

1st AIRCRAFT ASSEMBLY SQUADRON

LINEAGE

Activated, 21 Sep 1942

Inactivated, 6 Nov 1945

STATIONS

Sacramento Air Depot, McClellan Field, CA

Camp Stoneman, CA

Casablanca, French Morocco

Cazes AB

Sidi Ahmed AB, Tunisia, 12 Aug 1943

Brindisi, AB, Italy, May 1944

Cazes AB Jan 1945

Capodichino, AB, Naples, Italy

Rome AAF, Rome, NY

ASSIGNMENTS

12th Air Force

COMMANDERS

Maj Hudson Nicholson

Maj Cecil B. Gailhouse

Maj John W. Clark

Maj William E. Green

Maj Harvey J. Neeld

HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

EMBLEM

MOTTO

OPERATIONS

The 1st Aircraft Assembly Squadron was activated at Sacramento Air Depot, McClellan Field, CA, on 21 Sep 1942. Action in the Pacific Theater of Operations at that time indicated the need for skilled aircraft assembly personnel to operate a base where planes shipped from the States could be quickly assembled for combat service, and the 1st Aircraft Assembly Squadron was scheduled for this mission.

Portable hangars, vehicles, tools and equipment, as well as quartermaster and hospital supplies were procured, and plans were made for extensive operations in the Pacific Theater. It was decided that the First Aircraft Squadron would operate their own aircraft assembly base on some island near the theater of operations against the Japanese.

The tactical situation changed, and the island designated for the assembly base was occupied by the enemy, and the plans for the 1st Aircraft Assembly Squadron were changed.

In the meantime, it had developed that repair and service squadrons, badly needed to keep front-line planes in repair in the North African Theater of operations, were being pressed into service to assemble aircraft to maintain the flow of planes to combat areas. Lack of trained personnel delayed this vital work, and reduced the efficiency of the combat war in the air. The need for a highly skilled group of aircraft assembly personnel led to the selection of the First Aircraft Squadron for this important task.

The organization left Camp Stoneman, CA, on 19 Jan 1943, to travel across the country to Camp Kilmer, NJ. Here they were processed for overseas shipment, and on 7 Feb, they embarked aboard the SS Brazil for the European Theater.

After a hazardous trip in convoy during which the Brazil's sister ship was rammed at sea with extensive loss of men and equipment, the squadron arrived at Casablanca on 19 Feb. The unit stayed aboard ship and debarked on the night of February 20 for security reasons.

The squadron was assigned immediately to the Twelfth Air Force by Headquarters, North African Theater of Operations. Twelfth Air Force, in turn, assigned the unit to Gazes Air Base. After five months of intensive training, the organization, which had been activated on 21 Sep 1942, was finally ready to put their knowledge and experience to good use. The first airplane assembled by the squadron was a P-38, No. 42-13136. It left the assembly line on 10 Mar 1943. During the period that the squadron was based at Gazes Air Field, many types of aircraft were assembled including P-39s, P-40s, A-36s, Spitfires, Hurricanes, A-35s, L-4Bs, F-5s, C-61s and CG-4s.

It was reported that the assembly of fighter aircraft during the Tunisian Campaign far exceeded the combat losses; a splendid tribute to the devotion to duty and the energy displayed by the personnel of the First Aircraft Assembly Squadron who were, in part, responsible for the gallant victory of our forces in that area.

Gliders and fighter planes assembled at Gazes Air Base were later used in the Sicilian Campaign and in the Rome-Arno Campaign and some flew on to carry the fight to the enemy in later campaigns.

During this time, the Finance Section was placed on detached service with higher headquarters where they were to remain during their entire overseas service except for short periods. They kept in close touch with the squadron while they were separated and old friendships were renewed during brief reunions.

The squadron moved from Casablanca, French Morocco by rail and truck convoy to Sidi Ahmed Air Base, Tunisia, on 12 Aug 1943. This trip will be long remembered by all who were members of the Squadron at that time. It was a long train trip over mountain passes and through tunnels cut through the hills. The men were crowded in box cars, the only available troop transports. The days passed slowly, and it was a week before the train reached its destination. The truck convoy, which followed with supplies and equipment, arrived a day later.

From Sidi Ahmed a detachment was sent to El Aoiunia on 26 Aug 1943, for a short period. At Sidi Ahmed the Engineering Section of the squadron assembled CG-4s, WC-78s, A-35s, P-40s, A-46s, P-47s, L-4s, A-20s, P-51s, F-5s and RA-24s. In addition to this assembly work, they modified B-25's to increase their fire power and returned them to combat a more efficient aircraft. Planes assembled here were used in the Naples-Foggia and Rome-Arno Campaigns. The Ordnance Section of the squadron was assigned to higher headquarters where they did outstanding staff work.

