

494th AIR EXPEDITIONARY GROUP



MISSION

LINEAGE

494th Bombardment Group (Heavy) established, 14 Sep 1943
Activated, 1 Dec 1943
Redesignated 494th Bombardment Group, Heavy, 7 Feb 1944
Inactivated, 4 Jan 1946

494th Bombardment Wing, Heavy established and activated, 15 Nov 1962
Organized, 1 Feb 1963
Discontinued and inactivated, 2 Apr 1966

494th Bombardment Group, Heavy and 494th Bombardment Wing, Heavy consolidated, 31 Jan 1984

Redesignated 494th Air Expeditionary Group, and converted to provisional status, 12 Jun 2002

STATIONS

Wendover Field, UT, 1 Dec 1943
Mountain Home AAFld, ID, 15 Apr-1 Jun 1944
Barking Sands, TH, 15 Jun 1944
Angaur Island, 30 Sep 1944
Yontan, Okinawa, 24 Jun-Dec 1945
Ft Lawton, WA, 2-4 Jan 1946
Sheppard AFB, TX, 1 Feb 1963-2 Apr 1966

ASSIGNMENTS

Second Air Force, 1 Dec 1943

Seventh Air Force, Jun 1944

VII Bomber Command, 24 Jun 1944-Dec 1945 (under operational control of CTG 95.6, 3 Nov-12 Dec 1944; Fifth Air Force, 13-14 Dec 1944; V Bomber Command, 15 Dec 1944-27 Jan 1945; Thirteenth Air Force, 28 Jan-19 Mar 1945; XIII Bomber Command, 20-27 Mar 1945; Thirteenth Air Force, 28 Mar-14 Apr 1945)

Strategic Air Command, 15 Nov 1962

816th Strategic Aerospace Division, 1 Feb 1963

4th Air Division, 1 Jul 1963

816th Strategic Aerospace Division, 1 Jul 1964

819th Strategic Aerospace Division, 1 Jul 1965

19th Air Division, 1 Oct 1965-2 Apr 1966

Air Mobility Command to activate or inactivate at any time after 12 Jun 2002

WEAPON SYSTEMS

B-24, 1944-1945

B-52D, 1963-1966

KC-135, 1963-1966

COMMANDERS

Unkn, Dec 1943-Jan 1944

Col Laurence B. Kelley, 20 Jan 1944

LTC Lyle E. Halstead, 26 Apr 1945

Col Laurence B. Kelley, 7 Jun 1945

Col Frederick D. Berry Jr., 1 Feb 1963

Col Roger L. Hicks Jr., 7 Jul 1964

Col Merrill N. Moore, 17 Aug 1964

Col Roger L. Hicks Jr., 11 Jan 1965-2 Apr 1966

Col Stayce Harris

HONORS

Service Streamers

None

Campaign Streamers

World War II

Air Offensive, Japan

Eastern Mandates

Western Pacific

Leyte

Luzon

Southern Philippines

Ryukyus

China Offensive
Air Combat Asiatic-Pacific Theater

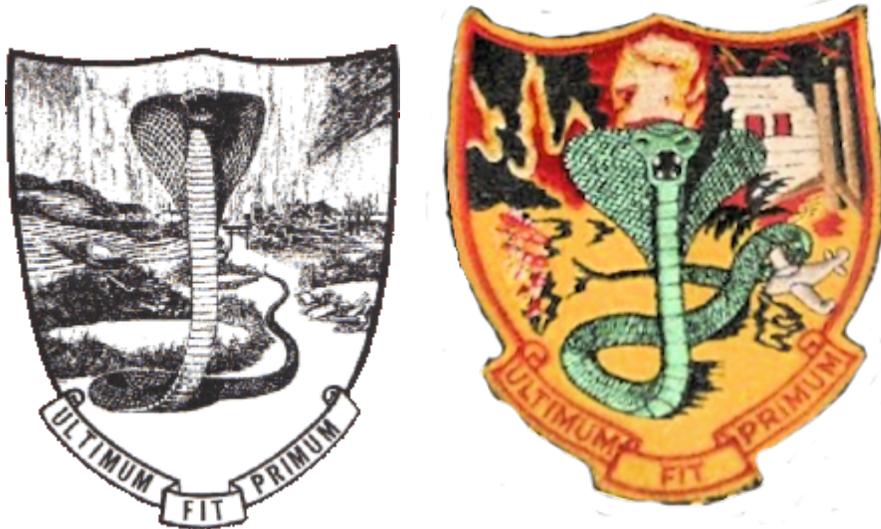
Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

