

20th COMPTROLLER SQUADRON

The Materiel Division began to move its headquarters from McCook to Wright Field in early 1927. Six months later, in June, the air intermediate depots were renamed air depots, a designation they were to carry until 1943, and the Air Corps established three insular, or departmental, depots. One depot was established in Hawaii, another in Panama, and the third in the Philippines. The Air Corps made a number of other important changes in the depot structure during the 1930s. The depot at Little Rock was discontinued during Fiscal Year 1930; the depot at Scott Field was discontinued in the late 1930s; and the depot at Rockwell Field was transferred from North Island, which was turned over to the Navy, to Sacramento, California, in 1938 and 1939. In addition, the Chief of the Materiel Division was moved to Washington, D.C., on October 2, 1939. The division's staff, however, remained at Wright Field under an Assistant Chief.

LINEAGE

STATIONS

ASSIGNMENTS

COMMANDERS

HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

EMBLEM

EMBLEM SIGNIFICANCE

MOTTO

NICKNAME

OPERATIONS

Service Command, the major component of which was the Panama Air Depot, although the 20th Troop Carrier Squadron was also assigned to Service Command from 10 November 1943.

Initially, the Panama Air Depot (more commonly known as the PAD) was located at France Field. When it became apparent that the major airfield in the defense scheme was to be Albrook Field, the establishment was moved there and grew into a very large and diversified organization.

The hangars which were the PAD, on the south side of Albrook Field, are still there, and the main hangar was, at one time, the largest such structure (other than a Zeppelin hangar in Brazil) in all of Latin America. It was not uncommon to see numerous Consolidated B-24 "Liberators" parked inside its cavernous reaches at one time.

The Service Command, although having access and temporary use of many aircraft at any given time, is only known to have had one plane assigned to it for its exclusive administrative use: Stinson L-1 40-233, which was used from early in the war until 3 May 1943, when it was passed on to the 20th Troop Carrier Squadron.

Although not very glamorous, the men and women of the Service Command - and a sizeable number of civilian employees from both the several Canal Zone communities and the Republic of Panama - performed what were frequently viewed as incredible feats of aircraft engineering, probably the most famous of which was the creation of the hybrid B-17D "The Swoose" (which still survives today in the collections of the National Air and Space Museum, Smithsonian Institution -which, , also has another Sixth Air Force veteran, a Boeing P-26A). Other local engineering challenges included the virtual rebuild of the Junkers Ju-52 3/m that became the sole USAAF C-79 and a variety of similar local cast-offs, plus the extensive modification of the Boeing XB-15 to become the XC-105.

Besides conducting "receiving" inspections on every single aircraft assigned to the Sixth Air Force prior to assignment to squadrons and commands, the PAD and Service Command similarly prepared aircraft for shipment back to CONUS. A look at the almost non-stop shuffle of variants of the Bell P-39 "Airacobra" into and out of the Sixth Air Force during the war (see the appropriate section in the Aircraft chapters) gives a good idea of the intensity of this seemingly never-ending process.

Obviously, the PAD had need for organic aircraft to aid in its sundry duties, but these were slow in coming, and when they were able to be made available, were mainly "basket cases" cast off from the major commands or aircraft the PAD staff pieced together for their own purposes. As early as 1939, one of the discarded Northrop A-17's was assigned to the PAD and this aircraft was supplemented in May and June 1943 by Stinson L-1 40-3137 and Curtiss P-36A 38-37.

Air Force Order of Battle

Created: 21 Apr 2011

Updated:

Sources