

4 AIR DEPOT GROUP

MISSION

LINEAGE

4 Air Depot Group activated, 1 Apr 1941

STATIONS

Patterson Field, Ohio

Wagga Wagga, Australia, 30 Mar 1942

Townsville, Australia, 2 Oct 1942

Nichols Field, Philippines

ASSIGNMENTS

COMMANDERS

Capt Milton B. McGuire

Lt Col Victor E. Bertrandias

Lt Col Richard J. Kirkpatrick

HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

EMBLEM

MOTTO

OPERATIONS

This Group consisting of Headquarters and Headquarters' Squadron, the 4th Repair Squadron and the 4th Supply Squadron was activated on April 1, 1941 at Patterson Field, Ohio, U.S.A. It began

with a complement of two officers and one hundred and twenty-four enlisted men.

Initially formed as an experiment, the purpose of the Group was to act as an entirely mobile workshop, settling only long enough to perform some necessary task of repair or retrieval, before pulling up stakes and accompanying the 'front' elsewhere.

In early August 1941, the Chief of the Army Air Forces authorized the Fourth Air Depot Group at Patterson Field, Ohio, and a few units of the Third Air Depot Group at Duncan Field, Texas, to participate in the maneuvers that would be held in Louisiana beginning in September. Near the middle of August, the Fourth Air Depot Group was instructed to move to Jackson, Mississippi, and to arrive at its destination during the last week of the month. To meet its scheduled arrival date, the group had to leave Patterson Field by August 21, and this left the group with very little time to prepare for its move. The result was a great deal of confusion and a poorly organized 87-vehicle convoy. On the first night, the personnel were not bedded down until well after midnight, and automotive repair crews equipped with tools and supplies to keep the vehicles moving were not placed at the end of the convoy until the third day.

The group encountered a number of problems after it arrived at Jackson. About 58 freight cars full of equipment and supplies had been sent to Jackson, and everyone assumed that the group would have to obtain very little additional materiel during the maneuvers. Apparently, no one realized how quickly shortages could develop, and no arrangements had been made for daily air service from Patterson Field. As a result, by the end of the first week, the Fourth Air Depot Group could only provide about eight to 10 percent of the parts that were needed by the using organizations. The group encountered another surprise because it found that almost 75 percent of the requisitions it received were for such common items as pencils, paper, and paperclips. In addition, the group had to obtain large quantities of small parts that were common to all aircraft because many of the units in the area were poorly organized and did not have all of their required tools or organizational equipment.

The group had only one hangar in which to store its vast assortment of miscellaneous items, and it shared the hangar with a squadron. The tasks of unloading, storing, recording, and arranging the supplies also created some problems for the group. For example, the group received a shipment of P-39 parts which came from the factory, through the Fairfield Air Depot, without being unpacked, marked, or tagged. Even with the help of a representative from the manufacturer, the group could not begin to fill any requisitions from the flying units for several days.

One of the group's biggest problems was its lack of experienced key personnel. In fact, the commander of the group reported that the organization could not have functioned outside the continental limits of the United States with the personnel originally assigned."

The service organizations that were assigned to the combat units also came in for some criticism. Requisitions were received by the Fourth Air Depot Group from the service organizations at

Jackson and New Orleans, Louisiana, and supplies were delivered to the units by air and truck. Unfortunately, this system required redelivery to other bases and distribution points, and this considerably increased the delivery times. Many of the delays could probably have been avoided by the direct delivery of supplies. The Inspection Division in the Office of the Chief of the Army Air Forces described the situation as follows: The supply system as established for the maneuvers was considered to be unsatisfactory, due to the length of time required for a requisition to pass through the intermediate agencies in the chain of supply. Namely, a squadron requisition would go to a Distribution Point, then to a sub-base, then to a main base, then to an Air Depot Group, and in most cases the majority of the items requisitioned were located at the rear echelon. Organizations were not notified of actions taken on their requisitions, and whether or not supplies requisitioned would or would not be supplied.

They became the first such Group to depart from America for overseas assignment, arriving at port of embarkation, San Francisco, December 15th 1941, sailing on January 12th aboard the U.S. Army transport, President Coolidge, arriving Melbourne on February 1st 1942.

An advance party comprising 9 officers and 192 airmen of the 4th Air Depot Group arrived at Wagga Wagga on 30 March 1942. Their Commanding Officer was Captain Milton B. McGuire. The remaining 15 officers and 296 men arrived at Wagga Wagga on 15 April 1942.

