

THE COOK ISLANDS IN WORLD WAR II: THE STORY OF PENRHYN AND AITUTAKI

A Compilation of Materials and Resources including Documents from the United
States National Archives

VOLUME 2

The Pacific Theater in World War II and the development of Penrhyn Island and
Aitutaki Island airbases within the Pacific Ocean Areas Command

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Honolulu, Hawai'i
November 2012

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XIII Air Force Service Command
Historical Monographs, number 17

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THE OPERATIONS OF AVIATION ENGINEERS
IN THE SOUTH PACIFIC

(Activation History, XIII Air Force Service Command, Part I)

JANUARY 1942 - AUGUST 1944

Headquarters
XIII Air Force Service Command
APO 719

15 July 1945

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Operations of Aviation Engineers, South Pacific

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Operations of Aviation Engineers, South Pacific

FOREWORD

It is evident that air bases and installations used and occupied by Army Air Forces personnel in the South Pacific played a significant role in the effective prosecution of the war there. Hence there is no further need to justify the worthiness of a historical study devoted to the construction of these bases and installations for the purposes of military history.

Yet, there is an even higher goal to be served in preserving a record of the development of the aviation facilities of the South Seas. It is axiomatic in the history of mankind that economic and cultural developments follow rapidly in the wake of military penetration. There is every reason to expect that the same will be true of the South Seas following the current war, especially since they encompass one of the greatest undeveloped insular zones upon the earth and at the same time provide seaways and airways from western America to Australia, New Guinea, and the Dutch East Indies. There is little doubt that the air bases which have sprung up in these islands from the necessities of war will hasten the air-borne economic development of this region. Hence the study that follows may have significance also as source material for the general economic and social history of the South Sea Islands.

The scope of this study is necessarily limited. It tells only the part that was played by the Aviation Engineers of the Thirteenth Air Force in the development of air bases and military installations. The work of ground force, navy, marine, New Zealand, Australian, and other engineers has not been treated since data on their operations is not available. It can only be hoped that those agencies too will have kept a record of their operations and that historians will some day be able to collate the history of all, both for the needs of military and of economic history.

A statement should be made about the problems which the historian has encountered in the preparation of this study since, without that, those who may make use of it might do so with insufficient critical preparation. The source materials that have been used are not without error. Unit histories are documents prepared by untrained historians who are prone to aggrandize the work of their unit at the expense of historical fidelity or to be brief to the point of omitting data on even the most significant accomplishments of the unit. Interviews have been held with only a few of many engineers who might be able to give significant information on engineer operations in the South Seas but who are no longer available. The historian has been able to visit only a few of the bases where the aviation engineers have operated. Finally, basic planning for the disposition and construction of air bases in the South Seas was done largely by the Planning Board, COMSOPAC, (Commanding General, South Pacific). The

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Operations of Aviation Engineers, South Pacific, contd

records of that office have not been available to the historian so that, in reality, he has been able to describe a great deal of the actual work of air base and installation construction without having been in a position to study basic engineer operational plans in their relationship to the overall strategy of the war in the South Pacific.

It should further be stated that the operations of two engineer units of Thirteenth Air Force are not fully covered in this report. Since the 956th Engineer Topographical Company Aviation was never assigned directly to Headquarters XIII Air Force Service Command, the record of its operations has not come into the hands of the Command Historian. Furthermore, the specialized nature of its work is such that its treatment in a study of this kind would be somewhat inorganic. The 905th Engineer Air Force Headquarters Company was assigned to the XIII Air Force Service Command during a large part of the period of its operations in the South Pacific. For that reason, and perhaps also because certain of its missions were directly related to the construction of air bases and aviation installations, there is some mention of this unit in the study that follows. Its strength has been included in the tables on disposition of aviation engineer personnel.

This study is the first in a series that will ultimately be prepared by the XIII Air Force Service Command which, upon completion, will comprise a history of the Command from the date of activation to January of 1944. However, for the sake of comprehensiveness and the logical treatment of materials, it has not been found desirable to delineate the study entirely on a chronological basis. Hence it has been found expedient to treat the operations of the aviation engineers during the entire period of their assignment to this Command. This includes missions carried out by them before the Command was activated and during approximately the first half of the year 1944--the time of their relief from assignment to this Headquarters and to the Thirteenth Air Force.

In conclusion, the historian wishes to express his appreciation to those who have made this study possible by their helpfulness and interest; to the unit historians whose historical reports constitute the principal source materials; to personnel of the Engineer Sections of Headquarters Thirteenth Air Force and XIII Air Force Service Command, the names of whom appear in Chapter I; and finally to Corporal Clifton R. Phippin, 33902043, research assistant to the Command Historian, whose careful compilations on the administration and movements of aviation engineers appear in the charts and tables of Chapters I and II.

Austin E. Fiez
AUSTIN E. FIEZ,
Captain, Air Corps
Historical Officer

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Operations of Aviation Engineers, South Pacific

Chapter I

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

This chapter is being written to show exactly what materials were available to the historian for the preparation of this study and to give an estimate of the value of these materials to historians concerned with the development of air bases and garrisons of aerial warfare in the South Pacific.

It should be kept in mind that only a portion of the actual construction, maintenance, and improvement of air bases in the South Pacific was accomplished by the engineer aviation units of XIII Air Force Service Command. A few were built under the supervision of the local island governments and were operational as early as the 1930's. Some were built by the Hawaiian Department of the United States Engineer Department or by private construction companies under contract to the United States Engineer Department and were operational just before or shortly after December 7, 1941. Many were constructed and maintained by Naval and Marine construction units. A few were taken from the Japanese usually in a much damaged condition and rebuilt, expanded, and improved by American forces. Construction was performed at a few others by engineers of New Zealand and Australia. To tell the entire story it will be necessary to collate the construction records of all these governments and agencies. It is, of course, impossible for the writer of this paper to make such a collation. Yet it is important that he bring together all the data available on the operations of the aviation engineers of Thirteenth Air Force so that, at some later date, other historians may better tell the entire story of the development of the aviation facilities of the South Seas.

Following is a list of pertinent sources of information which have been available to the writer of this monograph:

A: -- UNIT HISTORIES

1. 810th Engineer Aviation Battalion
 - a. Operational History (South Pacific Area). 8 pages, dated 3 October 1944. An excellent summary of the significant engineer projects carried out by this unit at New Caledonia and Guadalcanal. (Sup Doc 3)
 - b. History. From Activation to December 31, 1944. 13 pages, narrative, legal length. No date. Excellent data on operations at New Caledonia and Guadalcanal.
 - c. Monthly unit histories from January through June 1944. Adequate brief summaries of monthly operations.
2. 811th Engineer Aviation Battalion
 - a. Battalion History (Activation to October 1944). 25 pages mimeographed, no date. Significant material on the operations of this unit at New Caledonia and Guadalcanal. (Sup Doc 4)

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b. Monthly unit histories for March, April, May, June, and July 1944.

3. 821st Engineer Aviation Battalion

a. Monthly unit histories from January to August 1944. These histories are the best that have been written by any engineer aviation unit of this Command. Those for the period from April to August 1944 tell in lucid detail the development of nearly all Air Force installations at Los Negros, Admiralties. Because of their excellence these histories were called to the special attention of the Commanding General, Thirteenth Air Force and to the Chief Engineer, AAF, per letter of this Headquarters dated 18 September 1944, subject: "Unit Histories, 821st Engineer Aviation Battalion."

4. 822nd Engineer Aviation Battalion

a. Monthly unit histories from January to March of 1944. These brief manuscripts are very inadequate and tell only a meager story of the operations of this unit which was stationed at Espiritu Santo, New Hebrides, from November of 1942 to May of 1944.

5. 828th Engineer Aviation Battalion

a. Operational History, 828th Engr Avn Bn, November 1942 to July 1944. 65 pages, dated 12 December 1945. Includes a brief summary of the airdrome construction operations of this unit at Efate and New Guinea, plus single page mimeographed forms briefly describing all other major construction projects carried out by this unit at these two locations. (Sup Doc 5)

b. Quarterly history for October-December 1943, outline only.

c. Monthly unit histories for the period from January to August 1944.

6. 873rd Airborne Engineer Aviation Battalion

a. Monthly unit histories for the period from January through November 1944.

7. 890th Engineer Aviation Company

a. Unit history for the period from activation through March 1944.

b. Monthly unit histories for the period from April through July 1944.

8. 891st Engineer Aviation Company

a. Unit history for period from 25 July 1942 (activation) to 31 March 1944. A brief account of the construction work of this unit at Tongareva (North Cook Islands) and at New Caledonia.

b. Monthly unit histories for the period from January through June of 1944.

