

580th AIRBORNE MATERIEL ASSEMBLY SQUADRON

MISSION

LINEAGE

580th Airborne Materiel Assembly Squadron

STATIONS

Mountain Home AFB, ID, 16 Apr 1951-9 Sep 1952

ASSIGNMENTS

COMMANDERS

LTC Ernest L. Reid

HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

EMBLEM

MOTTO

NICKNAME

OPERATIONS

The Airborne Materiel Assembly (AMA) Squadron stored thousands of Communist-bloc and US weapons for aerial delivery behind the Iron Curtain. Rations were also stored after first having their English language labels removed and replaced with the language spoken in the country for which the rations were destined.

These 580th AMA riggers are customizing packages for airdrop. Packing nonstandard-sized bundles for parachute drop was just one of the AMA's specialties.

When Major Joseph assumed command of the 580th Airborne Materials Assembly Squadron in 1954, he discovered the true logistical power inherent in an ARC wing. Like his old H&B Squadron, the AMA Squadron was far more active than its innocuous title would suggest. Rigging parachutes and preparing nonstandard-sized bundles for parachute drop were routine activities, but it was what went into the bundles that told the true story of the AMA.

Stored in the AMA warehouses were thousands of Communist-bloc small arms weapons, waiting for the day they would be packed and "paradropped" behind the Iron Curtain to anti-Communist partisans. Purchased on the international arms market, there was no way they could be traced even should anyone bother to try. All had been stripped down, cleaned, and test fired by AMA armorers before being stacked for future shipment.

In addition to the weapons, field rations had been purchased for delivery to resistance movements present or anticipated in Communist-controlled territories. Unlike the Communist-made weapons whose source was self-evident, the rations had to be "sterilized" to hide their origin. Each individual item had its English-language label removed and replaced by a description of the same item in the language of the country for which it was intended. Both weapons and rations packaging did have one thing in common, and that was the unique manner in which they were packed for long-term storage.

"Seal and peel" was a technique developed specifically to protect AMA's weapons and rations from every conceivable combination of weather. The process was as simple as it was effective. For example, a Soviet-built assault rifle and extra magazines of 7.62 mm ammunition were tightly wrapped in cloth, then briefly dunked into a liquid solution, and retrieved. Within minutes the cloth bundle would harden to a tough, quarter inch thick, brown-colored plastic shell that would protect the contents even if submerged in salt water. Shipments of both weapons and rations were exported in this configuration to various "customers" on a number of occasions.

In addition to AMA personnel, USI maintained a liaison office within the protected compound to ensure a prompt response to its own needs in the region. The integration of its people into the 580th's airlift and logistical system gave the US the capability to support a range of both military and USI special operations across vast distances while still maintaining the low profile that was mandatory for success in a high-stakes competition neither Washington nor Moscow were anxious to publicize.

Air Force Order of Battle
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Sources
Air Force Historical Research Agency. U.S. Air Force. Maxwell AFB, AL.