enemy, the men were depressed.

Chaplain Cooper and Lt. Colonel Neyer seemed to have prepared for such a disaster. They had written letters to the parents, wives and sweethearts before leaving Kansas asking them to write letters addressed to their sons, husbands and sweethearts but not to tell them and to place the letters in an envelope addressed to the Chaplain.

The 75th, while sitting in the middle of the Pacific were blue, dejected, etc. when they heard over the ship's speaker "the 75th Air Service Group please report for mail call." The men could hardly believe their ears but were a happy group as they received letters from home. Many thought Colonel Neyer had picked up the mail in Hawaii when he left the ship. Following the mail call every man was given a bottle of beer or a soft drink. This also was planned back in Kansas. Needless to say the 75th was the envy of the other men on the ship.

While on the high seas, our CO Lt. Col. Neyer received his Eagles-Full Colonel. There was no Eagle insignia available, so the ship machine shop made the eagle out of tin.

The ship docked at Eniwetok, Marshall Islands, the 4th of May, 1945. There were many ships in port: cargo, baby flat tops, subs, etc. The mail was taken off the ship and some of the men fished. A few deep sea fish were caught but died as soon as they surfaced.

Upon leaving Eniwetok harbor at 1030, May 6th, the 75th still wasn't sure where they were to be stationed. They left in a convoy from which they were soon separated.

May 9th was Pop Sheppard's birthday. He had spent the last two birthdays on two different oceans, half a world apart.

In Kansas, the card game "Hearts" was a popular game for the officers and their wives and especially Lt. Colonel Neyer. Hearts, bridge and other card games filled the time on the ship when the men were not on some kind of duty.

May 10, 1945, the ship docked at Guam, and the men found this is where they will stay; 26 days and 5700 miles from the U.S.A.

May 11th, the 75th disembarked and went to Northwest Field, 315th Bomb Wing Headquarters, APO 243 Unit #3, later APO 182.

Barracks were waiting for Headquarter & 581st Materiel Squadrons on the south side of the runways Service Center "G". The 587th Air Engineer SQ along with the Engineering from the three other Service Groups, were quartered on the north side of the runways Service Center

"H". The Engineers lived in two men tents for a while. They went about the task of making the area livable for it was to be their home and no one knew for how long. They made paths and roads from pieces of coral and coconut trees were planted for landscape. They worked with the seabees building air strips, parking ramps, etc.

Al Seeloff was again in charge of the handling of the morale equipment. After loading the trucks, some of the men had to ride shotgun to make sure the boxes arrived in the area where the 75th was assigned. If not, it could be lost. There was talk about trucks, jeeps, bulldozers and other equipment disappearing.

The 75th soon settled down at Northwest Field, built a day room, and an enlisted mens club to shelter the morale equipment including the Wurlitzer juke box, soft drink fountain, etc.

Chaplain Cooper called on two of the groups best scavengers to get lumber, etc. Pfc. Rosco Imperatrice and Al Seeloff took the task. They requisitioned a six ply from the motor pool and went to Naval Receiving Depot. There they traded a bottle of whiskey for three loads of dunnage

(wood used to secure boxes and equipment in place in the cargo ships).

Later an officer from an engineer squadron accused the Chaplain of stealing the lumber. The Chaplain was told the lumber came from the Naval Depot and they would go get a receipt or take the Chaplain to the depot to verify it. Although he seemed satisfied, he was never told the truth about trading whiskey for wood. It is a good thing that Rosco and myself went by the "book", for as mad as Chaplain

Cooper was that day, if we had "liberated" that lumber, most probably we would still be in the stockade. Chaplain Cooper didn't call us to report to his chapel, he came looking for us!

Dr. Spellman was kept busy with the group until they learned not to drink from a green coconut. It gave the men diarrhea. Then after a picnic to Talafolo Bay almost every one became ill. It appeared the picnic lunch was contaminated from the hot weather. Dr. Spellman's devotion to duty was outstanding and greatly appreciated.

The 75th found more ways than one to take care of a situation. They buried their beer or soft drinks to cool them or used CO2 to get them cold. If they wanted fruit juice, they traded their beer or soft drink for same.

The weather was hot, and the men worked hard and long hours, but they enjoyed their morale equipment when possible.

David T. Fong recalls a morning when Waldron Leonard overslept. At 10 a.m.. Colonel Neyer went to see about him, and he had to wake him. Leonard shot up in bed and said, "God, Colonel is it time for hearts?"