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9. 905th Engineer Air Force Headquarters Company
 a. Narrative History of Organization, from activation (1 May 1942) through 31 December 1944.

b. Monthly unit histories for the period from January through June of 1944.

10. 1918th Engineer Aviation Company
 a. Monthly unit histories for the period from January through June of 1944.

11. 1919th Engineer Aviation Company
 a. Unit histories for the period from January through June of 1944.

12. During 1943 QUARTERLY HISTORIES, in outline form, were required of all units assigned to USAFISPA, including those of Thirteenth Air Force. Hence, engineer aviation units which were later assigned to XIII Air Force Service Command submitted histories of this nature. Some of these were sent to USAFISPA through Island Command channels. Others were submitted to the Commanding General Army Air Forces through Headquarters Thirteenth Air Force. Only a very few of these have been available to the Command Historian. However, being in outline form, and based upon an outline designed for ground force combat troops, they were of little value indeed insofar as they might reveal anything significant about the engineer operations of the units concerned. It is doubtful that a search for these documents would be worth the effort in terms of what they might reveal concerning the development of aviation installations in the South Pacific.

Other Documents

1. War Department AAF Form 63, subject: "Foreign Airport Description." This form constitutes a comprehensive description of each foreign airport. There are a total of thirty-eight (38) items which give the name and location of the field; essential navigational, weather, and communications data; repair, fuel, hangar, and other facilities; personnel accommodations; hospitals, railroads, waterways, electric power, and other facilities; and data on defensive facilities and personnel. I am advised by Major Stephen F. Noonan (see following section of this chapter under interviews) that directives requiring air base commanders to fill out this form had not generally been complied with in the South Pacific up to November 1943.

At about that time Senator Lodge and party made visits to air bases in the South Pacific and expressed the desire that the War Department be supplied with information on the cost of construction, lease arrangements, and other related data for all aviation installations occupied by American forces in the South Pacific. A supplement was devised for War Department AAF Form 63 to convey this additional information to the Assistant Secretary of War for Air. This supplement carried information on the following general topics: the importance of the air base; jurisdiction of

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the base; units and aircraft making use of the base; the original status of the base; description of all construction and installations made at the base by the United States; lease agreements and authority for use; the estimated evaluation of all United States construction and development; the sources from which all information were drawn.

It is important to note that both of these documents constitute a careful description of each air base as of the date of compilation. Little or nothing is given in either on the date on which fields and installations were constructed, what units are responsible for maintenance, construction, and development, when the strips became operational, etc.

Save for the air bases of New Caledonia (see 2. supra) the writer has had access to neither of these significant groups of documents. However, the War Department AAF Form 63 was sent monthly to Headquarters Army Air Forces following November 1943, where it will no doubt be available for historical research.

2. Special Report for Assistant Secretary of War for Air. The basis for this report has already been described in paragraph 1. supra. A great deal of detail is available concerning this report for the air bases of New Caledonia since a duplicate copy of the report has been made available to the writer for transmittal to the Historical Archives, Army Air Forces, with this monograph. (Supporting document number 2) It was compiled by Thirteenth Air Force, Office of the Engineer, Sub-office, 13th Air Depot, APC 502, and transmitted to Headquarters Thirteenth Air Force on 14 December 1943. This significant document has a section on each air field in New Caledonia containing the following: an engineer's drawing of the field and surrounding terrain; photostatic copies of War Department AAF Form 63 with supplement; an aerial photograph of the field; mimeographed copies of leases when they were available; survey sheets giving detailed account of U.S. development and estimated costs.

Similar data was sent to the Assistant Secretary of War for Air by engineers of the Thirteenth Air Force on all the air bases in the South Pacific Area although the writer has not been so fortunate as to discover duplicate copies of these reports.

Air bases to the north and east of Espiritu Santo were visited by Major Stephen F. Noonan for the purpose of gathering this information while other bases in the South Pacific were visited by a Major Stringer of Headquarters USAFISPA.

3. Historical Records; Supplement to Quarterly Inventory Form. In October of 1944 and upon instructions from the War Department (ltr, Office of the Chief of Engineers, file CE SPROW, dated 7 September 1944, subject "Report on Overseas Army Installations", an inventory of all permanent and semi-permanent army installations in the South Pacific was directed. The

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first reports were completed in November of 1944 and a policy was set for subsequent quarterly reports on installations not covered by the initial report. Each island base commander was made responsible for reports on all army installations in the area of his command. 1

Reports on Army Air Force Installations were again sub-delegated to qualified AAF units or personnel at each island. At Guadalcanal, for example, this was done by the Engineering Section of XIII Air Force Service Command. Finished reports were turned in on ENG FORMS 939a and 939a-1, through the Island Commands and SOPACBACOM, to the Office of the Chief of Engineers, War Department, Washington, D.C.

The importance of these documents cannot be overestimated since they constitute a description of all permanent and semi-permanent Air Force installations in the South Pacific: airfields, including runways, taxiways, parking facilities, air navigation aids, night lighting facilities, storage facilities, airfield roads, and other miscellaneous airdrome facilities; data on leased structures; reports on camps, cantonments, radio installations and various other significant developments. Included is very little information on the history of the installation in question; nevertheless, the comprehensive description of each installation as of the date of the report is more or less significant.

Copies of these reports have not been available to the Command Historian. They will be available for study in Washington, D.C. and it will be possible to write any intelligible story of the development of air bases in the South Pacific only by consulting them. Copies of pertinent forms and instructions are enclosed with this study as supporting documents. (No. 6)

4. Air Pilot Manual of the Pacific Islands. Published by the Director of Intelligence Service, Headquarters Army Air Forces, Washington, D.C., January 2, 1943. CONFIDENTIAL. This document contains maps, photographs, topographical sketches, descriptive data, and other pertinent navigational information on all airfields then in operation in the South Pacific. Like the documents described above, it is descriptive in nature only and gives no information on when airfields became operational, what units constructed each installation, or other pertinent historical data.

5. Airfields, South Pacific, 13th Air Force Engineer Office. SECRET. This document consists of a section on all the airfields in the South Pacific Area. In each section there is a drawing of the air field and surrounding terrain, a description of the field, and four (4) photographic views of the field, each from a different angle. The descriptive materials include navigational data; information on maintenance, repair, and supply facilities; gasoline supplies; housing facilities.

1. Ltr Hq SOPACBACOM, File 319.1 (Engr), dtd 16 Oct 44, subj: "Report on Overseas Army Installations".

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Airfields, South Pacific was prepared by the joint Engineer Sections of Thirteenth Air Force and XIII Air Force Service Command under the direction of Colonel Francis Hoehl. Only thirteen (13) copies were prepared with distribution as follows: (1) Engr Office 13th Air Force; (2) Hq AAF, Asst Chief of Staff, Intell. Wash., D.C.; (3) Engr Off, USAFISPA; (4) Air Engr, AC/AS Mat., Maint. & Dist. Office of the Air Engr, Washington, D.C.; (5) CG XIII Air Force Service Command; (6) CG, Thirteenth Air Force; (7) AC of S, A-2, 13th Air Force; (8) Operations Officer, 13th Air Force; (9) MM & DB Sec, AAF, Wash., D.C.; (10) Engr, SOSEPA; (11) Commander South Pacific; (12) Hydrographic Office, Navy Dept, Wash., D.C.; (13) Inspector, Pacific Fleet, POA.

Initial distribution was made to these various offices between the 3rd December 1943 and 10th March 1944. It was kept up to date by the distribution of new pages for insertion whenever there were significant changes in the facilities at any given air field. In July 1944 when it became evident that the Thirteenth Air Force would shortly move to the Southwest Pacific, revisions of the document were discontinued.

Copy number 1 has been used by the writer. Arrangements have been made for the XIII Air Force Service Command Engineer to release this copy for disposition in the AAF historical archives, and it accompanies this monograph as supporting document number 1.

Airfields, South Pacific, is an excellent description of the status of air bases in that area as they were during the first quarter of 1944. It is descriptive in nature and unfortunately gives no data on the date that strips became operational, what units were responsible for initial construction, maintenance, and improvement, or any other historical data.

6. Joint Intelligence Center, Pacific Ocean Areas, Bulletins Nos. 55-44 and 13-42, Secret Sailing Directions for United Nations Bases, South Pacific. This document consists of four (4) volumes of comprehensive information on all aviatational and naval installations in the South Pacific Area. In addition to data on harbors, docking facilities, etc., there is a section for each island on the aviatational facilities available. A few photographs and drawings are included, specifications of the strips, data on the various facilities available. Each page carries an amendment number and date so that the document could be kept up to date by the destruction of old pages and the insertion of new ones. The copy available to the writer seems to be corrected largely up to the end of 1944. The document is descriptive in nature and gives no data on the history of the base in question. The contents of each volume are as follows: Vol I, Aitutaki, Borabora, Efate, Ellice Islands, Espiritu Santo; Vol II, Fiji Islands, Green Island, New Caledonia, New Zealand; Vol III, Norfolk, Penrhyn, St. Matthias Group, Samoan Islands-Wallis, Santa Cruz Islands; Vol IV, Solomon Islands, Tongatabu.