None

Decorations

Philippine Presidential Unit Citation (WWII)

EMBLEM



494th Bombardment Group emblem

Azure, issuant from sinister chief a cloud formation fesswise argent emitting a lightning flash or, terminating in pale above a demi-sphere issuant from base of the second, outlined and gridlined vert, in dexter chief a circle of six mullets of the second, all within a diminished bordure of the third. (Approved, 11 Feb 1964)

MOTTO

NICKNAME

OPERATIONS

Trained for combat with B-24s. Moved to Hawaii in Jun 1944 for additional training. Moved to Palau in late Sep 1944, helped to build a base of operations on Angaur, and entered combat on 3 Nov 1944 with attacks on Japanese airfields on Yap and Koror. Conducted strikes on other bypassed enemy installations in the Pacific and against the Japanese in the Philippines. In late 1944, bombed gun emplacements, personnel areas, and storage depots on Corregidor and Caballo at the entrance to Manila Bay; radio installations and power plants at Japanese bases in the Philippines; and enemy airfields, including Clark Field, Luzon. Early in 1945, struck airfields on

Mindinao and ammunition and supply dumps in Davao Gulf and Illana Bay. Engaged primarily in attacks against enemy airfields on Kyushu, Jun 1945 to V-J Day, participating in incendiary raids and dropping propaganda leaflets. Struck airfields in China, southern Korea, and around the Inland Sea of Japan. Transported personnel and supplies from Manila to Tokyo after the war.

Although the 494th Bombardment Group (H) had been a paper organization for several months in the top secret files of G3, it was not until December, 1943, that it began to assume physical reality. From all quarters of the compass, by train and bus, airplane and automobile, an apparently casual collection of individuals began to assemble in that Garden Spot of the Old West, Wendover, Utah. They debarked usually in flurries of snow, or a steady drizzle of cold rain, jostled each other in the muddy and salt-encrusted streets of the Area, lost and found their personal gear in the growing mounds of baggage, and lined up for everything from going to a latrine to delivering "name, rank & serial number" to anyone who required this information.

Lives there a man with soul so dead who can forget the first impressions of Wendover! The chill bleakness of the hills North and West of us that was only equaled by the salt flats extending to the horizon to the South and East, with a haze of soft coal smoke hanging over the small (pop. 140) town, the airfield and cantonment area day and night. It has been wisely observed that no better area could have been selected by anyone for the training of a combat outfit in combat scenery; Sherman on his march to the sea left more behind him to look at than our new home provided. In brief, it was a masterpiece of desolation .

Eventually, the above noted individuals found their belongings, their quarters, mess halls and plumbing, signed all their forms, and awoke one morning to discover that they were in fact the 494th Bombardment Group (H), equipped with a Headquarters Squadron, four others (the 864th, 865th, 866th & 867th) and very little else. They began to think of themselves as "we." The brightest features in an otherwise drab-looking future appeared to be the State Line Hotel, with its bar in Utah and its remainder in Nevada, and the daily train & bus to Salt Lake City. Those with the time, money and proper credentials availed themselves of these facilities with commendable alacrity.

A confused January moved into a more settled February, and on the 13th, a cadre of O and EM was sent to the Army Air Forces School of Applied Tactics at Orlando, Florida, for a six weeks course in simulated combat conditions and problems. Orlando, even with its formations, lectures and examinations was not hard to take; and Brooksville's training in the shortcomings of tents, pyramidal, and pre-dawn take-offs probably stood those of us who were exposed to the routine in good stead. Colonel Kelley joined us at Orlando on 15 February, returning to Wendover with the Brooksville veterans on the 23rd after an appropriate and welcome delay en route.

Our crews put in their appearance during March, and schoolroom exercises were begun, as were training missions when airplanes became available. The 489th Group, training at Wendover when we arrived, pulled out for the European Theater and left us with whatever equipment and facilities that they felt was not worth taking with them. We went on a week-long bivouac in the hills, strafed by "Chief" Sturm and his Hot Rocks, and exposed to the rigors and mysteries of

guard duty in rough and cold terrain. Surviving all this, we packed, processed and proceeded to Mountain Home, Idaho, on the 13th of April to complete our training, glad to trade Wendover for anything that the War Department had to offer.