Sgt. Jim Vlaska, Jr. had one of the most important assignments on the base. "Waterboy." He trucked ours, Service Center "G" allotment of water, in from the wells controlled by the Navy. He used to dp us off when water was available for showers. The showers were short and cold, but wet and felt good. The water never stayed long enough in the storage tank to be warmed by the sun.

In the meantime, runways were being built in readiness for the 315th Bomb Wing to begin its missions.

Under special orders #37, Headquarters 315th Bombardment Wing, APO 246, Unit 3 c/o PM San Francisco, California, Special Order #37: Page 4 Par. 11, So much of Par. 9 SO 34 this HG dated 26 May 45, pertaining to Captain (4823) Mathew Abromowitz 0857 801 AC as reads "Placed on SD with Maintenance Controller, this HQ for DY in Service Center "H" is amended to read "Placed on SD with the Maintenance Controller, this HQ for DY as Combat Maintenance Officer, in charge of Service Center "H". Page 4, Par. 14, 1st Lt. (0224) Sidney Siegel 01 640945, SC, Hq. & Base Serv. SQ 75th Air Service Group, is placed on SD this HQ with Wing Communication Section as Wing Cryptographic Security Officer.

On 1 August 1945, 315 Bombardment Wing (VH) special order #98, dated 29th July 1945: All officers and enlisted men of the Service Groups were placed on DS with the 76th Air Service Group. The 75th Air Service Group became "Flight D" of the 76th Consolidated Air Service Group. The four service groups 24th, 73, 75th and 76th were consolidated under the command of Colonel Joe L. Neyer and designated as the service center for the wing.

The reorganization affected everyone. There was a surplus of officers and men in some departments and many were called upon to perform tasks far removed from their military speciality. For all practical purposes this was the end of the 75th Air Service Group. It was only a paper organization, however all pitched in and carried out their assignments with zeal and energy.

The air service engineers were trained to repair, maintain and service the B-29's, The Air Materiel Squadron had to get the material to the right place at the right time.

The proud accomplishment of the service groups was the construction of an outdoor amphitheater. Since the principal recreation for the men was a movie or an occasional USO show, it was imperative that a suitable structure be built. The Navy Seabees and Army engineers joined the service groups. A site was bulldozed, terraced and impacted. Seats were constructed from discarded wooden crates, and the stage was built from various and sundry materials but made large enough (40 x 90) to attract live entertainment. The theater was named "El Gecko," seated over 5000 and played to capacity—rain or shine. The labor on the theater was done after duty hours.

The theater name "El Gecko" was from the Guamanian name for a common, harmless lizard on the island. The theater was dedicated 18 June 1945.

The combat crews having arrived had begun their long missions. Most of their targets were the fuel supplies for the Japanese empire.

Colonel F. M. Durfee of the combat maintenance section was reassigned and Lt. Colonel Harvey Turner of the 75th replaced him in the automotive section of the 587th engineering section.

In close proximity to the 587th Engineering Squadron was an antiaircraft artillery company whose mission was the protection of facilities in that area and the native population. The natives also had an accompanying patrol when they went to the beach for a day of fishing each Sunday.

The men of the Service Groups worked on the flight line, in the armor shop, control tower, provided medical and dental care and contributed their support to the final demise of the enemy.

There were still Japanese soldiers on the island, mostly hidden in caves. Some finally surrendered, some were caught and some took their own lives.

The 315th finished their job at Amagasaki on Empire Mission 8 and left one more Japanese oil refinery in ruins.

The 75th in Guam built their own facilities and helped keep the planes in repair and in the air. The 315th flew 15 combat missions in 50 days.

Colonel Paul Tibbets and his 509th Composite Group left Tinian in the "Enola Gay" and dropped the first atomic bomb on Hiroshima (Hiroshima time 0815 hours) 6 August 1945. The feeling, in Guam, was that the war would soon be over.

Between 30 August and 2 September the 315th Bomb Wing flew two major and three smaller POW missions, dropping food and supplies to the American soldiers held prisoners by the Japanese.

The surrender ceremony took place 2 September 1945 aboard the Battleship "Missouri" with over one hundred B-29's escorting the battleship.

It was not long before the men of the 75th began to return to the United States by plane and ship. Some left before Christmas or shortly after the first of the year.

The following people gave information whereby this history of the 75th Air Service Group has been written, our sincere thanks to them: Riley Hayes, Al Seeloff, Joe Schoene, Frank Springer, B.J. Rutherford, Chester Raczkowski, Hosea (Dick) Williams, Hill Beasley and David Fong, and Chris Neyer for assembling and correlating the history.

Subordinate units

587th Air Engineering Squadron

581st Air Material Squadron

Air Force Order of Battle

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Sources

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