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B:--INTERVIEWS

Interviews have been held by the writer with the following persons who have been capable of supplying important information on the operations of aviation engineers in the South Pacific either because of responsible positions which they have held or because of significant missions which they carried out:

1. Colonel Francis R. Hoehl - came overseas as Commanding Officer of the 822nd Engineer Aviation Battalion in June of 1942 and served as chief of the combined Engineer Sections of Thirteenth Air Force and XIII Air Force Service Command from their inception down to July 1944. From July to December 1944 he was chief of the Engineer Section XIII Air Force Service Command after which he returned to the United States where he is now serving as Engineer for the First Air Force.
2. Colonel Robert E. Hines - came overseas as Commanding Officer of the 905th Engineer Air Force Headquarters Company in November of 1942. In April, 1943, he joined the Engineer Section of Thirteenth Air Force and became Chief in July 1944.
3. Major Charles W. Munford - came overseas as Commanding Officer of the 955th Engineer Topographical Company Aviation (assigned to Thirteenth Air Force but never to XIII Air Force Service Command) in November of 1942. In December 1943 he joined the joint Engineer Sections of Thirteenth Air Force and XIII Air Force Service Command. In July 1944 when these two sections were separated he remained as assistant engineer of XIII Air Force Service Command. Since December 1944 he has been Chief of the Engineer Section, XIII Air Force Service Command.
4. Major Dean L. Condon - with the Engineer Section USAFISPA from September of 1943 to January 1944 when he joined the Engineer Section of Thirteenth Air Force. Now executive officer of the Engineer Section, this Headquarters.
5. Major Stephen F. Noonan - came overseas with the 822nd Engineer Aviation Battalion in October 1942. In July 1943 he joined the combined Engineer Sections of Thirteenth Air Force and XIII Air Force Service Command. In November of 1943 he was charged with the duty of visiting a number of air bases in the South Pacific to prepare War Department AAF Form 83 with attachments on aviaional facilities at the bases visited and to make the Special Report for the Assistant Secretary of War for Air on the bases visited. Major Noonan has furnished valuable information on the operations of the 822nd Engineer Aviation Battalion at Espiritu Santo.
6. Major Randall H. Hamilton - came overseas as S-4 of the 821st Engineer Aviation Battalion. On 27 July 1944 he joined the staff of the Engineer Section, Thirteenth Air Force. Much of the information in this study on the operations of the aviation engineers at Fiji was furnished by Major Hamilton.

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7. Captain Matthew J. Vea - came to the South Pacific in April of 1943. He served until the end of 1943 with the 361st Base Headquarters and Air Base Squadron at Tontouta Air Base, New Caledonia, as Base Engineer. From January to June, 1944 he was with the 828th Engineer Aviation Battalion at Munda. Since that time he has been with the Engineer Section of XIII Air Force Service Command as operations and engineering officer. He has furnished valuable data on the work of the aviation engineers at Munda and at Guadalcanal.

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Operations of Aviation Engineers, South Pacific contd

Chapter II

THE ADMINISTRATION OF ENGINEER AVIATION UNITS IN THE SOUTH PACIFIC

Eight (8) of the twelve (12) engineer aviation units that were ultimately assigned to the XIII Air Force Service Command arrived overseas before the activation of the Thirteenth Air Force in January 1943. They were assigned to Headquarters USAFISPA. For operations they were controlled by the Base Engineer at each island location.

Following the activation of the Thirteenth Air Force a new administrative plan was devised for all engineer aviation units. They were assigned to Thirteenth Air Force and further assigned to XIII Air Force Service Command. The first of these was assigned to Thirteenth Air Force on 19 April 1943. All of those which had arrived overseas prior to 1 July 1943 when XIII Air Force Service Command began operations, were assigned to this Headquarters at that time. There was a total of five (5) Engineer Aviation Battalions, two (2) Engineer Aviation Companies, the 905th Engineer Air Force Headquarters Company, and the 873rd Airborne Engineer Aviation Battalion. Towards the end of 1943 and in early 1944 three (3) additional Engineer Aviation Companies arrived overseas and were also assigned to this Command. (For further details see Table I, following.)

Thus, at least nominally on 1 July 1943 Headquarters XIII Air Force Service Command assumed responsibility for the administration and operations of all aviation engineer units in the South Pacific Area. In actual practice, however, the actual supervision of operations by this Command had to be modified owing to the remote geographic location of certain of the units and the lack of adequate communications facilities. A great degree of local autonomy was necessary. At Fiji, Tongareva, Aitutaki, and Efate operations were carried out for the most part under supervision of the base engineer. At the islands that were more centrally located--New Caledonia, Espiritu Santo, Guadalcanal--XIII Air Force Service Command took responsibility for administration and operations of engineer aviation units and continued to do so until they were either relieved from assignment to this Headquarters or moved into the Southwest Pacific Theater. At Munda a Naval engineer section had control of the operations of all engineer units. At Los Negros, Admiralties, operations were carried out under the direct operational control of Headquarters Thirteenth Air Force.

In the Southwest Pacific Theater this Command has lost all control of engineer aviation units. Upon movement into this Theater, engineer aviation units were first attached for administration and operational control to various ground force units and then later relieved from assignment. Thus, in effect, in the Southwest Pacific the administration and operations of engineer aviation units is very similar to the situation in the South Pacific prior to the activation of XIII Air Force Service Command. Base commanders and ground force headquarters have administrative and operational control of engineer aviation units. The result has been that Air Force installations

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have been built up with greater difficulty since priorities have been established and operations supervised by ground force units.

Following is a table which lists all engineer aviation units formerly assigned to XIII Air Force Service Command together with data on the date of departure from the United States and dates of assignment and relief from assignment to Thirteenth Air Force and XIII Air Force Service Command. This data was compiled from a study of all pertinent General Orders and other information available to the Command Historian on a form entitled "Unit Organizational and Administrative History". Upon completion these forms were sent back to all units concerned for editing and return to this office. Completed forms for all engineer aviation units follow Table I.

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TABLE I

ADMINISTRATIVE DATA ON ENGINEER AVIATION UNITS OF THE THIRTEENTH AIR FORCE

UNIT	¹ Date of Departure from the U.S.	² Date asgd to 15th AF	³ Date asgd to XIII AFSC	⁴ Date rld from asgmt to XIII AFSC
810th Engineer Aviation Battalion	25 Jan 42	11 June 43	1 July 43	24 Aug 44
811th Engineer Aviation Battalion	25 Jan 42	1 July 43	1 July 43	+15 June 44
821st Engineer Aviation Battalion	22 June 42	1 July 43	1 July 43	24 Aug 44
822nd Engineer Aviation Battalion	"20 Oct 42	19 April 43	1 July 43	25 June 44
828th Engineer Aviation Battalion	"20 Oct 42	1 July 43	1 July 43	24 Aug 44
890th Engineer Aviation Company	"23 Oct 42	1 July 43	1 July 43	+15 June 44
891st Engineer Aviation Company	"23 Oct 42	1 July 43	1 July 43	+15 June 44
905th Engineer Air Force Headquarters Co	1 Nov 42	unknown	1 July 43	29 June 44
873rd Airborne Engineer Aviation Battalion	8 June 43	14 June 43	1 July 43	17 Dec 44
1918th Engineer Aviation Company	1 Nov 43	+31 Aug 43	5 Nov 43	+15 June 44
1920th Engineer Aviation Company	11 Jan 44	23 Jan 44	1 Feb 44	12 Jan 45
1919th Engineer Aviation Company	16 Feb 44	#11 Mar 44	10 Mar 44	+15 June 44

1--All units except the 873rd Airborne Engineer Aviation Bn, assigned to USAFISPA for interval between the date of arrival overseas and date of assignment to 15th AF; 873rd previously assigned to SOSSPA.

2--par 2, MO 10 Hq Army Service Forces, APO 502 dtd 24 April 43; GO 135, Hq USAFISPA, dtd 6 June 43; GO 92, Hq USAFISPA, dtd 19 April 43; par 1, AO 76, Hq SOSSPA dtd 14 June 43; Ltrs subj, "Assignments of Units" Hq USAFISPA dtd 31 Aug & 8 Oct 43; par 1 AO 11 Hq USAFISPA dtd 16 Jan 44.

