

11th SERVICE SQUADRON

MISSION

LINEAGE

Materiel Squadron, 8th Air Base Group
Redesignated 11th Materiel Squadron
Redesignated 11th Service Squadron, 4 Aug 1942

STATIONS

Langley Field, VA
Bangor, ME
Sydney, Australia
RAAF Station, Bankstown, New South Wales, Australia, 17 Apr 1942

ASSIGNMENTS

COMMANDERS

Maj Alfred T. Geddes

HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

EMBLEM

MOTTO

NICKNAME

OPERATIONS

The 8th Air Base Group was activated on 15 January, 1941, at Langley Field, Virginia, composed of the following units: Headquarters and Headquarters Squadron, 11th Materiel Squadron, and the 7th Air Base Squadron. The period following activation was spent in basic training and routine administration duties. The Group was under strength and was slowly being brought up to allotted tables of organization.

On 4 June, 1941, by rail, privately owned conveyance and military motor vehicles, the group moved to Bangor, Maine, to assume control of the Bangor Air Base, then under construction and the next few months after arrival, were spent in basic training. Approximately 10 per cent of the personnel were sent to various Army Special Service Schools for technical training.

On 18 September, 1941, orders came through for Headquarters and Headquarters Squadron and the 11th Materiel Squadron to go to the North Carolina Maneuvers. The 7th Air Base Squadron to remain at the Bangor Air Base to continue normal operations. A few days prior to this date a small detachment of men, made up from each of the units had departed for the Louisiana Maneuvers.

The units departed for the Carolina Maneuvers by motor convoy on 20 September 1941, being assigned to the Blue Army. Duties were to assume complete operational control of the Knollwood Airport. The Airport was put in serviceable order in a minimum length of time which necessitated installation of tower, engineering, gas service, landing lights, salvage control, operations and many minor constructions. The maneuvers having been successfully completed the two units departed by motor convoy for their home base arriving at Bangor, Maine, on 5 December, 1941.

On the 7th of January, 1942, the 8th Air Base Group was alerted for shipment overseas and the 15th Signal Platoon (AB) was assigned to the Group for overseas shipment. The 7th Air Base Squadron was to remain at the base to continue operations. On the morning of 17 February, 1942, the Group consisting of Headquarters and Headquarters Squadron, 11th Materiel Squadron, and the 15th Signal Platoon (AB), departed by rail to port of embarkation at Boston, Massachusetts. On arrival there the organization moved directly on board the "Queen Mary" where the 703rd Ordnance Company (AB) and detachment, 2nd Quartermaster Company (AB) joined the Group.

The route followed was due south to Key West, Florida, where a brief stop was made, then to Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, arriving on the morning of 6 March, 1942, where a two day delay was experienced but no personnel allowed ashore. The journey was then resumed, docking at Capetown, Africa, on the morning of 14 March. The following morning found the "Queen Mary" continuing her journey, arriving on the 23rd of March at Fremantle, Australia, where fuel and water was taken aboard and then on to her destination, Sydney, Australia.

The Group arrived in Sydney, Australia, at approximately 1730 hours on 28 March 1942, having spent forty days en route. Upon arrival, all troops were billeted at Randwick Racecourse, Sydney, on 17 April, 1942, the 11th Materiel Squadron moved to the R.A.A.F. Station, Bankstown, New South Wales.

During the stay at Bankstown Airdrome, the 11th was performing 1st, 2nd and 3rd echelon maintenance of aircraft. Inexperienced men worked side by side with skilled mechanics and received valuable training and experience, which was to serve them well when the test came in New Guinea.

The 11th Materiel Squadron left Bankstown in July, 1942, for Port Moresby, where they were assigned to the 8th Service Group. Many humorous stories could be told about the first air raid—men trying to dig shelters with helmets and knives, attempting to crowd into shallow slit trenches, lying on top of each other; but this was the first and only raid that caught them unprepared. The name of the Squadron was changed to the 11th Service Squadron on 4 Aug 1942.

During the first months sleep was a rare luxury and food was scarce, but in spite of these conditions the 8th Service Group did all the work of establishing and maintaining the landing strips in the Moresby area. Men from the 11th were engaged in gas servicing, repair, maintenance and salvage of aircraft, also in the construction of roads, runways and revetments at eight different airdromes.

Going on one of the missions meant a few days or even months of hardship. Toots Avere scarce, working conditions were the worst possible, and often the men had to depend on friendly natives for food and help in transporting materials. All of these jobs required a great deal of ingenuity and determination. One officer and six enlisted men, together with an Australian officer, were flown to an airstrip to repair planes which had been forced down 40 miles from the small strip. When the job was done the crew and remaining natives cut and pulled grass to clear the strip so that the plane could be flown out.

The most difficult job ever undertaken by this organization was the repair of an aircraft near which two fragmentation or daisy cutter bombs had exploded. The wings and fuselage were holed in several places, a good part of the electrical system was shot out, all windows were blown out, and a fire started in the tail end of the fuselage which burned away several square feet of skin, ruined one bulkhead, damaged three others, and weakened several structural members before it could be extinguished. The overall repair time was thirty-days; The ship was then flown to Melbourne by Capt. Edwards, Engineering Officer, and his Co-pilot. Lt. McCluney. Both officers have since been awarded the Air Medal for this accomplishment.

Col. Bradford A. Shaw, former Commanding Officer of the 8th Service Group, said at a Squadron party: "We worked fourteen to eighteen hours a day necessary to get airplanes back in commission so that they could go out again and again to strike Rabaul and Buna and Lae and pin the Nip down. We worked and sweated and cursed and took the Japs together through the

dark days when it seemed all was lost, when the Jap was advancing on every front and when our efforts seemed small and ineffectual, until the Jap was finally held and then turned back. No one can ever take from us the knowledge that we didn't drop the ball, and we did a complicated, unglamorous, thankless job hard and well."

The 11th participated in the Papuan Campaign from 30 Jul 1942-23 Jan 1943, and in the New Guinea Campaign from 24 Jan 1943-13 Jan 1944.

Air Force Order of Battle

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Sources

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

Unit History. *8 Air Service Group, Pictorial History*. Simmons Limited. Sydney, Australia. 1945.