

499th AIR SERVICE SQUADRON

MISSION

LINEAGE

499th Service Squadron
Redesignated 499th Air Service Squadron
Disbanded, 8 Oct 1948

STATIONS

MacDill Fld, FL
Avon Park, FL
Ondal, India

ASSIGNMENTS

54th Air Service Group
305th Air Service Group

WEAPON SYSTEMS

COMMANDERS

Lt Howard L Harris, Jr.

HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

EMBLEM

MOTTO

OPERATIONS

499th and 500th Service Squadrons (later to be designated Air Service Squadrons) which had arrived in Avon Park Bombing Range, Avon Park, Florida, on 18 June 1943 by motor convoy from MacDill Field, Tampa, Florida, on 17 June 1943; by the 2118th and 2119th Quartermaster Truck Companies (Avn) (colored) which arrived by rail from Ten Mile Station, Charleston, South Carolina, on or about 25 June 1943; and by the 1112th Signal Company (Avn) which arrived by rail from Columbia Army Air Base, Columbia, South Carolina, on 10 August 1943.

The training of an Air Service Group is based upon three phases: Phase I in which each unit is formed, filled with personnel, and the individual training of the soldier is completed; Phase II in which the units are brought together at one station, as a group, and the training and equipping of the group is performed under the guidance of a "parent" Air Service Group; Phase III in which the group simulates the performance of its mission with tactical groups, under theater of operations conditions.

The units arriving at Avon Park were, for the most part, too far understrength to have completed their first phase of training at their previous stations; and this same shortage of personnel made impossible the completion of second-phase training at Avon Park. Filler personnel were arriving, if slowly, and officers and men made the most of the situation that confronted them, under the general guidance of the "parent organization", the 40th Air Service Group.

Who, of the original personnel, will ever forget Avon Park-the tent camp in its open bivouac area, flooded by torrential afternoon showers; the swarms of mosquitoes that drove the men to bed, under mosquito nets, at dark; the shortage of vehicles -- "walk" was the rule; the early morning "belt buckle" inspections; the daily officers' lecture by the Commanding Officer of the parent Group; and those glorious Florida Sunsets. On 18 August 1943, the Group received its "warning orders".

These orders directed preparation for overseas movement, and were authority for the requisitioning of equipment not then on hand. Accordingly, "initial shortage lists" were submitted on 21 August 1943. At this time, the composition of the 54th Air Service Group was as follows:

On 6 September 1943 the Group moved by motor convoy from Avon Park to Lakeland Army Air Field, Lakeland, Florida, for a permanent change of station. The movement orders did not include the 2118th and 2119th QM Truck Companies (Avn) (colored) so these units were lost to the Group.

Just before departure from Avon Park, Major Benjamin King, Air Corps, was transferred from the Group and was succeeded in command by Major James R. Allen, Air Corps. Shortly after arrival at Lakeland, the Group was augmented by the 2080th and 2081st QM Truck Companies (Avn) which moved by motor convoy from their previous station at Venice, Florida.

The Base at Lakeland was nice and the housing facilities for the Group were good. All units were in frame buildings--quite a treat to the boys who had been living in tents in the marshy field at Avon Park. The officers and men working in Group Headquarters were well situated, and quite prepared for the "brace" that occurred daily at 0810.

The Group now contained all of the units to which it was entitled, and it began "third phase" training. The various units of the Group, with the exception of the Quartermaster Truck Companies, were still far below strength. It became apparent that the 54th Air Service Group could hardly begin -- much less, finish -- its third phase of training. From the very beginning, the Group had been greatly handicapped in its training. With the Port of Embarkation only two months away, there was ample cause for contemplation -- could the Group perform its overseas training? The Group thought so, and set out to prove it.

On 20 October 1943, Lt. Colonel Herbert M. West, Jr., Air Corps, was assigned to the Group, and assumed command vice Major James R. Alien, transferred. The "Port Call" was imminent now. Colonel West's first order was one restricting all personnel to the limits of the Base, and a killing tempo of training and preparation for overseas movement was begun. The day began in the darkness of early morning, with physical training; it ended late into the night after lectures, hikes and endless hours of packing and crating.

The inspectors came, the inspectors went--some said the Group could move to the Port on the scheduled date, but most said "No". Finally, the Inspector General and the POM Inspector arrived. The Group sold itself to these inspectors -- the ones who really counted -- and soon thereafter the "Port Call" was received. Neither the 1081st QM Company nor the 1112th Signal Company were included in the orders, so they were lost from the Group.

On 15 November 1943, midst the playing of Auld Lang Syne by the Base band, the Group loaded aboard two Atlantic Coast Line trains and departed for the Port of Embarkation. None will ever forget the mixed emotions of that hour -- the feeling of pride and satisfaction that comes only to those who know that they are enroute to join the boys who are doing the fighting; but the equally strong emotion of leaving home and loved ones.