3--par 1 GO 9 Hq 13AF dtd 6 June 43; par 2 GO 164 Hq USAFISPA dtd 30 June 43; par 1 GO 45 Hq 13AF dtd 3 Nov 43; Sec II par 1 GO 15 Hq 13 AF dtd 1 Feb 44.

4--par 1 GO 166 Hq FEAF (P) dtd 28 Aug 44; par 1 GO 1179 SOPACBACOM dtd 9 Aug 44; Sec II par 1 GO 65 Hq 13AF dtd 7 July 44; Sec II GO 79 Hq 15 AF dtd 29 June 44; GO 339 Hq FEAF (P) dtd 17 Dec 44; ltr USAFFE file FECC 570.5 (60) dtd 9 Jan 45 per GO 343 Hq FEAF dtd 7 Mar 45.

Relieved effective 15 June 44 per GO of 9 Aug 44; hence the units actually remained under administrative control of XIII Air Force Service Command until 9 Aug 44.

"Date of departure as given by the units concerned. It seems probable that all four of these units left the United States in the same convoy; that two reported erroneously the date they boarded ship and not the date the convoy left port.

*Conjectured from incomplete data which it has not been possible to verify.

#Per Gen. Orders of an earlier date which stated "effective upon arrival at APO 708" (i.e. Espiritu Santo, New Hebrides).

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Operations of Aviation Engineers, South Pacific

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HEADQUARTERS
XIII AIR FORCE SERVICE COMMAND

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UNIT ORGANIZATIONAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE HISTORY

A. Unit: 890th Engineer Aviation CompanyB. Activation: 1. Effective date: 25 July 19422. Place: Erlin Field, Fla.3. Authority: GO #13, Hq., AAF Proving Grounds, dated 25 July 1942.4. Source of original cadre: Transferred from Co. "F", 822nd Engineer Battalion, Aviation.

C. Prior designations with inclusive date of each:

1. Co. "B", 822nd Engineer Aviation Battalion 25 July 19422. 890th Engineer Company (Avn) 1 Aug 19423. 890th Engineer Aviation Company

4. _____

D. T/O & E with inclusive dates of each:

1. (S-417, 1 April 42, W/C-1, 1 Aug 42 & G-2, 15 Jan. 43.) 1 Aug 1944
(WDC 192 (27 Aug 43) S-O 178-EM)2. S-417, 1 August 423. S-417, 15 May 1944 & WD Cir 201, 22 May 44.

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5. _____

E. Assignments (hq to which asgd, effective date & authority):

1. Thirteenth Air Force; 1 July 43, GO #135, Hq., USAFISPA, dated
6 June 1943.2. XIII Air Force Service Command; 1 July 43, par. 1, GO #9, Hq.,
Thirteenth Air Force, dated 6 June 43.3. U.S. Army Task Force #8408, APD 721, (Authority Unknown)
(Relieved 1 July 43, GO #135, Hq., USAFISPA, dated 6 June 43.)

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F. Relieved from assignment ~~and inactive~~
(action, effective date, authority): 15 June 44, par. 1, GO #1179, Hq.,

(Assigned to USAFISPA)

II Island Air Command, Fij1, 27 December 1943, par. 1, AO #8, Hq..

11 Island Air Command, Fiji, 27 December 1943, FOIA b 7 - D.
USAFISFA, dated 27 December 1943.
Hq. Det., "A", 375th Air Base & Headquarters Squadron, Fiji, 1 April 44,
GO #407, Hq. USAFISFA, dated 19 March 44.

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Operations of Aviation Engineers, South Pacific Command

CHAPTER III

THE DISPOSITION OF AVIATION ENGINEERS IN THE SOUTH PACIFIC

Aviation Engineers of the Thirteenth Air Force were stationed for operations at ten (10) island locations in the South Pacific. Included in this number is Los Negros Island of the Admiralty Group--technically in the Southwest Pacific yet from the point of view of aviation engineer operations, in the same category as the air bases of the Northern Solomons.

At all of these tactical air bases except the Russell Islands, aviation engineers were present in sufficient numbers and for a sufficient period of time for them to perform a significant portion of the engineer operations necessary for the development of all aviation facilities and much of the general construction work on other military establishments including roads, camps, cantonments, supply bases, docks, drainage and sanitary engineering projects, etc. on the island.

For the purposes of this study, their operations extended from the arrival of each aviation engineer unit in the South Pacific to the date either of its relief from assignment to XIII Air Force Service Command or until its departure from the South Pacific area, whichever was earlier. This covers a period of two and one-half (2½) years--from 15 March 1942 to 20 September 1944. For details concerning the length of time that the aviation engineers operated at each island location see Table II, following.

The number of aviation engineers in the South Pacific grew steadily from March of 1942 when two (2) battalions arrived until March of 1944 when there was a total of over five thousand six hundred and fifty (5,650) aviation engineers assigned to XIII Air Force Service Command and operating at various bases in the South Pacific. After 15 June 1944 these units were rapidly lost either by relief from assignment to this Command or by departure to the Southwest Pacific until 20 September when all had either been relieved from assignment or moved to the New Theater. Greatest concentrations of aviation engineers were at Guadalcanal where there were from fifteen hundred (1500) to twenty-five hundred (2500) from August 1943 to July 1944 and at New Caledonia where there were from one thousand (1,000) to sixteen hundred (1,600) almost continuously from March 1942 to December 1943. For further details concerning the concentration of aviation engineer personnel at each island base see Tables III, IV, and V, following. It should be kept in mind that these figures are not without error. It is impossible to account for the movement of very small detachments via air or for rear echelons of small numbers frequently left behind to accompany organizational equipment. Furthermore, since actual strength figures for each unit have not been available for each day, it has been necessary to make certain assumptions as to strength at any one time. This has been done by a careful check of actual strength on known dates with the table of authorized strength for each unit at the period under consideration. It is believed that these figures are about ninety-five percent accurate for islands such as Guadalcanal and New Caledonia and about ninety-eight percent accurate for other islands.

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Operations of Aviation Engineers, South Pacific

TABLE II

DISPOSITION OF AVIATION ENGINEERS IN THE SOUTH PACIFIC

UNIT	ARRIVED	*DEPARTED	#DURATION OF STAY
TONGAREVA (or Penrhyn, North Cook Group)			
891st Engineer Aviation Co.	8 Nov 42	22 Nov 43	12/20
AITUTAKI (South Cook Group)			
890th Engineer Aviation Co.	14 Nov 42	28 Nov 43	12/20
VITI LEVU (Fiji Group)			
821st Engineer Aviation Bn	10 July 42		
Det of 544 personnel		5 Jan 44	17/25
Det of 190 personnel		20-26 Jan 44	18/10-16
890th Engineer Aviation Co	8 Dec 43	*15 June 44	6/10
NEW CALEDONIA			
810th Engineer Aviation Bn	15 Mar 42		
Company "B"		10 Sept 42	5/25
Less Company "B"		7 June 43	15/22
811th Engineer Aviation Bn	15 Mar 42	27 Mar 44	24/12
905th Engineer Air Force Hq Co	22 Nov 42	21 July 43	7/29
873rd Airborne Engineer Avn Bn	7 July 43	7 Aug 43	1/
1918th Engineer Aviation Co	24 Nov 43	*15 June 44	8/21
891st Engineer Aviation Co	12 Dec 43	*15 June 44	6/3
EPATE (New Hebrides)			
828th Engineer Aviation Bn	12 Nov 42		
Det of 610 personnel		4 Aug 43	8/22
Det of 156 personnel		25 Aug 43	9/13
ESPIRITU SANTO (New Hebrides)			
810th Engr Avn Bn, Co. "B"	16 Sept 42	22 April 43	6/6
822nd Engineer Aviation Bn	23 Nov 42	14 May 44	17/21
1919th Engineer Aviation Co	10 Mar 44	*15 June 44	3/3
GUADALCANAL (Solomons Group)			
810th Engineer Aviation Bn		11 July 44	
Company "B"	2 May 43		14/9
Less Company "B"	15 June 43		12/26
905th Engineer Air Force Hq Co	31 July 43	*29 June 44	10/29
828th Engineer Aviation Bn			0/3- 1/18
Det of 610 personnel	12 Aug 43		
Det of 156 personnel	27 Aug 43		
Det of 761 personnel		1-7 Sept 43	
Det of 28 personnel		28 Sept 43	
873rd Airborne Engineer Avn Bn	12 Aug 43	20 Sept 44	12/8
1920th Engineer Aviation Co	23 Jan 44	13 Sept 44	7/20
811th Engineer Aviation Bn	1 April 44	*15 June 44	2/14

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Operations of Aviation Engineers, South Pacific

TABLE II
(continued)DISPOSITION OF AVIATION ENGINEERS IN THE SOUTH PACIFIC

UNIT	ARRIVED	*DEPARTED	#DURATION OF STAY
RUSSELL ISLANDS (Solomons Group)			
821st Engineer Aviation Bn		13-29 April 44	3/2-8
Det of 544 personnel	11 Jan 44		2/4-20
Det of 120 personnel	9 Feb 44		
MUNDA (Solomons Group)			
828th Engineer Aviation Bn		11-23 July 44	10/3-23
Det of 761 personnel	1-8 Sept 43		9/12-24
Det of 21 personnel	29 Sept 43		
LOS NEGROS (Admiralty Group)			
821st Engineer Aviation Bn	25 April-22 May 44	*24 Aug 44	3/2-29

*Dates marked with an asterisk indicate that the unit was relieved from assignment to XIII Air Force Service Command at that time without change of station. Data on how long units remained at each station or what they accomplished after relief from assignment to this Headquarters is not available.