As all of us hoped, but few expected, our new resting place presented a much more attractive picture as the train- weary elements of the 494th peered out of the windows and doors of their tourist sleepers and three-decker Pullmans at the town of Mountain Home (pop. 1200-plus). Real live trees, and grass, too, was growing quite unconcernedly around the railroad station and along the town's streets that appeared to be actually paved. This looked much better. Two hotels (the Millen and the Mountain Home), a couple of restaurants and a liquor store were all in plain view from the train, not to mention a movie, a barber shop and the usual hardware and dry goods emporiums along the main street. A highway sign, visible from our point of view, said "Boise-45 miles." All this and Heaven too! Those who flew up from Wendover, or made the move via privately owned vehicle, missed that soul-satisfying first sight of "Town" from the train. Our base was only seven miles away.

The airfield and its facilities as well as our living and working quarters were all new and well arranged. After the increasingly familiar routine of finding everything and signing up had run its bewildering course, the 494th settled down to the business of getting itself ready to go somewhere else. Latrine and other less reliable rumors indicated that we were (a) Headed for the ETO. (b) Going to be put into B-29's. (c) Destined to become a training Group. (d) Going to join the party in the Pacific.

Mountain Home was where the Group was required to learn how to become an Agent of Destruction, and as it turned out, the time allotted for its education along these lines was to be short. Daily missions, complete with briefing, target photos and diagrams became as much a part of life as the sound of airplane engines on the line and the routine of keeping them in operation. The airplanes given us to use at Wendover and here had been used before, and used hard, to put it mildly; and the fact that we flew them without a serious accident until our new and shining "J's" began to put in their appearance early in May stands as a tribute to the ability of pilots and ground crews alike. By the time that all the new equipment had been flown in and distributed to its eager owners, the hours of night and day flying, navigating and all the other endless ground work of a bomber group were nearing the total set for us by the Second Air Force. A visit, about the middle of May, from General Landon and his atabrine-tinted staff from HQ 7th BOMCOM strengthened the conviction that the Summer gear we were using would some day be permanent equipment. Our missions to Las Vegas, Reno, Sacramento, Portland and Pendleton took on an unmistakably Japanese flavor as the briefings described enemy forces landing on the West Coast and paralyzing the War Effort centered in that unfortunate area. Late in May, the POM missions were run off with a sureness and excellence of rating that caused the examining team from HQ 2AF to sit up and take notice. "Here," they said, is a Group that's really going places!" How right they were! 7 day furloughs began to appear shortly thereafter. The Brass had its official picture taken.

On the 28th of May, after drawing some overseas equipment (tropical) and processing more than just a little, those of the Group who belonged to airplanes took off for Lincoln, Nebraska in their flying machines on the first leg of a journey that was to take them from Lincoln to Hamilton Field, California, and then to a place called Hickam Field, Oahu, T. H., that had figured prominently in the news of December 7th, 1941. The operation was carried out with the usual Group efficiency, the pleasant memories of night life in Lincoln and "The Top of The Mark" being saddened by the loss of Lt. Wallace and his entire crew after leaving Lincoln. Safely at Hickam, the Air Echelon relaxed in a luxury of surroundings and facilities while awaiting its less fortunate brothers in the Ground end of things.

SEATTLE On 1 June the Ground Echelon, packed and semi-processed, squeezed itself into its sleepers (tourist) and Pullmans (3 decker) and pulled out of Mountain Home, waving and calling farewell to the friendly citizens, male and female, who had gathered at the station to see us off. No one knew where the engineer was heading with us, but since we were equipped with such odds and ends as heavy metal headgear, carbines and other lethal weapons, and canvas strips (complete with buttons, button holes, loops, pegs & pins) described as shelter halves, we felt that our future was going to be slightly more rugged than it had appeared three months back. Our direction was north and west, and by the time night had fallen on the caravan, the experts among us had our destination picked out as Portland. The engineer kept his own counsel, and kept going. So we climbed down from our conveyances in the foggy half light of very early morning and lined up along the tracks in the yards that later observation proved to be adjacent to the Seattle, Washington, railroad station. Weighed down by our equipment that seemed more bulky and heavy than any possible use could justify, we walked as steadily as possible to a waiting line of trucks, 2 1/2 ton (6 x 6), which received us and moved us through little used back streets into the open country and Fort Lawton. Here, where an old Artillery post had been turned into a POE, we were set down in the midst of confusion and what seemed like seven full divisions of transient personnel to undergo a processing that made all others look simple by comparison. New clothing for old, AGO cards and photographs, more and more equipment (tropical), lotions and ointments, showdown inspections and formations at all hours of the day and night. If life was like this before we even got going, what would it be like when we got there? Six days of this routine, (during which time all our Air Corps patches had been removed from our clothing to prevent identification of those of the outfit who got in town, and we had been initiated into the mysteries of censoring mail), and we were alerted again, loaded into the same trucks, 2 1/2 ton (6 x 6), and conveyed to the waterfront. Here in the heat of early afternoon we got ourselves onto and into the converted cruise liner "Mexico." With upwards of 2500 personnel occupying space originally intended for 300 comfortable travelers (or so it seemed), we set off into the setting sun on the evening of 8 June.