The 4th Air Depot Group moved from Melbourne, arriving in Townsville on 2 October 1942. They formed part of Depot # 2 of the 5th Air Service Command. Depot # 2 Townsville was established at the base of Mount Louisa not far from Garbutt aerodrome. Townsville was chosen because of its nearness to New Guinea. Aircraft were able to carry out bombing missions to New Guinea from Townsville. Other factors were Townsville's port facilities and its access via the rail network.

For various logistical considerations, the Group was dispersed. Repair depots were established at Wagga and Tocurnwal, the latter becoming the largest and most technically comprehensive of any unit in Australia to that date, and it was capable of complete aircraft assembly and maintenance.

The 4th Depot Supply Squadron was sent to Brisbane, Queensland, where for convenience, some of their supplies were unloaded, but for safety, in case of possible and probable enemy air raids, the bulk of the supplies were unloaded in Melbourne. This necessitated the establishment of an additional depot at West Footscray in Victoria.

Later that year it became apparent that to reach its full operational efficiency, a unit of this type was required closer to the 'front', in order to expedite the war against Japan. Thus Townsville, and in particular, Mount Louisa was chosen, where they arrived on October 2nd 1942, under the command of LTC Victor E. Bertrandias.

Personnel of the 4th were able to gaze on their prospective camp site, and see the gently sloping foothills on the eastern side of Mount Louisa, which spread across Louisa Creek, to incorporate the stock route and that part of Dalrymple Road as far as Garbutt's slaughter yard to the east.

They would acquire the unspoiled bush land extending from near Aitkenvale in the south to Garbutt in the north. Principally they would be limited to the east by Duckworth Street, with a few exceptions, notably our back paddock in which they erected two igloos and parked many of their aircraft. They sliced the south west corner off our side paddock to improve the exit from the strip. The area they chose was indeed almost virgin bush, supporting a few 'milkers', some beef cattle, a few horses and very many chine-apple trees.

While the enemy were metaphorically knocking at Australia's front door, construction crews under the directive of Captain Antovini were bulldozing down trees, leveling roads and building sites, commencing October 12th, 1942. By November 11th, with roofs only half completed on the machine shops, another crew began installing the machinery, and on the 13th the first jobs were being turned out.

Eventually, by hard work, this vast expanse of bush was transformed into the new encampment containing all of the facilities necessary for the purpose of rapid assembly, repair and modification of bombers and fighters for the 'front', and all had been achieved in record time. The first aircraft for repairs arrived on November 15th 1942, and engine overhaul got under way on December 8th 1942.

The all-important Post Office Exchange was built and designated APO 922.

The workshops operated nine hours a day including Sunday, and the engines being 'run in' after erection or reassembly, ran continually day and night for weeks on end without regular breaks - and on that subject I am an authority, because the so-called 'sound proofed' concrete test stands were only three hundred yards from my home, being located across the strip, just beyond the Tamarind tree. The only thing in which the Americans lacked expertise was 'sound proofing'.

The 2nd Service Squadron consisting of 7 officers and 240 enlisted men were attached to the 4th ADG in October 1942.

By the close of 1942, the 4th Air Depot Group was the principal tenant of the area, and they occupied four repair hangars and five supply warehouses. This was the complement of Phase 1 of their building program. Phase 2 called for the erection of nine further supply warehouses in 1943. The 83rd Depot Repair Squadron was assigned to the 4th ADG on February 6th, 1943.

The 336th Service Squadron arrived in Townsville in north Queensland on 8 September 1943. After two days in uncomfortable days at Armstrong's Paddock they started work at No. 2 US Air Depot near Mount Louisa where they set up camp.

The 4th Air Depot Group dividing its 41 officers and 617 enlisted men between three widely separated locations was attempting to carry out functions which normally would require these such groups. To supplement this group, the 81st Air Depot Group, 81st Repair Squadron and the

81st Supply Squadron was activated. Personnel and equipment to man these organizations came from resources already in Australia.

The 4th Air Depot Group by the end of April was operating at Footscray, Victoria a central supply depot with controlled the issue of all air force supplies, and in addition the group operating branch supply depot at Brisbane and also at Wagga Wagga, New South Wales where a major repair depot was to be temporarily established. Work was also in progress on a permanent repair and supply depot. Under the supervision of the group the aircraft erection facilities at Amberley were to continue in operation with the personnel of the 2nd Materiel Squadron assigned to the depots.

DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE UNIT HISTORIES

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Sources

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