

**24TH
AIR
SERVICE
GROUP**

24th Air Service Group

Commander

Col Lee Fulton

May 1944

Lt Col Charles H. Adams

May 1945



Colonel Lee Fulton

Squadrons

24th HQ and Base Service Squadron

552nd Materiel Squadron

551st Engineering Squadron

Data

Activated: 24 May 1944

U.S. Training Base: Smokey Hill AAF, Salina Kansas

Deployed to Guam: 6 April 1945 -

Arrived Guam 11 May 1945

USS Kota Baroe

History of the 24th Air Service Group 315th Bomb Wing

The 24th Air Service Group was formed at the Air Service Command training Center, Fresno 2, California, in 1944 under the command of Colonel Lee Fulton. Most of the 24th personnel came first from the 24th Air Base, Borinquen Field, Puerto Rico, and from other airbases which were in the Caribbean Islands. The training used in the 315th was just about what was used on Sub and Convoy missions from these bases.

In 1942 and 1943 this base served as a base for planes going to the ETO bases. Planes were B-24's, B-17's, A-30's, B-25's, B-24's, C-47's, C-54's, and P-38's. All were served by the 24th Service Group at Borinquen before they would takeoff the next day. Only one plane was lost due to a crash landing at this field.

From Puerto Rico by way of ship, the personnel with over two years or more overseas time were sent back to the states for new duties. From New Orleans, Louisiana to Fresno, California, was by troop train. Most of us hadn't seen a train for much of this time.

At Fresno, California, most of the overseas personnel were sent to other bomb groups and other service groups, and some were sent to airbases where they were made base personnel.

More training was in store for the 24th Service Group before we were sent on another Army troop train ride. While at Fresno, California, the 24th became known as the misfits because the drill details and other duties which we learned after 3 or 4 years in the Army didn't agree with any of us. In the city of Fresno the 24th made a name for all the rest to follow.

At 1800, 7 November 1944, the 24th Service Group entrained at ASCTC, Fresno, California, for its new station, Tinker Field, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. The Group arrived at Tinker Field at 1800, 10 November 1944. The movement placed this group under the Oklahoma City Air Technical Service Command. The barracks occupied at Tinker Field were much more comfortable than those at Fresno. In addition, each squadron operated its own mess hall.

About December 1st, the 24th Service Group received movement orders transferring the organization to Smoky Hill Army Air Field, Salina, Kansas, from Tinker Field, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. By 8 December 1944, most of the officers and enlisted men on leave or furlough had returned. Personnel were occupied with packing and getting ready for the move until 8 December.

The entire 24th Service Group departed from Tinker Field, Oklahoma on 9 December 1944 bound for Smoky Hill AAF, Kansas. The movement was made by truck convoy and will long be remembered by all involved. A cold freezing rain at the time of departure changed into a cold driving snow storm in the 20 hours required to complete the

265 mile trip. Breakfast was served by the Quartermaster Truck Company in Wichita, Kansas, at 0930, 10 December 1944. This stop allowed everyone to thaw out and begin living again. A hot chow was served at Smoky Hill AAF upon arrival and was probably the best time of the entire journey.

Soon after arrival at Smoky Hill AAF, personnel entered their third and final period of training consisting of actual on-the-job with base sections and organizations. An additional training schedule was carried out in addition to on-the-job training.

From the base we were sent to Fort Lawton, Washington (the POE), and from the POE we were sent to Guam. Within a few minutes the vessel was out in Puget Sound, and everyone was then sure that this was no "dry run."

The next morning everyone was up bright and early to find nothing in sight but water and sea gulls that were still lingering around the ship. It did not take long before almost all the passengers found that getting around a rolling ship was not easy. The first day out was rather rough and the majority of the personnel aboard were sick. They all had the usual stories, "I'm not seasick, just something I ate." Not many of them ate that day. The sea remained calm for the remainder of the voyage and little difficulty was encountered from the second day on.

Entertainment was rather good, under the circumstances. There were several picture shows and a few entertainments provided by talent found among the passenger personnel. The ship had a good library of phonograph recordings, and musical programs, news broadcasts, and quiz programs were provided over the public address system. Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish religious services were held regularly. The ship's library, though small, did help tremendously in providing reading material.