The voyage was uneventful, and after the first day of sailing into a head wind and a less than placid sea, the weather improved and the roll of the ship became hardly noticeable. Seasickness abated (though there were some characters who never left their sacks), and card games and sun bathing began to be observed on such small portions of the decks as we were allowed to use. Without escorts we were, the subject of enemy submarines was thoroughly discussed at the beginning of the voyage and soon forgotten as one relaxed day followed another. An early riser

on the morning of 15 June looked off the starboard bow and saw the lovely, green, mist-shrouded mass of a mountainous island ringed with white surf punctuated by occasional tall spouts of water, and the decks were soon crowded with passengers eager to set foot on this vision of delight. Several hours later, the "Mexico" was berthed in the harbor of Port Allen on the southern coast of the island of Kauai in the Hawaiian Islands.

BARKING SANDS With the motion of the boat still being felt by every pair of legs, the outfit, complete with all its gear and some pets that had made a mysterious appearance, fell in on the dock, had its assorted noses counted, and climbed over the high tailboards of the waiting trucks, 2 1/2 ton (6 x 6), and other varied vehicles to proceed to its new home. This turned out to be a station built for the Navy in the early days of the War at an area north of the small settlement of Kekaha, at a location known as Barking Sands, situated on the western bulge of the island facing the purple silhouette of the island of Niihau 17 miles away.

The ride to the Base opened our eyes to scenery with a capital "S." From our road, roughly skirting the coast, the land rose toward the center of the island to form the peak of Kawaikini, which the small guide book (courtesy of USO) said was 5170 feet high. Canyons and valleys, cut to a depth of 3000 feet by the mountain streams which we occasionally crossed, made each successive view more dramatic than the one last seen, and the combined colors of rich green vegetation, red soil and blue sea and sky had to be seen to be believed. Those of us who later made the tour of Kauai (and who did not) found it well named the Garden Island.

The caravan dropped us in our respective areas. Again we found our belongings, quarters, mess halls and plumbing, signed our forms and settled down, this time in separate squadron areas strung out along the ocean facing the setting sun. We were to live like this, with minor variations wherever we went, for over a year and a half.

The Air Echelon, rested and sun-tanned from its stopover at Oahu, joined the Barking Sands contingent as fast as the crews could be rounded up in the various pastures that they had discovered. The last airplane made its usual perfect landing and taxied to its camouflaged revetment on 22 June, and once again, the 494th was a complete Bombardment Group (H), ready for the next move which everyone hoped would not take too long to come. It is worthy of note here that each airplane and crew that left the States arrived safely at Kauai.

Although the airplanes that the Group brought along were the latest model of Stateside effectiveness, they were not equipped to meet standards set by the 7th AF during its more than two years experience in Pacific warfare. The first and most pressing job facing us, therefore, was to see that the necessary modifications were made to our equipment as quickly as possible. After lengthy negotiations with the Hawaiian Air Depot had proved that we would never catch up with the War if we waited for the work to be done at that busy spot, it was decided to take on the job at our own place with our own personnel. Starting early in July, after a full formation flight around the Island on the 4th, all alterations and additions were complete by 1 August, much to the surprise of experts sent over by HAD to observe the operation. Completed also was much of the art work that decorated every airplane by the time our first combat mission was flown, none

of it equaling in size or sheer inventive genius the face of "Casey" Laskowski's "Horrible Monster" that was the first job to be executed back at Mountain Home.

Meanwhile, GI's and Brass alike drilled on the sun-baked steel matting of taxi strips, stood guard at night through-out the Area, disported themselves in the mountainous surf at Sunova Beach and toured our Island and many of its neighbors while the time ran out. The crews went through Gunnery School at Hickam, gaining a proficiency with cal. 50's and cal. 30's that was to stand them in good stead later in life. As July ended and August began, rumors and common sense made it plain that the Group was going to move again.