#Months are indicated before the diagonal bar, days following it.

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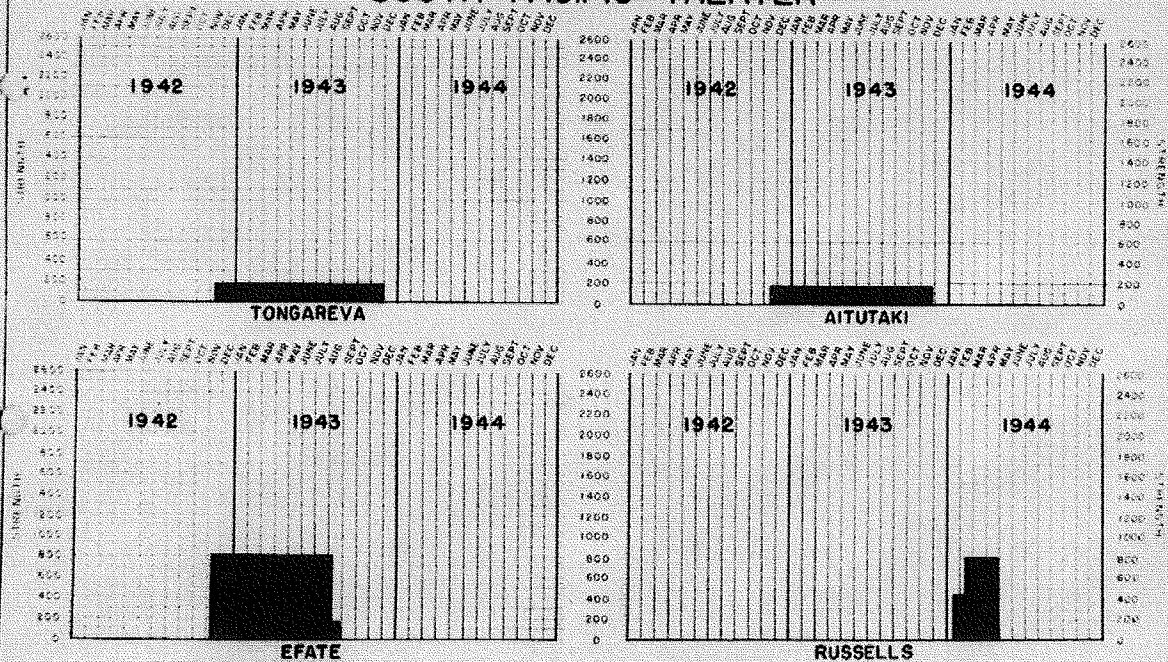
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TABLE III
DISPOSITION OF ENGINEER AVIATION UNITS
XIII AIR FORCE SERVICE COMMAND
SOUTH PACIFIC THEATER



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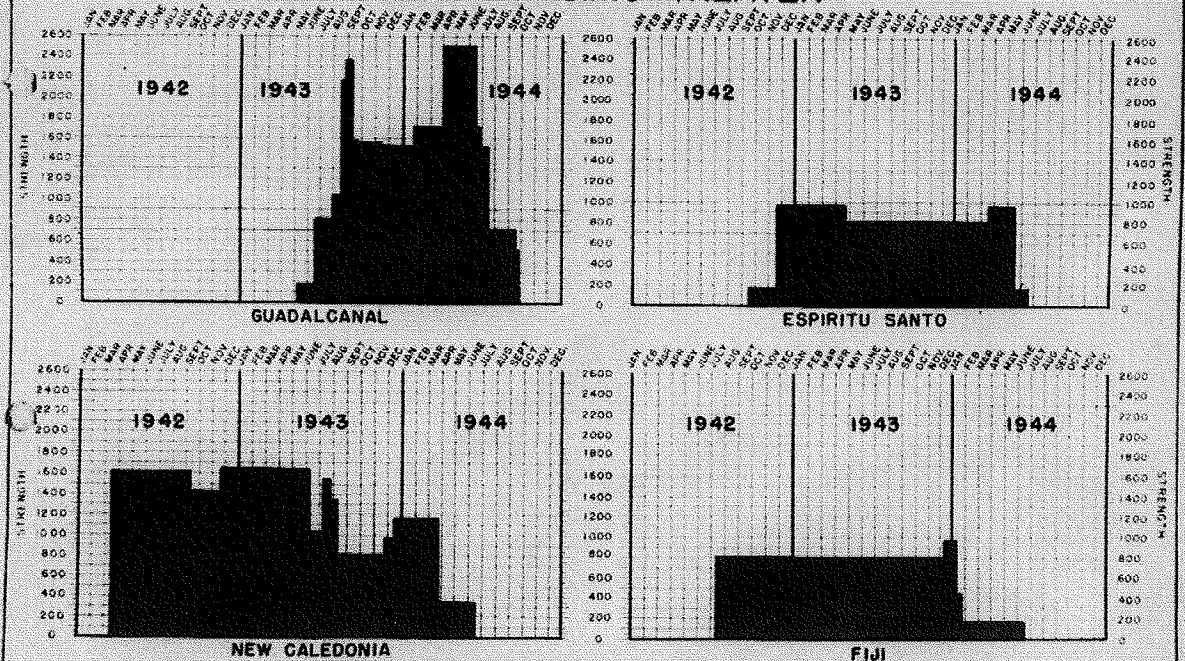
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TABLE IV
DISPOSITION OF ENGINEER AVIATION UNITS
XIII AIR FORCE SERVICE COMMAND
SOUTH PACIFIC THEATER



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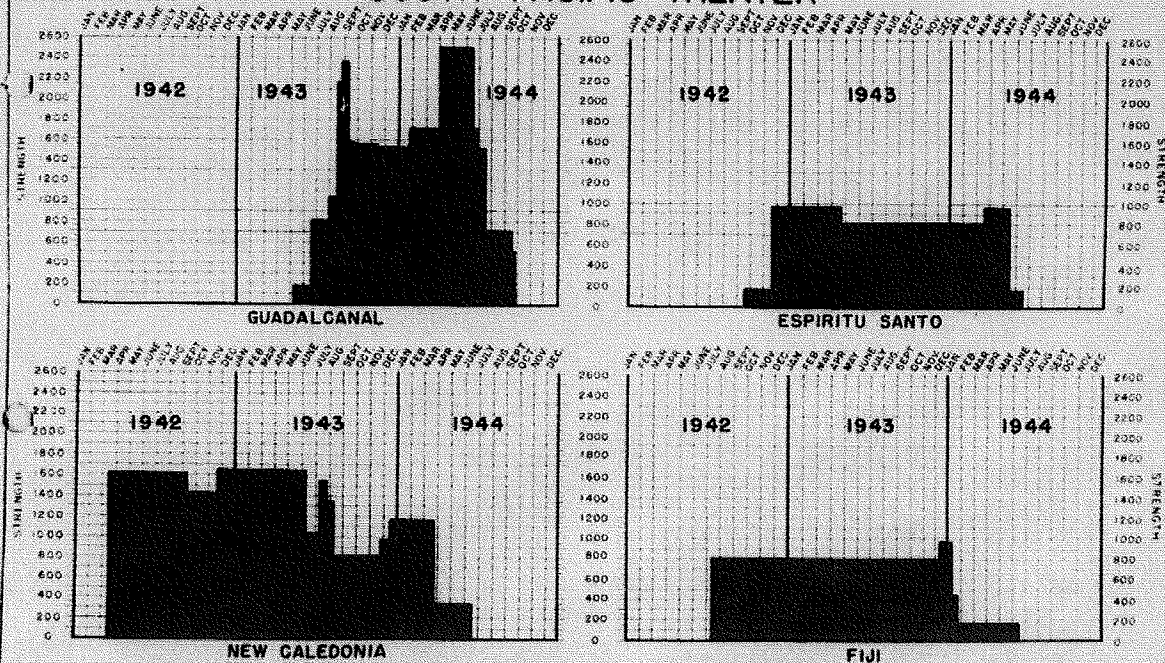
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TABLE IV
DISPOSITION OF ENGINEER AVIATION UNITS
XIII AIR FORCE SERVICE COMMAND
SOUTH PACIFIC THEATER