The first stop enroute to the "unknown destination" proved to be Camp Patrick Henry, Virginia, where the two serials arrived after dark on a cold winter day.

The Operations Officer at Patrick Henry was efficient, and the Group was quickly unloaded and formed, amidst the barked instructions from the loudspeakers of the public address system. The march from the train to the barracks was cold, but not long. Soon everyone was bedded down in heated frame barracks. No one will forget the high cyclone fence that surrounded Patrick Henry - - it was anything but inviting.' Having passed through its portals, there was but one way out--by sea.

At Patrick Henry, the Group was joined by the 1104th Signal Company. The days which followed were hectic. It was learned that the Group, enroute to its final destination, would be

"transshipped" several times and that a bare minimum of tonnage would be allowed for "TAT" equipment. This necessitated repacking some boxes and selecting others for shipment to the Los Angeles Port of Embarkation for shipment with the Group's "OEL" equipment. This, and other final chores, were completed and the units of the Group trained for the short one-way trip to Hampton Roads, Headquarters and Headquarters Squadron embarking 22 November 1943 on the Liberty Ship CONRAD WEISER, after warming themselves on cups of hot coffee served by ladies of the American Red Cross.

The units that embarked as parts of the 54th Air Service Group, Shipment No. 5220, at all full strength, were as follows:

UNIT COMMANDING OFFICER SHIP

Headquarters Lt Col Herbert M West AC Conrad Weiser

Hq. Squadron Capt Francis E Kelley AC Conrad Weiser

499th Air Sv. Sq. Capt Percy E Tucker AC

500th Air Sv. Sq. Capt William S Gutwillig AC Alexander Lillingt

The 499th Air Sv Sq and the 1081st QM Co debarked at Casa Blanca, North Africa. The other units debarked at Oran, Algeria, near the sunken French warships whose superstructures rose from the waters of the harbor. Hq and Hq Sq debarked 13 December 1943.

Rising above the hulks of the sunken French ships was the towering old fort of Santa Cruz, perched atop a mountain peak which rose abruptly from the Old Harbor. The Group climbed aboard a convoy of 6 x 6 trucks and proceeded to Staging Area CP-2, a windswept and rain-soaked tent camp about 20 miles away, near the village of Fleurus. The Group arrived at the Staging Area well after darkness had fallen. It was raining and cold. A muddy, rocky hilltop, studded with furled tents, was pointed out as the temporary home of the 54th Air Service Group. That was a bad night, and one which will be long remembered--but who will forget Oran anyway!

For the most part, the Group had no mission at Oran other than to keep itself in readiness to move onward on short notice. So this became a nice orientation period; the Maison du Colon, the Red Cross Clubs, the retreat ceremonies at Place Foche, the village of Fleurus with its vin rouge and those wonderful North African oranges--all of these recall pleasant memories. But those cold, rainy days, the utter absence of fuel for heating, the long "chow lines" standing in the rain three times a day waiting with empty mess kits outstretched, and that ice cold, salty water for bathing --these present the other side of the picture!

It has been said that the Group had no essential mission in North Africa, but certain parts of the Group were quite busy. For its entire five weeks in North Africa, the 2081st QM Truck Company was utilized to capacity in hauling cargo from warehouses to the docks, for quick shipment to the Allied forces then fighting in Italy; the 1576th Ordnance Company was maintaining all of the vehicles of the Staging Area; the Engineering and Air Corps Supply sections of "both Air Service Squadrons were working at La Senia Air Base; and the Finance Section of Headquarters and

Headquarters Squadron was working with the Disbursing Officer in Gran, handling "invasion currency" for their first time.

During the staging period at CP-2, the 499th Air Service Squadron and the 1081st QM Company, both of which had landed at Casa Blanca, French Morocco, rejoined the Group. There was much joy when the 1081st QM Company boys rejoined the Group, as they had been detached from the Group at Lakeland and their return was unexpected.

In January 1944, the Group continued its way toward its unknown destination. Some of the units embarked at Oran on 10 January 1944; others moved to Algiers by rail and embarked there on 24 January 1944.

All units arrived in Bombay, India, debarking during the month of February and entraining at Victoria Station for their ultimate destination. Enroute to its destination, the Group lost the 499th Air Service Squadron and the 1104th Signal Company (Avn), but on its arrival at its final station, Tezgaon, Bengal, India, it inherited two units that were already in operation there: the 89th Air Service Squadron, commanded by Major Wayne Ramsey, Air Corps, and the 1086th Signal Company (Avn), commanded by 1st Lt John D. Redmond, Signal Corps. Thus in the last days of February 1944, the 54th Air Service Group arrived at the station from which it was expected to perform the mission for which it had been activated.

Air Force Order of Battle
Created: 8 Feb 2012
Updated:

Sources

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