What and where the move would be was complicated by the fact that there was no place for us to go. Unless we were to be put to work keeping by-passed islands in a continually reduced state, there was no base in the forward area that was in shape to be used by a heavy group at this time, unless it was Saipan, and the rumor was that a heavy group had been moved in there already, A clue to our destiny came to S-2 early in August, when a bale of Philippine target photos made its appearance. Where could a B-24 Group base and strike the Philippines? Yap had not been taken, and no one thought it would be. The Palaus looked ideal on the map, and there were rumors -

ANGAUR On 17 August, an advance echelon of the Group was assembled, processed and stuffed into a waiting vessel, the "Sea Sturgeon," which set out for parts unknown but faintly surmised. The story of the wanderings of this hardy band of pioneers in the "Sturgeon" is too long to set down here in any detail, but a brief outline will suffice to show why some members of the 494th prefer any fate but that of spending any part of their life on the water. From Kauai they steamed to Honolulu and remained tied up at the harbor end of one of that City's main streets for the weekend with no shore liberty to ease the strain. Casting loose, they set sail for Kwajalein, lying offshore for a suitable length of time to take on or deliver supplies. From this desolated area they steamed South, crossing the Equator with appropriate ceremony, and put into Manus for rest and relaxation as well as anything else the "Sturgeon" happened to need. At this point many will remember Duffy's Tavern on the island of Pittylou, where real beer was encountered in considerable quantity. Hoisting anchor once more regretfully, the little band headed North, and eventually found itself anchored and riding out the swells of a recent hurricane off the northern coast of Babelthuap Island, which a glance at a chart showed was the largest and most northerly of the Palau Group. So this was it! Forty-three (43) days and blacked-out nights had elapsed since Kauai!

It wasn't it, exactly. When the weather had modified enough to permit landing (barely enough), the "Sturgeon" proceeded South for the full extent of the group of islands, picked out the smallest one, and set the travelers on the beach in a heavy rain, complete with a small mountain of gear and supplies. The island was Angaur, the meanest of the Group, where in happier times the natives-of the area condemned its mentally deranged brethren to live separated from the more normal members of their society. Though "all organized resistance had ceased" in the estimation of the communiqué writers, there was still plenty of the unorganized variety, and few if any of that first echelon will forget the first weeks of trying to cope with Jap snipers, land crabs, pup tents, K rations and the jungle growth separately and collectively. Pelelieu Island, on this

30th of September '44 was still in the process of being separated from its Japanese defenders, and the strip at Angaur was far from complete. The Advance Echelon wondered if it would ever see the rest of the Group again.

The remainder of the Group at Barking Sands began to pack, process and check equipment while a complicated schedule for moving the outfit by air was being worked out with ATC at Hickam Field. It was not until 10 October that the "Missouri Mule," piloted by Lt. Colonel Halstead and staffed by a crew containing many of the top-ranking officers of Group HQ, took off, followed by a C-47 load of HQ personnel on the 12th. The route took them to Hickam (where the C-47 was traded for a C-54), thence to Johnson Island, Kwajalein and Saipan. At Saipan, an enforced "delay en route" of 10 days gave members of this small contingent a first-hand view of operations in the rough from the receiving end, for the Japs had not resigned themselves to the apparent loss of this strategic spot, or else did not know that they were beaten. Here, while quartered with the 7th BOMCOM, several members of the 494th flew their first combat mission with crews of the 30th Group, stationed on Saipan, and got their only glimpse of Iwo Jima. The "Mule" landed on Pelelieu on 16 October, picking up its first combat scars in the form of stray bullets from the battle of Bloody-Nose Ridge which was in full swing at the time. Leaving his flying machine for a few days in comparative safety at Pelelieu, Colonel Halstead established contact with the forward echelon on Angaur by means of a convenient "puddle-jumper" taxi service that had been established by MAG 11. The "Missouri Mule" followed as soon as the unfinished strip at Angaur permitted it to land and find a parking space out of the way of the night and day construction being rushed to completion by the Seabees and Combat Engineers. The first installment of HQ personnel, marooned at Saipan until this time, put in its appearance at Angaur on 23 October. Colonel Kelley, in No. 101 (an unarmed version of our combat airplanes that was later to be known as the "Fat Cat") landed on our strip on 24 October, and the Group was completely headed up. Airplanes and crews came in from that date on as quickly as the strip could accommodate them, but it was not until 23 November that the last plane was in. By this date, starting on 3 November, 15 combat missions had been flown by the 494th over Yap and the upper islands of the Palaus, Arakabesan, Koror and Babelthuap, and the first of the Philippine missions had been carried out successfully by a strike at the Legaspi Airfield on 17 November.

Air Force Order of Battle
Created: 31 Aug 2011
Updated:

Sources

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