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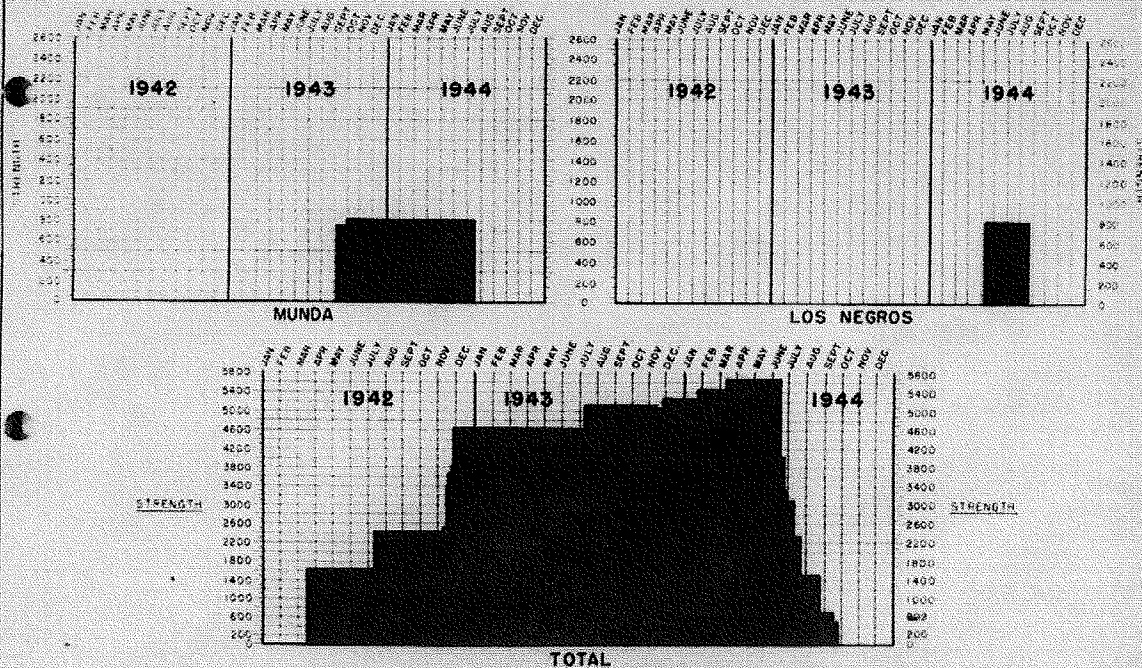
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TABLE V
DISPOSITION OF ENGINEER AVIATION UNITS
XIII AIR FORCE SERVICE COMMAND
SOUTH PACIFIC THEATER



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ALL AIR FORCE SERVICE COMMAND

GOVERNMENTS: 890th Engineer Aviation Company

Prior Designations: GO "B", 822nd Engineer Aviation Battalion
890th Engineer Company (Avn)

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OVERMENTS: 905th Engineer Air Force Headquarters Company

Prior Designations: None

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SECRETOperations of Aviation Engineers, South Pacific, contd

Chapter IV

AVIATION ENGINEER OPERATIONS FROM
THE SOCIETY ISLANDS TO FIJI

Even before 7 December 1941 United States Army and Navy personnel had become aware of the military importance of developing the meager chain of commercially operated airdromes that extended from Hawaii South and West to New Zealand and Australia. Early steps were taken to improve existing facilities and to add new bases largely under the supervision of the Hawaiian Division of the United States Engineer Department. This was done in the earliest stages by letting contracts to private construction companies whose work was supervised by the United States Engineer Department. However, early in 1942 Task Forces of the United States Army began to arrive in this chain of islands, and with them Engineer Aviation Battalions and Companies which played an important part in the development of aviation facilities through this entire area.

The strategic importance of this chain of air bases cannot be over emphasized. With the Japanese penetration through the Marshalls and as far as the Southern Solomons it became imperative to maintain dependable air communications with New Zealand and Australia. A chain of air bases was needed that could be used to ferry aircraft and crews to the combat bases on New Caledonia and in the New Hebrides and to provide for the air movement of critical supplies and urgently needed personnel. The bases discussed in subsequent pages of this chapter enjoyed an important role in this phase of the aerial war of the South Pacific and the part that the aviation engineers played in their construction and development is worthy of attention.

BORA BORA, SOCIETY GROUP

Motu Mute Airfield, Bora Bora Island, Society Group (16° 30' South, Longitude; 151° 45' West, Latitude) was originally constructed by Navy Construction Battalions and by infantry and combat engineers of the first American task force that went there after war against Japan was declared. This airport is constructed on French soil which is administered by the government of French Tahiti. The strips are built on a reef about a quarters mile off the island and are only a few feet above sea level.

Major Noonan visited the airport in November of 1943 and made out War Department AAF Form 63 with attachments on the installations. He reports that the lease provisions with the government of Tahiti were not very favorable to the United States. He held conferences with a Sergeant who represented the government of Tahiti at Bora Bora. Major Noonan reports that his conferences were not pleasant because of the negative attitude of the Tahitian representative. The attitude which he expressed towards post war commercial air operations at Bora Bora by American planes

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Operations of Aviation Engineers, South Pacific, contd

was unfavorable. Major Noonan got the impression that the French feared American intrusions in the Society Islands and ventured the guess that the strips were built at Bora Bora and not at Tahiti because of the attitude of the French Government of Tahiti.¹

TONGAREVA (PENRRHYN)

Onaka or "Robinson" Airfield, on Tongareva or Penrhyn Island, North Cook Group, is located at Latitude 9° 03' South, Longitude 158° 02' West. In its finished state it consisted of one (1) runway 300 by 7,500 feet with a coral surface. There were two (2) small dispersal areas and a few other facilities.²

The 891st Engineer Aviation Company debarked at Tongareva on 8 November 1942 with Task Force 8529. An airstrip 7,000 by 300 feet had been built there by Sverdrup and Parcel Contractors who had been on the Island since July of 1942.³ This company had used for the most part native New Zealand laborers.

Shortly after their arrival the 891st Engineer Aviation Company took over both equipment and projects of Sverdrup and Parcel. The unit's biggest job was the immediate addition of a five hundred (500) foot extension to the South end of the runway. Following this the entire runway was re-sanded, bunkers were built, and drainage and approach roads were provided. A number of buildings were constructed for the Army Airways Communications Service of which the most important was an eighty (80) foot control tower.⁴

1. Interview with Major Stephen F. Noonan, 6 April 1945; Fols 2-2.1.5, Airfields, South Pacific Area, 13th AF Engineer Office; pp 200-201, amendment (6), 7-5-44, JICPOA Bulletin No. 55-44, Vol. 1, Joint Intelligence Center Pacific Ocean Areas, Secret Sailing Directions for United Nations Bases, South Pacific.
2. Fols 10-10.1.5, Airfields, South Pacific Area, 13th AF Engineer Office; pp 200-201, Amendment (34), 2-16-44, JICPOA Bulletin No. 13-42, Vol. III, Joint Intelligence Center, Pacific Ocean Areas, Secret Sailing Directions for United Nations Bases, South Pacific; pp 20-21, 60, Air Pilot Manual of the Pacific Islands.
3. pp 4-5, Narrative History, 891st Engr Avn Co, 25 July 42 to 31 Mar 44.
4. Ibid, pp 6-7.

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Operations of Aviation Engineers, South Pacific, contd

On 1 July 1943, while still stationed at Tongareva, the 691st Engineer Aviation Company was relieved from assignment to Force 8529 and assigned to Thirteenth Air Force with further assignment to XIII Air Force Service Command.⁵

Major Stephen F. Noonan visited Tongareva in November 1943, made a general study of Omaka Field and filled out War Department AAF Form 63, with attachment, on it. He held conferences with Vigo Rasmussen, resident commissioner.⁶ He reports that lease contracts were very favorable to the United States, that Rasmussen expressed the hope that Omaka Field might be used by American commercial aircraft after the war because he felt that the tourist trade would bring some little prosperity to the island and provide a ready outlet for its small pearl industry.⁷

AITUTAKI, SOUTH COOK ISLANDS

During the latter part of 1941 Sverdrup and Parcel Contractors had sent engineers and equipment to Aitutaki, a New Zealand mandated island of the South Cook group, located at Latitude 18° 51' South, Longitude 169° 45' West, and with the use of native labor built the two (2) airstrips--one 5,000 by 200 feet and the other 6,000 by 200 feet--of Amuri Field.⁸

The 890th Engineer Aviation Company debarked at Aitutaki on 14 November 1942 as a part of Force 8408. This unit engaged in general construction work at Aitutaki. Buildings and roads were constructed, a Quartermaster laundry was built, channels were dredged, and a sawmill was operated. Improvements were added to the airport including the construction of a concrete hardstanding area.⁹

On 1 July 1943 this unit was relieved from assignment to Force 8408 and assigned to Thirteenth Air Force with further assignment to XIII Air Force Service Command. Actual operations of the unit remained unchanged however until it departed from Aitutaki on 28 November 1943. The unit operated with a good deal of autonomy because of its remote geographic locations.