After eight days at sea, the ship sailed into the harbor at Honolulu and everyone experienced a thrill at the sight of the famed Diamond Head and Waikiki Beach. The big questions now were, "How long will we be here?" and, "Can we get off the ship to look around?" Most definitely, no one was allowed off the ship save the chaplains who managed to get many cases of pineapple juice, newspapers, and magazines for the passengers. One disappointing incident was the fact that some Navy personnel and ship's crew members went ashore and bought items which they returned to the ship and sold at twice and three times their cost. The two-day layover in the harbor was not too pleasant because of the heat and the fact that our view of the city was obscured by a large warehouse on the dock. We did manage to get a glimpse of the city on the way out of the harbor, however. Morale on the trip had been rather high up to this point, and it was a genuine disappointment to everyone that all personnel were restricted to the ship.

After two days of restlessness in Honolulu harbor, the ship pulled away from the dock and again rumors flew around the ship as to our destination. As it happened, however, the next stop, which was on 5 May, was not our destination, but was at Eniwetok in the Marshall Islands. It

was the first time that most of the personnel had seen a former field of actual combat and there was much interest. Again, however, no one was allowed to go ashore, and we tried to satisfy ourselves with glimpses of the island over the two miles of water that lay between the ship and shore.

Two days later anchor was hoisted and the ship began the last lap of the voyage. When Guam was sighted early on the morning of 10 May, there were few who believed that this was the destination. Some hours after anchor was dropped in the harbor, the information was confirmed and debarking instructions for the following morning were given.

The trip was over, and everyone was apparently happy to go over the side and set foot on land. It had been a good high. One of the incidents of the trip was that the Finance section, without being forewarned before departure, managed to pay the troops at the end of April. Since the International Date Line was crossed early in the morning of 30 April, the day was skipped and pay was distributed on 1 May.

Trucks were waiting at the docks for the personnel and they were hurried to Northwest Field, operational area of the 315th Bombardment Wing, XXI Bomber Command. The thirty-five mile trip was of immense interest to everyone as we looked around to see what the island was like.

The first couple of days were utilized in orienting ourselves to the field and doing some necessary construction work. After that, things began to happen. Most of the men were sent out on details and some were placed on special duty and detached service with the 315th Bombardment Wing.

Life, the first few days, was not too pleasant—there was difficulty in getting enough water for bathing and meals were of the C- and K-ration variety. No one seemed to mind “roughing it” for a few days, however. The 551st Air Engineering Squadron faced the least desirable conditions of the group in that they were assigned to the area north of the landing strips where construction had not even been begun, and they were almost completely walled-in by dense jungle.

The group commander, Colonel Lee W. Fulton, having been placed on detached service with wing headquarters, Lt. Col. Charles H. Adams, CO of Headquarters and Base Services squadron became Group CO, and Major William B. McConnel, Jr., the Group S-3, was appointed CO of Headquarters and Base Services Squadron, Deputy for Services and Group Executive Officer. Capt. James W. Lassiter made the voyage on a freight ship, and was placed in command of the 552nd Air Materiel Squadron when he arrived.

Having been trained to operate as a group, there was a loss in morale when some personnel and whole sections were immediately attached to the wing headquarters. Officers who had been trained for particular jobs found themselves in charge of various details that were entirely foreign to them. Men who thought they had critical MOS's found themselves on duty-soldier assignments. The finance Offi-

cer upon arrival found that his services, as such, were not needed and he was performing many small duties for the Group.

The various sections have accomplished quite a lot since starting into the area. Lighting is in all the barracks, buildings, and tents. Walks have been laid, and the area is beginning to resemble the usual army type garrison. The mess personnel have proven themselves in the tasty meals they prepare. Transportation has been consolidated with other service groups and is starting to roll now that the kinks have been ironed out. Finance is in operation under wing headquarters, and the fire-fighters' section has done a good job already with one of their members having been commended for the rescue of a pilot from a burning aircraft. In the 552nd Air Materiel Squadron, entire sections such as QM supply AC Supply, Signal Supply, and Ord Supply have been removed as operating agencies in the squadron and are now consolidated with other group supply functions under wing administration. All these personnel are on special duty with the wing headquarters.

On 16 May, Capt. Gerrit Beckering, Group Medical Officer, and Capt. Henry Epstein, Group Dental Officer, with the enlisted men of their sections were placed on DS with the 551st Air Engineering Squadron on the north side of the landing strips. They set up a dispensary in this area and are taking care of personnel. The Headquarters and Base Services Squadron and 552nd Air Materiel Squadron are being serviced by the 75th Air Service Group Dispensary.