All Air Base and Sub-Depot functions were taken over by the squadron at Sidi Ahmed Air Base on 23 Jan 1944. The squadron was responsible for control and operation of the entire base. For a short period the Dental Officer and his assistant were put on detached service with the North African Bomber Command. On 8 Feb 1944, the Senior Engineering Officer and one assembly group were placed on detached service to Gazes Air Base at Casablanca.

In May 1944, it became necessary to establish an advance base for aircraft assembly and the Commanding Officer, four other officers, one assembly group, and medical personnel flew ahead to Brindisi Air Base, Brindisi, Italy, to begin operations. Headquarters Section remained at Sidi Ahmed until 10 Jun and then moved on by air to join the advance group at Brindisi. A detachment of the squadron remained at Sidi Ahmed to supervise the transportation of the vehicles and heavy equipment. They embarked from Bizerte, Tunisia on the SS Simmons on 17 Jun and sailed to Naples, Italy. From there they came overland to Brindisi to rejoin the squadron.

Late in Jul 1944, the Engineering Officer and the assembly group on detached service at Gazes Air Base were flown to Cercola Air Base at Naples, Italy, to spearhead the assembly of CG-4 for the invasion of Southern France. This campaign started 15 Aug and the assembly group completed their work three days ahead of the scheduled time. Cercola Air Base was at the foot of Mt. Versuvius and the volcanic ash and dust from the recently erupted volcano made their work extremely difficult. For their meritorious effort on this assignment, the group received several letters of commendation.

At Brindisi Air Base, the remainder of the squadron continued to assemble aircraft that were used in the Rome-Arno, Southern France and Po Valley Campaigns by the 12th and 15th Air Forces. They also disassembled P-47s and Heinkel 111s and crated them for shipment to the United States. The P-47s were dismantled and returned to the States for inspection and design improvements after they

had been used in combat. The Heinkel 111s were shipped to Wright Field for armament and design inspections and later they were reassembled and sent around the country on bond drive tours.

On 31 Jan 1945, the squadron departed by air for Cazes Air Base. Here they rejoined the detachment that had been there since Feb 1944. It had been a year since the entire squadron functioned as a complete unit, and here again at Cazes Air Base they continued to assemble aircraft in addition to their other Depot duties. On 14 Mar 1945, the squadron took over the Headquarters of Erection Center No. 1 at Cazes. The squadron had been returned to Cazes Air Base from Brindisi because speed was now an important factor. When the squadron was at Brindisi, they had to wait for ships to travel the long slow route through the Mediterranean Sea to bring the planes to them to be assembled. At Cazes, they could assemble the planes, and then they could be ferried by air to the replacement pool in Naples.

The shocking news of the death of President Roosevelt was confirmed by radio on 13 Apr 1945, and memorial services were held at Pare Lyautey, Casablanca on April 15.

When victory over the enemy in the European Theater came on 8 May 1945, ending the war with Germany, the squadron was assigned the task of disassembling aircraft and crating it for shipment to the Pacific Theater. This work continued at Cazes until 28 May 1945, when the squadron moved to Capodi-chino Air Field at Naples, Italy. Disassembly of aircraft here, as in Casablanca, was the main duty of the organization.

On 3 Jun 1945, word was received that the organization was to be shipped to the Pacific Theater to assemble aircraft for a fighter wing there. After extensive preparations, the squadron embarked at Naples on 6 Aug 1945, for the long journey to the Philippine Islands. Eight days later at sea aboard their trans- port, the SS Sea Owl, a Merchant Marine Liberty Ship, a message was received that the Japanese had accepted unconditional surrender terms. The next day the Sea Owl was ordered to alter its course and sail for Boston. The end of hostilities in the Pacific had eliminated the need for the services of the squadron in that area and they were ordered back to the States.

The Sea Owl arrived at Boston on 18 Aug 1945, and the organization proceeded to Camp Miles Standish to await further orders. From there, personnel were shipped to their respective Separation Centers and all were given furloughs at home. Those who had accumulated enough points were discharged when they returned to the Separation Centers, and the remaining officers and men were assigned as a unit to Rome Army Air Field, Rome, New York. The organization performed various duties at the air field until the Squadron was inactivated on 6 Nov 1945. Personnel who remained in service after this date were absorbed into permanent units who were operating the Rome Army Air Base.

Air Force Order of Battle
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Sources

Air Force Historical Research Agency. U.S. Air Force. Maxwell AFB, AL.
Unit history. *1st Aircraft Assembly Squadron. Into the Sky*. No date.