5. Vide Chapter II.

6. Rasmussen took Nordhoff and Hall on a visit through the surrounding islands in the "Cherry Topper" and has the distinction of having "Mutiny on The Bounty" dedicated to him.

7. Interview with Major Noonan, 6 April 1945.

8. Interview with Major Noonan, 6 April 45; p 60 Air Pilot Manual of the South Pacific Islands; Fols 1-1.1.4, Airfields South Pacific Area, 13th AF Engr Office; pp 200-201, Amendment (13), CinCPac-CinCPac, Bul. No. 55-44, 10-25-44, Vol I, Joint Intelligence Center, POA, Secret Sailing Directives for United Nations Bases, South Pacific.

9. p 2 Historical Data, 890th Engr Avn Co, dtd 1 Mar 44.

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Operations of Aviation Engineers, South Pacific, contd

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8. Interview with Major Noonan, 6 April 45; p 60 Air Pilot Manual of the South Pacific Islands; Fols 1-1.1.4, Airfields South Pacific Area, 13th AF Engr Office; pp 200-201, Amendment (13), CinCPac-CinCPac, Bul. No. 55-44, 10-25-44, Vol I, Joint Intelligence Center, FGA, Secret Sailing Directives for United Nations Bases, South Pacific.

9. p 2 Historical Data, 890th Engr Avn Co, dtd 1 Mar 44.

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Operations of Aviation Engineers, South Pacific, contd

During his visit Major Noonan made notes on the general description and facilities of Aitutaki Airport and filled out War Department AAF Form No. 63, Foreign Air Port Description, on this airport together with an inclosure giving data on lease agreements, cost of construction, the attitude of the resident commissioner toward war and post war use of the strips by American aircraft, and other data. A part of the last mentioned information had to be gotten in New Zealand where many pertinent papers were on file.

Major Noonan reports that the lease arrangements were favorable, that there was a good attitude on the part of the resident commissioner towards the Americans, and that hope was expressed that Amuri Field might bring American aircraft and tourists there after the war and that this traffic might furnish an outlet for the crafts and knick-knacks produced by the natives of the island.

Upolu Island, British Samoa

Fale'ola Air Base is located on Upolu Island, British Samoa, at Latitude 13° 52' South and Longitude 171° 55' West. It consisted of one strip 250 by 6,000 feet with very limited dispersal area and only a few other facilities.¹⁰

The only data available to the writer on the history of Fale'ola Airfield comes from Major Stephen F. Noonan who visited that field in November 1943, studied all facilities, and made out War Department AAF Form 63 and attachments on them.

He reports that original construction was by the Navy Construction Battalions shortly after the outbreak of war. Property was secured from the British on the best possible lease which amounted to donation for use indefinitely and without costs. All development and construction were made by Naval and Marine construction units.

Major Noonan held conferences with the British resident commissioner who expressed a favorable attitude towards the prospects of commercial use of the field after the war believing that it would facilitate the economic development of British Samoa.

No Thirteenth Air Force engineer aviation units were ever stationed at Fale'ola Airfield.

It should be observed in passing that no Form 63 was made out on Tafuna Airdrome, Tutuila Island, since this was constructed on American soil.¹¹

10. Fols 14-14.1.6, Airfields South Pacific Area, 13th AF Engr Office: pp 208-208.2 Amendment (28), 12-22-43, JICPOA Bul. No. 13-42, Vol. III, Joint Intelligence Center, POA, Secret Sailing Directions for United Nations Bases, South Pacific; pp 28 & 61, Air Pilots Manual of the Pacific Islands.

11. Interview with Major Stephen F. Noonan, 5 April 1945.

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Operations of Aviation Engineers, South Pacific, cont'd

FII ISLANDS

Fiji was destined to become an important forward base for tactical air operations early in the offensive action designed to eliminate Japanese operations in the Solomons. Its geographical location afforded an ideal position for the staging of tactical elements prior to entry into the combat zone. The arrival of the 821st Engineer Aviation Battalion at Viti Levu, Fiji Group, on 10 July 1942 after only six (6) weeks of basic training in the United States and a record processing through San Francisco Port of Embarkation in six (6) days time, was an event soon to prove of permanent benefit to air operations, local ground force operations, and to the British Colony of Fiji.

The Development of Aviation Facilities

Three (3) airdromes were operational at Viti Levu, Fiji Group, prior to the arrival of the 821st Engineer Aviation Battalion. Mausei Airdrome, located on the Eastern side of the island fifteen (15) miles from the capital city of Suva, had been developed in the thirties jointly by Trans-Pacific Civil Airways and the British Colonial government. Development was undertaken at two additional fields early in 1942 when the Hawaiian Department of the United States Engineers moved into British Fiji to supervise construction work of the Civil Construction Unit from New Zealand (counterpart to the Public Works Department of Fiji), Royal New Zealand Air Force Engineer units, and the Whan Construction Company, local contractors. Both the Nadi and the Narewa Airdromes were operational prior to July 1942 although no significant developments had been made beyond the construction of the airstrips. 15

NADI-NAREWA AIRDROMES

Five (5) airstrips were developed in the Nadi-Narewa sector and used largely by elements of the United States. They included the two intersecting strips of Nadi and Narewa Airdromes and Martins Fighter Strip between the two larger developments. All five of these strips are on Longitude 117° 25' East and between Latitudes 17° 46' (Nadi) and 17° 48' South (Narewa). 16

The work of the 821st Engineer Aviation Battalion at the Nadi-Narewa Airdromes included the greater portion of all developments beyond the initial construction of four (4) of the five (5) strips. One of the earliest projects was the construction of a taxiway complete with drainage connecting Nadi and Narewa Airdromes. This project had been started by Royal New Zealand Air Force Engineers and was approximately thirty percent completed by them when the 821st took over the project. Subsequently construction was begun on the Martins Strip. This consisted of an auxiliary fighter strip 80 by 5,000 feet cleared to 150 feet in width. The surface was of stabilized

15. Interview with Major Randall H. Hamilton, 2 July 45.

16. Fols 15.2 - 15.4.6, Airfields South Pacific Area, 13th Air Force Engineer Office.

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Operations of Aviation Engineers, South Pacific, contd

gravel. Construction and maintenance was entirely by the 821st Engineer Aviation Battalion, although it was used largely for the operations of Naval aircraft. By March of 1944 the Martins Strip was no longer in use. 17

Continuous improvement, maintenance and repair to the five (5) Nadi-Narewa airstrips was the full responsibility of the 821st Engineer Aviation Battalion during the eighteen (18) months that this unit was stationed in the Fiji Islands. Dispersal areas and taxiways were expanded, improved and maintained. A one thousand-foot gravel surface extension was added on the south end of the Nadi north-south runway. Heavy rains made repair and maintenance work extremely difficult. Extensive underground drainage facilities had to be installed. At least seventy-five percent (75%) of the Nadi east-west strip was resurfaced during the fall of 1943. Army Air Force engineering facilities were erected at Nadi Airdrome consisting of three (3) 40 by 120-foot warehouses. Installations were made for Air Transport Command including the erection of a freight and passenger terminal, mess halls, and prefabricated huts for personnel. 18

The 821st Engineer Aviation Battalion was responsible for the installation of bulk aviation gasoline facilities for all the Nadi-Narewa strips. Approximately twenty (20) miles of four (4) and six (6)-inch pipe was laid from the Navy dock at Vunda Point to the base of the Sabeto Range. Three (3) ten thousand (10,000)-barrel storage tanks were erected. Pumping stations, control equipment, and a distributing system were installed. Additional aviation gasoline storage facilities were erected at Lautoka City. 19

THE DRASA EMERGENCY STRIPS

The two emergency strips at Drasa were built entirely by the 821st Engineer Aviation Battalion. They are located about five (5) miles north of Lautoka at Latitude 17° 35' South, Longitude 177° 30' East. The strips are 150 by 5,000 and 150 by 7,000 feet respectively, the shorter one being surfaced with pierced plank and the longer one with stabilized gravel. Although these strips were built at a time when aircraft were expected to arrive at Fiji beyond the facilities of the Nadi-Narewa and Nausori installations, they were actually never used save for emergency operations. No important developments were made beyond the construction of the strips. 20

NAUSORI AIRDROME

It has already been pointed out that Nausori Airdrome was the only civil airfield at Viti Levu prior to the outbreak of war with Japan (*supra* p. 60).