The month of June 1945 rolled along smoothly with officers of the group. By the end of the month the novelty of being at Northwest Field had worn off and life was settling down to a normal routine.

Naturally, there were many improvements made, and there were yet some things lacking which everyone had hoped would be available. Mail service, probably the most important thing to all of us, had its ups and downs. At times we got letters in amazing time and again there were times when everything seemed to be tied up. Service on packages was very poor.

The 552nd Materiel Squadron was badly in need of additional housing and, on 10 June 1945, authority was received to construct an additional barracks. The building was completed by men of the squadron who volunteered for the job and construction was completed within a few days. One important item which would help materially throughout the Group was to have tar paper, or similar roofing material, laid on the barracks. All the barracks leaked and when the frequent rains occurred it was very uncomfortable. Drainage in the area was also poor and there was a great deal of mud after every rain.

The group morale equipment arrived during the month and many items of comfort were distributed to the squadrons. Probably the most beneficial items were the refrigerators, and one was set up in the group area for use by everyone. It provided cooling for beverages and also for foods in those packages from home.

The Service Center Theatre was dedicated on 18 June

1945 and was named El Gecko, the Guamanian name for lizard. Several good stage shows were presented during the month, and we were proud to have had some part in construction one of the finest theatres on the island. Moving pictures were presented nightly. The group special services section had done an exceptional job with several swimming parties, trips around the island, a boat ride around the harbor, and visits to championship tennis matches. A big treat was the serving of ice cream to all personnel on 29 June. We had to thank one of the other groups for the use of their equipment for making the ice cream, since we did not own a machine.

All during the month, personnel were being placed on special duty or detached service with the 315th Bomb Wing, and by the end of the month the only personnel remaining for duty with the group are those performing administrative duties. Finding personnel for housekeeping details is the big "headache" of first sergeants in all three squadrons. All squadron duty soldiers have been placed on detached service with the wing headquarters. Loss of these men has been a serious loss to the three squadrons, since there are many details which must be performed for the squadrons, the group, and various service center activities, with no personnel readily available for the tasks.

Morale improved much over the preceding month and at the end of June was described as satisfactory. The living conditions, recreation and entertainment had improved, and the men were becoming accustomed to life here, with new jobs and organization. A few important items for comfort, especially soap and Coca Cola were lacking in the post exchange stocks, and these items were important to the attitude of personnel. An improvement in laundry facilities would have also boosted morale to some extent.

A memorable event on 1 July was entertainment provided by the Dick Jurgens All-Marine Show, which played at the El Gecko Theater. It was a well-done musical show and comments from all sides indicated that the men preferred Service Shows rather than USO performances.

The early part of the month brought a welcome addition to all barracks. Tar paper became available and details were quickly put to work in the squadrons covering the roofs for protection against rain. This marked the end of a two month period during which leaking roofs were a constant nuisance.

Early in the month a directive by the Island Commander authorized the use of privately owned cameras. There was a mad rush into barracks bags and footlockers, and everyone who had a camera and film was taking shots of the area and themselves and friends. It was a definite boost for the morale of the troops. Twentieth Air Force's shoulder patches were issued and were proudly worn by all personnel.

The close of the month brought new rumors and topics of conversation. It was announced that all personnel would be placed on Detached Service to the 76th Air Service Group. The action was designed to unify command in the area and improve efficiency.

The close of the month found the group ready for a

new era—that of almost inactivation. In spite of this, morale was good and everyone seemed to be accustomed to the surroundings.

On 1 August 1945, by 315th Bombardment Wing (VH) special orders No. 98 dated 29 July 1945, all officers and enlisted men were placed on DS to the 76th Air Service Group, with the exception of one officer in each of the three squadrons. These three officers remained on duty for the sole purpose of signing morning reports. This was a move in anticipation of the consolidation of all the Service Groups into one unit.

To all intents and purposes the unit history ceased on 1 August 1945. All activities were carried on by the 76th Group. The group commander of the 76th had the additional duty as CO of the 24th Air Service Group. The activities that the personnel of the 24th took part in can be found in the unit history of the 76th group.

On 23 February a further step was taken toward consolidation and inactivation was made when all personnel were returned from DS and transferred to the 75th Air Service Group with the exception of four officers and three enlisted men.

This unit was inactivated 15 May 1946.

Early McDaniels