17. Interview with Major Randall H. Hamilton, 2 July 45; fols 15.3 - 15.3.3, Airfields South Pacific Area, 13th Air Force Engineer Office.
18. Interview with Major Randall H. Hamilton, 2 July 45.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid. See also fols 15.1 - 15.1.4, Airfields South Pac, 13AF Eng Office.

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SECRETOperations of Aviation Engineers, South Pacific, contd

It is located about fifteen (15) miles from the capital city of Suva at Lat. 18° 03' South, Long. 178° 34' East. In its completed form the base consisted of intersecting strips; one, 159 by 7,000 feet surfaced with pierced plank on a compacted base, and the other 300 by 5,000 feet surfaced with stabilized gravel. Nausori Airdrome was used almost entirely by elements of the Royal New Zealand Air Force.

Only meager information is available on the construction, improvement and maintenance of Nausori Airdrome. The smaller transverse strip was constructed by Royal New Zealand Air Force Engineers--possibly assisted by local contractors, during 1942. It is known that shortly after the arrival of the 821st Eng. Avn Bn in Fiji, most of the Royal New Zealand Air Force Engineers moved from the Nadi-Marewa to the Suva area.

One company of the 821st Eng. Avn Bn. assisted the New Zealanders in laying the steel mat on the original runway and in grading and surfacing the transverse strip. No other significant missions were carried out by United States Aviation Engineers in the Suva area. 21

GENERAL ENGINEER OPERATIONS

The 821st Engineer Aviation Battalion functioned as base engineer unit in the western sector of Viti Levu Island. From July 1943 to January 1944 Lieutenant Colonel James B. Lampert, formerly commanding the 821st, was made Base Engineer for the area. He had been preceded in that assignment by Colonel R.J. Burt Jr. who had commanded the 610th Engineer Aviation Battalion at New Caledonia until he was relieved in order to go to Fiji as Base Engineer.

In carrying out the duties of Western Area Engineer unit, the 821st Eng. Avn Bn either actually performed all construction work and physical development in the western sector of the island or supervised and coordinated what it did not actually perform, under the general supervision, of course, of the base engineer. The unit acted as United States Government representative on all contracts made with local contractors engaged in developments on the western side of Viti Levu. 22

Important construction work was done by the 821st Eng Avn Bn for both the Sambeto and Nadi Station Hospitals. The Sambeto Hospital was enlarged with the assistance of the Nadi Construction Company. Additional buildings were erected, concrete passageways installed, and the water and sewage systems improved. The Nadi Hospital was constructed by the Nadi Construction Company under the direct daily supervision of the 821st Eng Avn Bn. Meanwhile the unit installed by itself all exterior electrical, water supply, and sewage facilities. This hospital project was carried out by the Nadi Construction Company on a cost-plus basis with all materials furnished by

21. Interview with Major Randall H. Hamilton, 2 July 1946.

22. Ibid.

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Operations of Aviation Engineers, South Pacific, contd

the United States Government, the 821st Eng. Avn Bn acting as agent. Supervision was especially rigorous since there was feeling that the same local contractors had, in constructing the Sabeto Hospital, taken undue advantage of the American Forces. ²³

Eighteen (18) miles of new road was built over very rough terrain from the Nadi-Narewa area to the Nausori Highlands. This project proved to be a futile one since it was built to a projected rest camp area which never materialized. Continuous road improvement and maintenance projects were carried out on all the interior roads of the Nadi-Narewa Air Bases and supply installations of the western sector of the island. At the same time the colonial Public Works Department was given continuous assistance in maintaining twenty-five (25) miles of the main island highway from Lautoka to a point five (5) miles south of Nadi. ²⁴

One of the most interesting phases of the work of the 821st Eng Avn Bn in the Fiji Islands concerned the production of lumber for all military installations on Viti Levu Island. With the arrival of a wide variety of army and navy units at Viti Levu early in 1942, the demands for lumber placed upon one poorly equipped private sawmill which was eighty miles from Nadi in the most mountainous terrain of the island, were out of all proportion to the productive capacity of the mill. Units made independent demands for lumber and established individual channels for the procurement and use of the lumber that was produced. On 21 September 1942 the Base Engineer, on behalf of the United States Government, contracted for the entire output of the mill. Transporting all lumber from the mill and increasing the output in addition to establishing a lumber depot for receipt, storage, and issue of all the lumber produced, was the assigned responsibility of the 821st Eng Avn Bn.

The excellent work of this unit in connection with this project has been described in detail in an article entitled "Aviation Engineers as Lumber Dealers" written by Lieutenant Colonel James B. Lampert and published in the August 1944 issue of The Military Engineer, pp 268-271. Since this article will be available to military historians in the United States only, a few summarizing statements will be made in this article.

Normal production was increased from twenty-to sixty thousand board feet weekly. During peak production eighty thousand board feet were produced in a single week. In fourteen (14) months of operations over a million and a half board feet of lumber was produced, and over two and a half million truck miles were travelled to transport it from the mill to the depot. Major Randall H. Hamilton, then S-4 of the 821st Eng Avn Bn (later with the Engineer Section of Headquarters Thirteenth Air Force), is given credit for the ad-

23. Interview with Major Randall H. Hamilton, 2 July 1945.

24. Ibid.

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ministration and coordination of this project. 25

The 821st Engr Avn Bn also operated gravel pits for the supply of road maintenance material and concrete aggregate for all United States Army construction in the western sector, Viti Levu Island. At the same time the unit operated a general engineer supply depot for all Army units in that area. During the earlier phases engineer supplies were requisitioned directly on San Francisco Port of Embarkation. Later they were processed through South Pacific Base Command at Noumea. We are advised that engineer supplies were abundant and arrived at Fiji in about forty (40) days after being requisitioned. 26

A secondary project carried out by the 821st Engr Avn Bn included the construction of a pile dock and mooring facilities in Nadi Bay for use by the Army and Navy and for barge movement of supplies to and from Suva and Lautoka. 27

Operations of the 890th Engineer Aviation
Company at Fiji

Much more detail is available on the operations of the 890th Engineer Aviation Company at Fiji. This unit departed from Aitutaki (supra p 37) on 28 November 1943 and arrived at Fiji on 5 December just a month before the 821st Engr Avn Bn began its departure for the Russell Islands. Unit histories are available for the 890th Engineer Aviation Company for each month up to its relief from assignment to this Command on 15 June 1944.

The operations of this unit were very similar to those of the 821st Engr Avn Bn which it replaced except that in most cases projects were those of maintenance and repair to existing installations. Only secondary new projects were undertaken since, by the date of this unit's arrival at Fiji, the base had not only been fully developed but its importance had decreased because airbases were now in operation at New Caledonia, New Hebrides, and in the Solomons.

The essential duty of the 890th Engr Avn Co was that of a base engineer unit for the Nadi-Warewa sector. Runway and road maintenance continued monthly, as did the operation of base utilities, water supply and purification work, mosquito control and sanitary engineering, the operation of a lumber yard, and the maintenance of the Nadi tank farm and aviation gasoline pipeline from Lautoka. 28 In June 1944 five thousand (5,000) feet of four (4)-

25. Aviation Engineers as Lumber Dealers, by Lt. Col. James B. Lampert; in "The Military Engineer", August 1944, pp 268-271.

26. Interview with Major Randall H. Hamilton, 2 July 1945.

27. Ibid.

28. pp 1-3 unit hists for Feb, Mar, Aprl, May, & June, 890th Engr Avn Co.

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inch pipe was installed and welded to supply water for the Namaka garden project. 29

It is evident that Headquarters XIII Air Force Service Command had very little to do with the assignment of projects and the actual engineer operations of this unit. Upon arrival at Fiji the organization was attached to II Island Command and assigned to duties with the II Island Air Command. 30 On 23 October 1943 it came under more direct administrative control of this Headquarters by being attached to XIII Air Force Service Command Service Center (Air), Fiji. However, during the first week of November the Service Center (Air) was disbanded. The unit continued to operate under II Island Air Command until April 1944 when that Headquarters was disbanded and the 890th Engr Avn Co passed under operational control of Det "A" 375th Base Headquarters and Airbase Squadron. 31

29. pp 1-2 unit hist for June 44, 890th Engr Avn Co

30. p 2 unit hist for Feb 44, 890th Engr Avn Co

31. GO 407, Hq USAFISPA, dtd 19 Mar 44, effective 1 April 44.

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